

Another Conservation Success Story...

Mitchell County, Georgia

June 2010

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) Benefits Endangered Species

Located in Southwest Georgia just northwest of Camilla is AA Land Company, owned by James and Sue Adams, – a company consisting of several farms, more than two thousand acres of land and a rookery of wild birds including an endangered species, the Wood Storks.

Wood Storks are three feet in length, weigh over five pounds and have a wingspan of five feet. The head and upper neck is bald and the skin is dark gray. Its plumage is primary white except for the tail and secondary flight feathers which are black.

When the Adams applied for the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) in 2003, returning some of their land back into wetlands, they never imagined that their land would host an endangered species, but they did have concerns once they showed up. “We didn’t anticipate having species that people have concerns about showing up. It’s a bonus to say, hey we have an endangered species out here that needs help and we’re going to assist in helping return it to a good population and not drive it to extinction,” said James Adams.

Georgia Department of Natural Resources discovered the nest when a Wood Stork was tracked to the area through its leg band. They



Above is the wetland before the program and below is after completion

did a second survey of the rookery in May of this year and found 125 Wood Stork nests, 580 Cattle Egret, eight Little Blue Heron and six Anhinga.

The Adams applied for the WRP because it was obvious to them that the land was not being used right. “Me and my wife looked at this property, I’m no Biologist, ... it was obvious to both of us that the land should have never been cleared up and never should have been put into production, cattle production or nothing else,” said Adams.

Adams went on to say, “The financial incentive was nice too. I like the idea so we went permanent. I did not want somebody to wake up 20 or 30 years down the line that didn’t appreciate it and destroy it and I felt like this was a good partnership. I liked the idea too that I could restrict access to it.”

The land has a high elevation that falls off rapidly on the south and west side forming a depression. “I have 200 plus acres and there’s a Civilian Conservation Corp ditch in the wet-

“The land might be in my wife’s and my name but it’s only in trust. I have a real responsibility to not harm the land or creatures that live on it. I try to enhance it” - Adams

lands. I guess it was dug in the 30’s to try and get rid of the malaria and that ditch is still flowing into the wetland- primarily of cypress trees of all ages and sizes,” said Adams. The easement with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service is only 89.46 of the 200 plus acres.

“The restoration was completed in December 2006” said Keith Wooster, state biologist for the NRCS in Athens.

Adams, a graduate of Georgia Tech with an MBA from Auburn University, started farming in 1969 after working for Lockheed Martin building computer models. He said, “I realize there are more things to raise beside dollars. You have to raise a family so we moved back here to raise our kids and started farming with my dad.”

The Adams’ have three daughters. None of them are into farming but his son-in-law Mark Glass is a farmer – of alligator and chickens. “This is about the largest alligator farm in the world,” said Adams.

“James is very conservation minded and comes to the office on a regular basis to find out if there are any other programs that will fit into his operation,” said Daniel J. Baker, soil



Wood Storks nesting in tops of pond cypress trees.

conservation technician for the NRCS in Camilla.

“Kind of a unique side to this whole thing; One purpose of the program is to preserve land and help in the recovery of endangered species and here we have the alligator which was endangered years ago and now they’re farming it. A total success of one species and we’re trying to do recovery of another,” said Wooster.

The benefits that Adams sees from the WRP are that the land is doing what it was intended for. “That land should never have gone out of cypress bottoms. To me it’s satisfying to see this particular piece of property fulfilling a purpose and it’s not all economics. It’s doing what the Lord intended it to do,” said Adams.

Adams conservation philosophy is that the land is in trust. “The land might be in my wife’s and my name but it’s only in trust. I have a real responsibility to not harm the land or creatures that live on it. I try to enhance it.”

In 2000 Adams was recognized as the Sunbelt Farmer of the year. Adams is also past president of the America Soybeans Association and for nine years he was Farm Service Agency State Chair for the FSA.



Keith Wooster navigates the wetland with Rick Lavender of the Georgia DNR.

Golden Triangle Resource
Conservation & Development
229-723-3841

 **Natural Resources
Conservation Service**
229-430-8509

Flint River Soil And Water
Conservation District

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA’s TARGET Center at 202 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.