

***Wheelin' Sportsmen* Event Held at Wayne National Forest**

Nearly 400 local residents helped celebrate the return of fishing to Lake Vesuvius on April 9, 2004. The South Hills Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) partnered with the Wayne National Forest to host the *Wheelin' Sportsmen* Fishing Day, in conjunction with the release of rainbow trout by the Ohio Division of Wildlife.



Wheelin' Sportsmen is an outreach program of the NWTf that provides people with disabilities the opportunity to get out and enjoy outdoor activities, such as hunting, fishing, bird watching and much more. The 1,500-foot over-the-water boardwalk, part of the three-year Lake Vesuvius renovation project, now provides accessible fishing and nature-viewing opportunities to tri-state area residents that previously were not available in this southern Ohio-northeast Kentucky-western West Virginia area. The improvements at Lake Vesuvius were

recognized nationally when the Wayne National Forest received the 2003 Rise To The Future Award in the Award's recreational fishing category.

Individual residents with disabilities, along with groups from local nursing homes, and representatives from the Huntington VA Medical Center, joined school children and their families for a day of fishing and fun on the boardwalk. The event kicked off at 11:00 am with the arrival of the trout from Kincaid State Fish Hatchery.

Buddy Fry, president of the Ohio State Chapter of NWTf, emceed the brief opening ceremony which included an official proclamation by the Lawrence County Commissioners that April 9th was "*Wheelin' Sportsmen* Fishing Day" in Lawrence County. Ironton District Ranger Gloria Chrismer welcomed everyone to Lake Vesuvius and reminded all participants to fish safely. Judy Newman, an aid to Congressman Ted Strickland (D-Ohio), told the crowd how very proud Mr. Strickland was of the improvements at Lake Vesuvius.



The crowd cheered when Buddy Fry asked Howie Damron to sing his new song called “Wheelin’ Sportsmen”. Howie is a Lawrence County, Ohio native who has been newly appointed as the national spokesman for the *Wheelin’ Sportsmen* program. He formed this partnership with NWTF after the release of his first CD, “From The Heart”, which contains songs about wildlife conservation and life in southern Ohio.

The hatchery truck backed up to the ramp and the Division of Wildlife asked Miranda Cremeans to help stock some of the 1,300 trout into the lake. Miranda is a local teenager with Spinal Muscular Atrophy, which refers to a group of diseases that affect the motor neurons of the spinal cord and brain stem. Miranda was an active participant in the early planning stages of the Lake Vesuvius project.



Back in 2001 when the Forest Service asked the public what improvements were desired at Lake Vesuvius, many people rallied around the idea of the over-the-water boardwalk when Miranda said “I just want to be able to go fishing at Lake Vesuvius, but I can’t do that now”.



After the fish were released, Miranda squeezed her electric scooter in among the line of people stretched out along the ¼-mile long boardwalk. Included in that mix was Nellie, a resident of the Fountain Head Nursing Home. She had never fished in her life, but decided to join the other Fountain Head residents for the trip to the lake. Local bait shop owner Vic Hopper stayed with her and showed her how to throw out and reel in her line. Everyone around her laughed when she grabbed that pole from Vic and moved her line where a trout had just jumped out of the water – talk about getting hooked on fishing!

Robert Burcham, vice-president of the South Hills Chapter of NWTF, and his fellow chapter members cooked and served lunch to all participants. No one wanted to take a break from fishing, so South Hills Chapter members carried coolers of hot dogs, nachos and pop up and down the boardwalk to the anglers. The food and drinks were provided by the NWTF and the Ohio University-Southern Nature Center.

The success of the *Wheelin' Sportsmen* Fishing Day was evident as word spread through the crowd that this one-time-only event might become an annual event. The Ohio Division of Wildlife stocked the trout in Lake Vesuvius as a way to provide some limited fishing opportunities until the newly stocked bass and bluegill fingerlings grew to catchable sizes. Only a limited number of trout are raised for annual spring put-and-take stockings in Ohio, and it took some extra coordination on the Division's part to find 1,300 fish for a lake which isn't on their list of trout stocking sites. But after seeing the over-the-water boardwalk put to use and hearing interest from NWTF in hosting an annual *Wheelin' Sportsmen* event at Lake Vesuvius, the Ohio Division of Wildlife Assistant Fish Management Supervisor was going back to his supervisor to try and get this to be an annual stocking event.



Proclamation

By Order of the Board of County Commissioners – Lawrence County, Ohio

Honoring

“Wheelin Sportsmen Fishing Day”

WHEREAS, there are more than 5,300 physically challenged outdoors persons residing in Ohio who are interested in participating in the outdoor activities of hunting and fishing; and

WHEREAS, many of those physically challenged persons reside in Lawrence County; and

WHEREAS, the U. S. Department of Agriculture, U. S. Forest Service has, as part of its renovation of Lake Vesuvius Recreation Area in Lawrence County reconstructed the Vesuvius dam, built new ramps and piers and constructed a scenic walkway with open access for all, regardless of physical challenges, making Lake Vesuvius readily available to all; and

WHEREAS, the National Wild Turkey Federation a 500,000 member conservation organization, has established an outreach program entitled *Wheelin’ Sportsmen*, with a mission to provide physically challenged individuals opportunities to participate in outdoor activities; and

WHEREAS, the South Hills Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, operating in Lawrence County, is committed to help carry out the mission of the Wheelin’ Sportsmen program by assisting physically challenged people participate in a fishing day at Lake Vesuvius in cooperation with the U. S. Forest Service on April 9, 2004, now:

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, We the Board of County Commissioners hereby proclaim April 9, 2004, as “Wheelin’ Sportsmen Fishing Day” in Lawrence County, Ohio in honor and recognition of the physically challenged residents of Lawrence County as they are offered the opportunity to participate in this special event.

Doug Malone, President

George R. Patterson

Jason C. Stephens, CFP

Board of Lawrence County Commissioners



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