



*Cypress swamps enhance wildlife habitat.*



*A golden eagle roosts on the property.*



*Pumps irrigate cropland and moist soil units.*



*Photos by Molly Voeller*

Waterfowl rest on a wetland on Dana Horn's property in Southwest Arkansas.

# Bringing nature home

*WRP helps turn 22,000 acres into wildlife paradise*

Dana Horn, at age 88, has a 10-year plan for his 22,000 acres in Southwest Arkansas. He started with just 363 acres enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program in 1997, and since then has added to it for a total of approximately 17,000 acres in WRP and 120 acres in the Conservation Reserve Program.

This land benefits more than ducks and it is all thanks to Horn keeping the big picture and long-term plan in mind.

Horn has a superior grasp on what is important for wildlife and his farm. "Water is king," he says. "It is precious and is getting more so." Ample water is available from rivers, lakes and wells on the property to irrigate both crop land and WRP moist soil units. The largest pump can move 12,000 gallons of water per minute.

NRCS Resource Engineer, Randy Childress, designed the plans to utilize the irrigation canals already on the farm. Working with the on-site manager Brendon Burrell, Childress and Horn are restoring micro-topography potholes and habitat mounds in the newer WRP sites and monitoring the 902,000 trees planted last year.

***"WRP is a good way for the government to have this land left for the future. What we have done will go on perpetually."*** -- Dana Horn

The value for wildlife is enhanced by the cypress swamps, hardwood timber and open farm fields. The complete mosaic is a paradise for wildlife. Deer, otters, alligators, bobcats, waterfowl, and songbirds all call the farm home.

"The CRP buffer parallel to the creek acts like a corridor for wild creatures to move about the farm," says Brendon, as he points out a golden eagle roosting atop one of the trees along the creek. Most impressive though is that more than 176 species of birds and mammals are now found on the easement, where as prior to restoration efforts the count was at only 36, (as reported by the SW Arkansas Audubon Society).

Horn came home to the land of his youth, the Big Woods of Southwest Arkansas, and now he is bringing nature home to his land.

# 2006 Wetlands Reserve Program

## Overview

The Wetlands Reserve Program is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners to address wetland, wildlife habitat, soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on private lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner.

The program provides an opportunity for landowners to receive financial incentives to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal land from agriculture. WRP is reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill).

## Benefits

WRP participants benefit by:

- ◆ Receiving financial and technical assistance in return for restoring, protecting and enhancing wetland functions and values;
- ◆ Seeing a reduction in problems associated with farming potentially difficult areas; and
- ◆ Having incentives to develop wildlife recreational opportunities on their land.

Wetlands benefit the nation by providing fish and wildlife habitat; improving water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals; reducing flooding; recharging groundwater; protecting biological diversity; as well as providing opportunities for educational, scientific, and recreational activities.

## Eligibility

To offer a conservation easement, the landowner must have owned the land for at least 12 months prior to enrolling it in the program, unless the land was inherited, the landowner exercised the landowner's right of redemption after foreclosure, or the landowner can prove the land was not obtained for the purpose of enrolling it in the program. To participate in a restoration cost-share agreement, the landowner must show evidence of ownership.

To be eligible for WRP, land must be restorable and be suitable for wildlife benefits.

This includes:

- ◆ Wetlands farmed under natural conditions;
- ◆ Farmed wetlands;
- ◆ Prior converted cropland;
- ◆ Farmed wetland pasture;
- ◆ Farmland that has become a wetland as a result of flooding;
- ◆ Range land, pasture, or production forest land where the hydrology has been significantly degraded and can be restored;
- ◆ Riparian areas which link protected wetlands;
- ◆ Lands adjacent to protected wetlands that contribute significantly to wetland functions and values; and

County	Contracts	Funding Approved
Chicot	7	\$1,262,989
Crawford	1	\$139,480
Independence	1	\$78,500
Jackson	1	\$117,075
Jefferson	1	\$5,696,630
Lafayette	1	\$329,700
Lee	1	\$179,680
Little River	1	\$982,000
Monroe	6	\$1,395,045
Ouchita	1	\$308,500
Phillips	1	\$396,040
Prairie	1	\$27,785
Randolph	1	\$110,400
St. Francis	1	\$95,300
White	2	\$361,685
Woodruff	7	\$1,458,820
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>\$12,939,629</b>

- ◆ Previously restored wetlands that need long-term protection.

*Ineligible Land.* Ineligible land includes wetlands converted after Dec. 23, 1985; lands with timber stands established under a Conservation Reserve Program contract; federal lands; and lands where conditions make restoration impossible.

## Uses of WRP Land

On acreage subject to a WRP easement, participants control access to the land and may lease the land for hunting, fishing, and other undeveloped recreational activities. At any time, a participant may request that additional activities be evaluated to determine if they are compatible uses for the site. This request may include such items as permission to cut hay, graze livestock, or harvest wood products.

## For More Information

For more information about WRP, contact your local USDA Service Center. Information is also available at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmland/2002/>.