



Annual Report 2005



Looking Ahead

Last year launched the next era of farm programs, the 2007 Farm Bill. Listening sessions which were called Farm Bill Forums were hosted across the country by the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. Arkansas' listening session was held during the Arkansas State Fair on the fair grounds with excellent participation. "The 2007 Farm Bill will affect America's entire agricultural community, so I believe our entire agricultural community should have a say in the process. I welcome input from across the nation about what is working and what we can do to improve farm policy," said Mike Johanns, Secretary of Agriculture.

In Hindsight

Arkansas' economy is closely tied to agriculture. With its production of food and fiber, the environment could be negatively impacted if natural resource concerns are not addressed. Looking back over the history of the Farm Bill conservation programs, it is astonishing how much the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Arkansas

grew. The dollars to address these natural resource concerns through the Farm Bill programs tripled, while the number of staff administering the programs slightly decreased. Arkansas' farmers, grazers, and landowners are better served now than ever before. NRCS can be proud of the work accomplished.

Soil and Water

Even with Farm Bill programs expanding, Arkansas NRCS reached a milestone in a core activity. On Friday, October 14, 2005, the Arkansas NRCS Soils Survey Program gave recognition to the past and present soil scientists in celebration of completing the "Last Acre of Initial Soil Mapping in Arkansas". It is no small feat to map the soil of an entire state, and the work spanned generations. Over 96 individuals contributed to soil mapping. Congratulations to all who played a role.

Water quality and water quantity are Arkansas' top priorities. Arkansas is fortunate to have clear streams and usually hearty rains in the spring, but there is not enough water in the alluvial aquifer to maintain the current demand to the forest industry in south-

ern Arkansas and to irrigate crops in eastern Arkansas. Working in partnership with federal, state, and local agencies viable solutions to ground water decline are being developed. It is a complicated issue, balancing the slow replenishment of the water in the aquifer to the needs of the farmers, communities, and health of the environment. Arkansas NRCS is diligently working towards implementing on-farm water management plans with farmers. The big picture and the long-term goal concerning irrigation is that the children of today's children will still be able to enjoy clean, pure water in Arkansas.

It was a satisfying year for Arkansas' NRCS. I hope you enjoy this annual report.



Kalven L. Trice
State Conservationist

Kalven L. Trice

NRCS projects benefit ivory-billed woodpecker

Natural Resources Conservation Service efforts since the late 1980s paid off with the rediscovery of the ivory-billed woodpecker in the Lower White River Basin in 2004.

The Wetlands Reserve Program has restored more than 90,000 acres of critical habitat in the basin for waterfowl, shorebirds, and migratory songbirds, and many resident species.

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program plays a critical role in these restoration efforts by allowing private landowners the opportunity to enroll lands that might not be eligible for other assistance. Although the aim of WHIP in the basin is conservation and enhancement of habitat for ivory-billed woodpeckers, ecological resto-

ration is the over-riding goal.

NRCS has also worked with Farm Service Agency and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on private lands through the Conservation Reserve Program and other projects..

Practices used in the area include:

- ◆ Forest stand improvement on 4,150 acres. Includes removing shade tolerant mid-story trees to promote regeneration of desirable species. Creating dead trees at a rate of one per acre.

- ◆ Reforestation/afforestation on 830 acres. Bottomland and pine flatwood habitats are being restored.

- ◆ Hydrology restoration on 150 acres. Sloughs, vernal pools and bayous are being replaced to enhance wetland functions.



George M. Sutton

A colorized digital image of ivory-billed woodpecker at nest.

Introduction

More than 280 NRCS employees serve all 75 Arkansas counties from 62 field service centers throughout the state.

These employees work with private landowners to preserve and maintain the natural resources of Arkansas.

Earth Team

Arkansas has more than 150 active volunteers who provided more than 10,000 hours of service to help NRCS accomplish the successes outlined in this report. Volunteer accomplishments in fiscal year 2005 include:

The NRCS Salem Field Office won the national "Chief's Field Award."

Volunteers in Sharp County conducted water quality monitoring tests on 226 sites within the county and posted the results in a global database.

Volunteers in Searcy County built and installed 152 Eastern Bluebird nesting boxes.

University professors teamed with NRCS to develop and implement training for the Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan certification standards for technical service providers.

Also, Earth Team volunteers in Arkansas appeared in a national video "Getting the Job Done," presented conservation education programs at schools and festivals, 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, Water Festival, Soil Stewardship Week, Farm Safety Day Camp, as well as surveying, archeological, 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 2005, NRCS helped the city of Prairie Grove develop a Supplemental Watershed Plan/Environmental Assessment (EA) to provide increased protection to residents living below Lake Prairie Grove and to extend the dams useful life by at least 100 years.

The NRCS provided assistance to the City of Jonesboro and the Poinsett Watershed Improvement District by finishing the Supplemental Watershed Plan/EA for Segment 7 to the Poinsett Channel and contracting work to reduce the flooding potential for the adjacent residences and land of Jonesboro.

Supplemental Plan/Environmental Assessment for rehabilitation were started for four dams in the state. Five addi-

tional risk assessments for the potential rehabilitation sites were also started. Progress was made toward the implementation of the Departee Creek Project by executing a drilling contract for additional geologic investigation needed for design of the dam.

Upper Petit Jean Site 3 project moved forward by awarding a task order for work items to begin the Supplemental Plan/Environmental Impact Statement.

NRCS 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. Initial soil survey mapping was completed during 2005. Digital soil maps are available for 65 counties and will be available for the 10 final counties by the end of 2006.

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

In addition, soil information for 65 counties are available with viewable interactive maps in the NRCS Web Soil Survey at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>. The data is also available from the Soil Data Mart Web site at <http://soildatamart.nrcs.usda.gov>.

Plans are 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 released its first plant cultivar in 2005, 'Bumpers' Eastern gamagrass, selected specifically for improvement of native grazing lands in the center's service area, with additional potential as a biofuel and nutrient sink.

The center also works with other agencies and groups to develop and demonstrate vegetative establishment and management methods.

Major efforts have been made to evaluate native grass species establishment on highway rights of way after construction, and rehabilitation of maneuver areas on Fort Chaffee.

Resource Conservation and 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.

RC&D councils are also looking at biomass as a feasible energy alternative.

Grazing Lands

NRCS employs four full-time grazing specialists and another 56 employees at the county level that spend a large percentage of their time providing assistance to grazing operations.

Conservation cooperation is very important in 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, Arkansas Farm Bureau, as well as the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension and NRCS.

In 2005, AGLAC, through efforts of NRCS and the Cooperative Extension Service, conducted 28 events around the state related to grazing lands. More than 1,100 farmers and educators attended the workshops.

AGLAC also funded eight demonstrations related to management of grazing lands and specialists assisted with four other demonstrations. Most importantly, grazing lands specialists assisted field staff by working directly with 180 farmers on planning grazing systems.

Conservation cooperation was enhanced through activities such as conservation districts providing fencing equipment for construction of high tensile electric fencing and specialists' participation in pasture walks on cooperator farms.

Additionally, this year AGLAC received SARE funding for on-farm research of native warm season grasses and cool season weed control through grazing.

Grazing specialists worked with Heifer International to establish grazing demonstrations and helped the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group develop a grazing management video for a USDA Risk Management project.

Cost-Share Programs Overview

NRCS is the administering agency for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Wetlands Reserve Program and Conservation Security Program. The agency also provides technical assistance for the Conservation Reserve Program and Grassland Reserve Program.

In addition, NRCS cooperates with many state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations to assure consistency in delivery of conservation technology through cost-share programs on private lands.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

During 2005, 2,782 landowners applied for \$45,260,671 in funds for statewide resource-concern areas. Program-funding levels limited funding to 1,108 applicants, who received a total of \$19,837,368 in funding.

A new funding category was added to address needs and concerns of small scale farms on cropland. This supplemented the alternative crop funding category. Arkansas NRCS allocated \$500,000 to the Small Scale Farm Initiative category and \$298,610 to the Alternative Crop category. Between these two categories, 70 small farm owners and operators applied for EQIP. All applicants were funded for a total of \$551,580 of cost shares.

Wetlands Reserve Program

During 2005, Arkansas funded and contracted 40 WRP easements, totaling \$14,900,000. There were 358 applicants requesting \$742,598,338. To date, Arkansas landowners have enrolled 190,433 acres into the program.

A new WRP easement monitoring procedure was implemented. Two organizations were selected based on their response to a request for proposals. These two organizations provided easement monitoring services on one-third of existing easements. The other two-thirds were monitored either by remote technology or by NRCS employees.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

During 2005, \$1,475,000 was approved to carry out 78 WHIP contracts in 21 counties. These contracts will benefit threatened, endangered and declining species, and will restore critical habitat for resident and migratory wildlife. WHIP improved wildlife habitat on approximately 15,000 acres.

Arkansas NRCS used seven funding categories to address specific wildlife needs in the state. They were: ivory-billed woodpecker special projects, quail habitat restoration in focal areas, elk habitat enhancement in a focal area, stream-bank restoration, cave protections, upland wildlife enhancement and wetland wildlife habitat enhancement.

Grassland Reserve Program

During 2005, \$900,000 was approved to fund 29 contracts in 15 counties.

In Arkansas, the GRP focused on helping landowners put in a rotational grazing system. Contracts included cross fencing, watering systems and prescribed grazing incentives.

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