

Californian of the Year Candidates Introduced

Californian of the Year was established by OWAC in 1993. The award is the most prestigious given by OWAC to honor "outdoors men and women who have done the most to improve the environment and save fish and wildlife in California."

Past recipients have been teachers, biologists, wildlife advocates, politicians, lands agency managers and everyday citizens who have taken up a cause benefitting the environment, wildlife and/or fish.

Active and supporting members of OWAC make the selection. This year, we have four candidates for the honor: Paul Bonderson, Jr., Lori Gray, Al Kalin and Dick Pool.

All OWAC members are asked to read the following biographies, then vote after receiving a ballot.

Here are this year's candidates:

Paul Bonderson, Jr.

Paul Bonderson, Jr. has spent a lifetime to support conservation, wetlands and waterfowl, and became the first (volunteer) President of Ducks Unlimited from California in 35 years. He then completed his term last year as Chairman of the Board. As president of DU, he formed a link with Audubon to protect wetlands habitat and started a crusade to raise \$2 billion to buy and protect breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere.

Bonderson has applied his goals to his own properties. At his 2,500-acre ranch in the Butte Sink near Colusa, for instance, Bonderson and his sons converted 1,500 acres from rice fields to wetlands, and put up 500 wood duck boxes. He has hosted and financed youth groups to take part in wildlife education courses at his ranch. The students range from anti-hunting vegans to youth hunters, all who completed the course with success, side-by-side.

Bonderson bridged the gap between duck hunters, including those from the California Waterfowl Association, and nature lovers, including from the Audubon Society, by acting to protect wetlands habitat that provides homes for more than 200 species of birds along with dozens of species of wildlife and endangered species. He also works personally with the chiefs of many state and federal agencies..

As a hunter, Bonderson has traveled and hunted across the hemisphere and beyond, literally world-class in scope, always projecting the highest sense of ethics, sportsmanship and skill. He was voted into the California Outdoors Hall of Fame in 2018.

Lori Gray

Born three months premature and addicted to drugs and alcohol in 1961, Lori describes herself as multi-disabled, vision-impaired, asthmatic and epileptic.

In spite of her disabilities, what she does is “fight and challenge.” For 23 years she worked with Environmental Traveling Companions, providing whitewater rafting and camping for the disabled. At 16, Lori started volunteer rowing on rafting trips. By 18, she was an assistant guide. Her rowing partner was a post-polio man. “He was the eyes – good at reading the water – and I was the muscle.”

For the past 20 years Lori has run the Adventures & Outings program for Bay Area Outreach & Recreation Program. In 2018 they did 110 trips.

As Program Coordinator, Lori schedules the events, arranges transportation and recruits volunteers. Participants choose among year-round weekly outdoor recreation activities, group adventure trips, and urban outings for a variety of ages, interests and abilities. The program creates new friendships, builds social connections, and connects people to nature and to their communities, challenging them to try new things.

Lori distinguishes between taking someone on a trip and facilitating them to go on a trip. “If you take someone, they’re not the captain of their destination. People think that disability is a life stopper. I have the fortune of having had some form of disability my whole life. I already knew of what I was capable. Hopefully through nature and recreation, others will figure out of what they’re capable.

Al Kalin

Al Kalin has been a tireless promoter of both outdoor pursuits and the environment, especially in the Imperial Valley, where his family was a pioneer in the farming and cattle business dating back to 1915.

Al contributed significantly in the effort to save the Salton Sea. A farmer responsible for the runoff from his fields into the Sea, he became expert in reducing the impact of agricultural runoff on the Sea. He developed a method for drastically reducing the amount of silt from Ag fields that runs into the Sea. This provided a way for farmers to comply with State regulations without undo expense. This also helped to reduce drastically the amount of pesticides washed into the Sea. This best management practice addressed two of the main environmental issues that farmers had to solve to save the Salton Sea.

Al pioneered using native plants to restore Imperial Valley wetlands, developing a method for germinating mesquite trees and growing them for replanting in restoration projects. As advisor for Desert Wildlife Unlimited he installed watering guzzlers essential for the survival of indigenous mammals and birds.

For 26 years, Al was the head designer at Kalin Lure Company. At its peak, Kalin Lures were found in the tackle boxes of 29 percent of all fisherman in the United States.

Al Kalin deserves consideration as OWAC's Californian of the Year 2019. He was a regular Imperial Valley Press columnist and contributed to Western Outdoor News and California Waterfowl magazine.

Dick Pool

Dick Pool started as a tackle inventor who employed innovative underwater film techniques to design his tackle. He then advanced as a leader for the conservation of California salmon and steelhead, a role he has played for more than 30 years.

He is considered as one of the prime persons who advocated for the restoration of California's salmon fishery. He continues to fight against extinction of the salmon.

However, Pool's renown began after he developed an underwater system to film and watch salmon lures being trolled. With that information, he invented the Salmon Rotary Killer and helped open up the world of down-rigger trolling on the California coast.

"When we figured out how to film trolled lures and then watched a big salmon make 17 passes at a lure without getting hooked, it was like watching the greatest secret show on Earth," Pool said.

Pool has served on numerous state and federal salmon advisory committees and has testified as an expert witness on salmon issues before the California Legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives.

His appointments include the California Fish and Game Upper Sacramento Salmon and Steelhead Advisory Committee; the advisory committee on winter-run salmon for the National Marine Fisheries Service; and the Board of Directors for the American Sportfishing Association.