

## Giving Back: A Thank You to John Gavitt

by ROBIN WEST

I first met John Gavitt in the 1990s when we both worked at the Service's Regional Office in Anchorage, Alaska.



PHOTO COURTESY ROBIN WEST

John Gavitt and staff of North River Retreat, West Virginia.

John was the Special Agent in Charge for the Office of Law Enforcement and I was the Migratory Bird Coordinator. The challenges we shared in developing enforcement policies for closed season take of migratory birds by Alaska natives created a strong bond and a long friendship—John demonstrated characteristics we all should aspire to: honesty, intense care for all people and all of God's creation, a strong work ethic and a willingness to go the extra distance to get the job done. He demonstrated these attributes throughout his career where he conducted undercover anti-poaching investigations and accepted a lengthy assignment overseas as part of the CITES Secretariat before moving to Alaska.

Upon retirement in 2000 John continued to give back with his work with the San Francisco-based nonprofit WildAid, helping train others to stem growing international poaching operations. During this time, John, with the help of wife Arlene, created the 437-acre North River Retreat in Hampshire County, West Virginia. John provided outdoor experiences designed for families: hiking, hunting, fishing, camping, sporting clay shooting, bird watching and GPS training. While doing this, he also managed the property to enhance habitat value for rare birds. John did this always at a financial loss, but did so out of his love for nature and his concern that future generations would not be able to experience the joys of outdoors experiences that he did as a youth.

While the realities of life have forced John to recently close North Country Retreat, he made sure that his giving back didn't stop with that decision. John put a conservation easement on his property, as part of the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust. Such efforts help ensure that John's 437-acres, along with approximately 50 other conservation easements in the area's trust, will continue to give back to future generations. Thank you, John!

ROBIN WEST/ CHAIRPERSON/FWS ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED EMPLOYEES