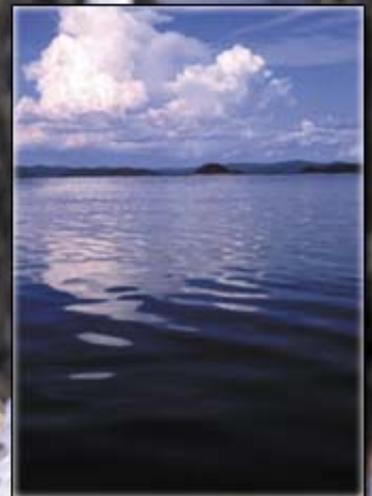


Annual Report 2004



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service



CSP rewards conservation stewardship

This year marked the beginning of the nation's newest conservation program -- the Conservation Security Program. CSP rounds out the already existing portfolio of USDA conservation programs available to help our nation's farmers and ranchers reach their environmental goals of conserving, maintaining and improving America's natural resources and environment.

Arkansas was one of 22 states to have a watershed eligible in the inaugural sign up. The Little River Ditches Watershed, located in southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas, was one of 18 chosen watersheds. The watershed is in portions of Craighead, Mississippi and Poinsett counties.

Contracts were awarded to all 83 applicants in the Arkansas portion of the watershed. Two Tier 1 and 81 Tier 2 contracts totaling about \$2 million were awarded. Although only 20 percent of the watershed is in Arkansas, 44 percent of the contracts were awarded to Arkansas farmers.

While conservation incentive programs and technical assistance from USDA date back to the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s, CSP represents the first time agricultural producers are being paid for ongoing stewardship. Farmers are doing what no single program or agency is doing -- they are protecting the natural resources upon which all future generations of Americans must depend.

Farmers in these watersheds have had a long-term commitment -- in some cases five or six generations -- to maintain these working lands, keeping hold of a rural lifestyle for their children and grandchildren -- and to be stewards for their land. They recognize that to keep their lifestyle they must use and protect their natural resources -- for generations to come.

Farmers in the Cadron, Lower Neosho, Lower St. Francis and Lower White-Bayou Des Arc watersheds will have a chance to participate during the 2005 CSP sign ups.

CSP inspires the people of our nation with examples of the world's best conservation practices, right here at home. Development of CSP required a major effort on the part of farmers and ranchers and conservation leaders everywhere. Some of America's best conservationists are right here in Arkansas and it's a bright new day for conservation and I'm delighted we were a part of this new program.

Kalven L. Trice

Kalven L. Trice
State Conservationist



Joint ventures turn 18,000 acres into contiguous wetland in Arkansas River Valley

Wetlands project in Pulaski, Lonoke and Jefferson counties will turn more than 18,000 acres of marginal farmland into the largest ecosystem restoration in the Arkansas River Valley.

The Woodson Joint Venture, a 7,186-acre project, includes 12 landowners. "No where else in the nation has a project like this been developed. Once completed, the project will benefit the entire area by creating a more than four-mile long riparian area along the Arkansas River," said Kalven L. Trice, state conservationist.

"This project will totally reconfigure marginal farmland and change it into recreational land that will greatly enhance wildlife habitat," said Gar Lile, who was the initial applicant with 1,140 acres. "We are taking non-irrigated farmland and returning it to its natural state."

Directly across the Arkansas River from the Woodson project is the 11,189-acre England Joint Venture.

There are 18 landowners involved in the England project. These landowners would have otherwise not been selected into WRP if they had not combined their acreages to develop a large contiguous block of non-fragmented restorable habitat. There are few acres of existing bottomland hardwood forest in this portion of the state. This project will restore miles of riparian acres that have been cleared for agricultural use. There will also be great improvement to water quality in the local watersheds.

One key component in the landscape across the lower 48 is non-fragmented bottomland hardwood forest with scattered seasonally flooded shallow water habitat.

"The last four years we have

focused our restoration efforts on restoring large contiguous blocks of shallow water habitat for migratory birds in all the major river valleys across the state," Trice said. "These two projects are excellent examples of how landowners and NRCS can accomplish great things in wetland restoration. Without this degree of public interest NRCS could never accomplish our goals in conservation."

By placing agricultural lands into WRP, the NRCS provides resting, loafing and foraging habitat for migratory waterfowl, songbirds, shorebirds, wading birds and other wetland species.

Additionally, wetlands benefits include reducing flooding, recharging ground water, protecting biological diversity and providing educational, scientific and recreational activities.

Introduction

More than 250 NRCS employees serve all 75 Arkansas counties from 62 field service centers throughout the state.

NRCS offices are led by district conservationists, with NRCS and partner staff members of agronomists, biologists, foresters, resource and soil conservationists, engineers, soil scientists, soil conservation and engineering technicians, water management specialists and administrative support specialists. These employees work with private landowners to preserve and maintain the natural resources of Arkansas.



Volunteers at Arkansas High School in Texarkana assemble bird houses.

Earth Team

In Arkansas, 762 volunteers donated 15,371 hours to help NRCS accomplish the successes outlined in this report. Seventy-eight percent of NRCS field offices in Arkansas have an active volunteer program -- an extraordinary effort due to the current workload.

Nationwide, 40,613 Earth Team volunteers contributed 967,526 hours of service.

In fiscal year 2004, two national Earth Team awards were presented to Arkansans.

Earth Team volunteers in Sharp County, Arkansas, received national attention when volunteers conducted water quality monitoring tests in 226 water sites within the county and posted the results in a global database.

Volunteers also built and installed 100 Eastern Bluebird nesting boxes; presented conservation education programs for schools and youth programs; demonstrated outdoor nature classrooms; and helped with outreach, public meetings, field days, fairs, state and area forestry contests, the Arkansas Envirothon, Earth Day, Arbor Day, Soil Stewardship Week, Farm Safety Day Camp, and surveying and field work activities.

Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program

NRCS uses the watershed program to reduce flooding problems; efficiently utilize and conserve irrigation water; improve water quality through improved management of animal waste and erosion control; and supply water to rural communities. Residents develop watershed-wide plans with

NRCS assistance to assess problems, and develop solutions that meet their particular needs. The program also provides financial assistance to carry out the plans.

During 2004, NRCS helped the city of Prairie Grove develop a plan to provide increased protection to residents living below Lake Prairie Grove and to extend its useful life by at least another 50 years.

NRCS also provided \$2,130,009 for construction of segments of the Poinsett Watershed channel, Poinsett Watershed sites 14L and 14R, and contracts for the Point Remove Wetlands Reclamation and Irrigation Project.

Soil Surveys

Soil surveys are available for 68 of the 75 counties in Arkansas. Digital soil maps are available for 48 counties and will be available for 10 additional counties by the end of 2005.

Six soil surveys are available on CD-ROM and on-line (<http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov>).

In addition, soil information of 47 counties are available in the NRCS Soil Data Mart web site (<http://soildatamar.t.nrcs.usda.gov>). Plans are also being developed to make revised and updated soil surveys available on CD-ROM and on-line.

Plant Materials

The Booneville Plant Materials Center serves parts of Arkansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. It is part of a national network of plant material centers, providing vegetative solutions to conservation problems.

The Booneville Plant Materials Center works with other agencies and groups to develop and demonstrate vegetative establishment methods. These plantings may consist of a few plants to larger area plantings.

One major project is the evaluation of native grass species establishment on highway rights of way after construction.



The Great Hall is part of the restoration work sponsored by the Central Arkansas Resource Conservation and Development Council at Camp Ouachita National Historic District in Perry County.

Resource Conservation & Development

RC&D councils in Arkansas are working on a variety of projects including grant programs for rural fire departments,

developing markets for farm products of non-traditional crops, restoration of historic sites, timber management by landowners with small acreages, assistance with rural water supplies, drainage improvement in rural communities and disposal of hazardous household chemicals.



Ralph Harris, conservation agronomist, discusses rotational grazing with Rhonda Foster, district conservationist in Fayetteville, and John Spain, a farmer in Benton County.

Grazing Lands

Grazing lands technical assistance addresses one of Arkansas' important resources. NRCS has three full-time grazing lands specialists on staff and another 56 employees who spend more than half of their time providing assistance to grazing operations.

Partnerships are very important tools used to promote grazing lands activities. The Arkansas Grazing Lands Advisory Committee continues to provide leadership and direction to the grazing lands programs. AGLAC's membership includes the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts, Arkansas Forage and Grassland Council, Arkansas Cattlemen's Association and Farm Bureau as well as University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension and NRCS.

In 2004, AGLAC, through efforts of NRCS and the Cooperative Extension Service, taught four two-day grazing workshops across the state. These were attended by 230 farmers and educators. Three one-day fencing systems development seminars were held on cooperator farms with an attendance of 105. Additional field day presentations and other presentations by grazing lands specialists reached another 300 persons with information on grazing. These activities will be expanded in 2005.

Grazing land specialists worked directly with 200 landowners on planning grazing systems in 2004, primarily

through the Grasslands Reserve Program. In 2005, expansion of EQIP and the Conservation Security Program will allow more cost share activities for grazing lands management. Arkansas will continue the effort put forth in 2004 to work directly with landowners to establish grazing systems with a high frequency of rotation.

Cost-Share Programs

NRCS provides technical assistance for all 2002 Farm Bill programs.

In addition, many state agencies and non-profit organizations look to NRCS' technical assistance for support of their conservation cost-share programs.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

During 2004, 5,422 landowners applied for \$81,839,601 in funds for statewide resource-concern areas. Program-funding levels limited funding to 821 applicants, who received a total of \$16,697,040 in funding.



A scrub/shrub marsh on an Arkansas WRP site.

Wetlands Reserve Program

During 2004, Arkansas funded and contracted 56 WRP easements, totaling \$27,871,681. There were 363 applicants requesting \$74,833,714.

Arkansas landowners have enrolled 148,055 acres into the program.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

During 2004, \$603,664 was approved to carry out 67 WHIP contracts. There were 285 applicants requesting about \$1,445,082.

Grazing Lands

During 2004, \$757,839 was approved to fund 24 contracts. There were 95 applicants requesting \$2,284,842.

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