

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary conservation program that offers landowners the means and opportunity to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property through perpetual easements, 30-year easements or 10-year contracts.

The program is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Technical and financial support is available to landowners who participate in the program.

In addition to the environmental benefits, the program is designed to provide a means for landowners of marginal agricultural lands to take the land out of production and convert it back to its original natural wetland state.

Eligible lands include:

- ♦ Wetlands cleared and/or drained for farming, pasture or timber production.
- ♦ Lands adjacent to restorable wetlands that contribute significantly to wetland functions and values.
- ♦ Previously restored wetlands that need long-term protection.
- ♦ Drained wooded wetlands where hydrology will be restored.
- ♦ Existing or restorable riparian habitat corridors that connect protected wetlands.
- ♦ Lands substantially altered by flooding where there is a likelihood of successful wetland restoration at a reasonable cost.

Once a tract of land has been accepted into WRP, NRCS develops a restoration plan to restore the wetland functions of the property. The landowner is invited to provide input.

This restoration includes creating water impoundments and planting bottomland hardwood trees and other native vegetation.

Landowners no longer have to fight Mother Nature to farm marginal crop land. Wetlands help recover fertilizer, eroded topsoil and chemicals from runoff water, helping protect water supplies.

Benefits of Wetlands

Since European settlement of North America, the United States has converted more than 118 million acres of wetland, leaving only 103 million acres. These remaining wetlands are essential to the health of our environment for many reasons.

Ecosystem Restoration – The Lower Mississippi River



Valley was once covered with 24 million acres of bottomland hardwood forests, a majority of which flooded each year. This vast wet forest was an ecosystem that supported plants and animals found nowhere else on earth. Although only 4.4 million acres of these forests are left, discoveries such as the ivory billed woodpecker remind us of how important these areas are. WRP is an integral part of the plan to increase what is left of the bottomland hardwood

forests by returning poor, nonproductive farmland back into wetlands.

Wildlife Habitat – 43 percent of all endangered species need wetlands for survival. The wetlands along the Mississippi River are important resting and feeding areas for the millions of songbirds that migrate through the Delta each year.

Wetlands provide a perfect location for observing wildlife. Many species of neotropical migrant songbirds, waterfowl, amphibians, reptiles and other animals depend on these habitats.

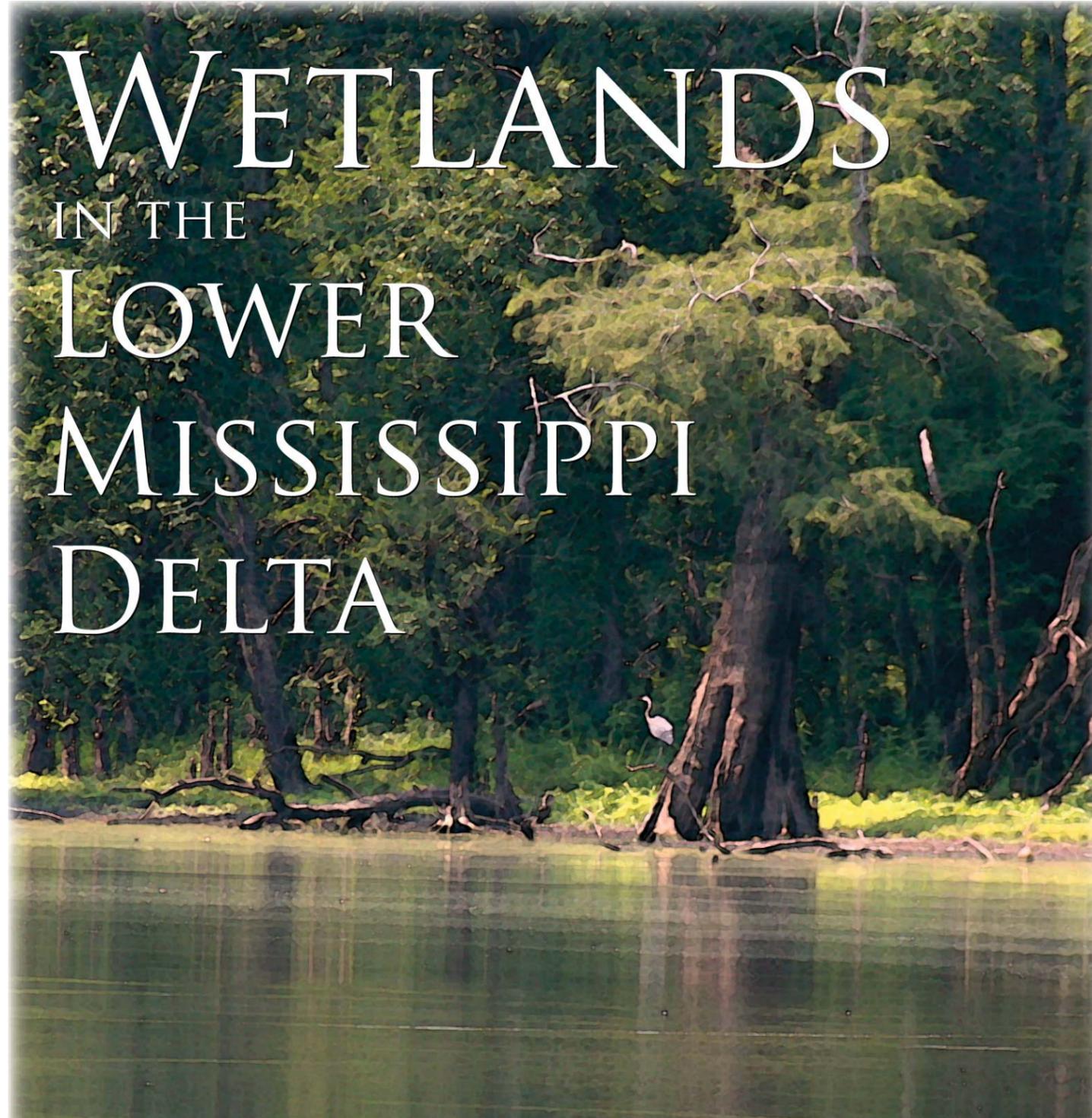
Floodwater Retention – Wetlands act as traps that hold back floodwater and slow down its flow into major creeks and rivers. This lessens the impacts of floods. It is estimated if 3 percent more wetlands were present in the Upper Mississippi River the flood of 1993 would have been prevented.

Carbon Sequestration – One of the most available sources of fighting global climate change is through the planting of trees. Each year, millions of hardwood saplings are planted through WRP nationwide. These trees continually remove carbon dioxide from the air to help the environment.

Water Quality – Wetlands have been called nature's sponge because of their ability to remove toxins from the water supply. A small strip of forested wetland along a stream can remove up to 80 percent of phosphorous and up to 90 percent of nitrogen from water. Wetlands also serve to slow down the flow of water during a flood. As the water slows down, it drops the soil particles it is carrying before they can enter into waterways, improving the water quality for fish and aquatic plants.

To learn more about WRP, visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp/>, or contact the local USDA/NRCS field service center.

WETLANDS IN THE LOWER MISSISSIPPI DELTA



ARKANSAS



LOUISIANA



MISSISSIPPI



United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Unique Arkansas projects increase wetland acreage

In the early 1800s, approximately 9.8 million acres in Arkansas were wetlands and bottomland hardwood forests. By the mid-1980s, only 2.8 millions acres existed – a 72 percent loss.

But thanks to programs like the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Arkansas is regaining wetland acres throughout the state. Arkansas is second in the nation in WRP with 190,401 acres enrolled.

NRCS has wetland projects in 40 counties in each region of the state.

In southwest Arkansas about 30,000 acres have been restored in the area surrounding the Red River. Wetlands work in southeast Arkansas is playing an important role in reducing soil erosion and

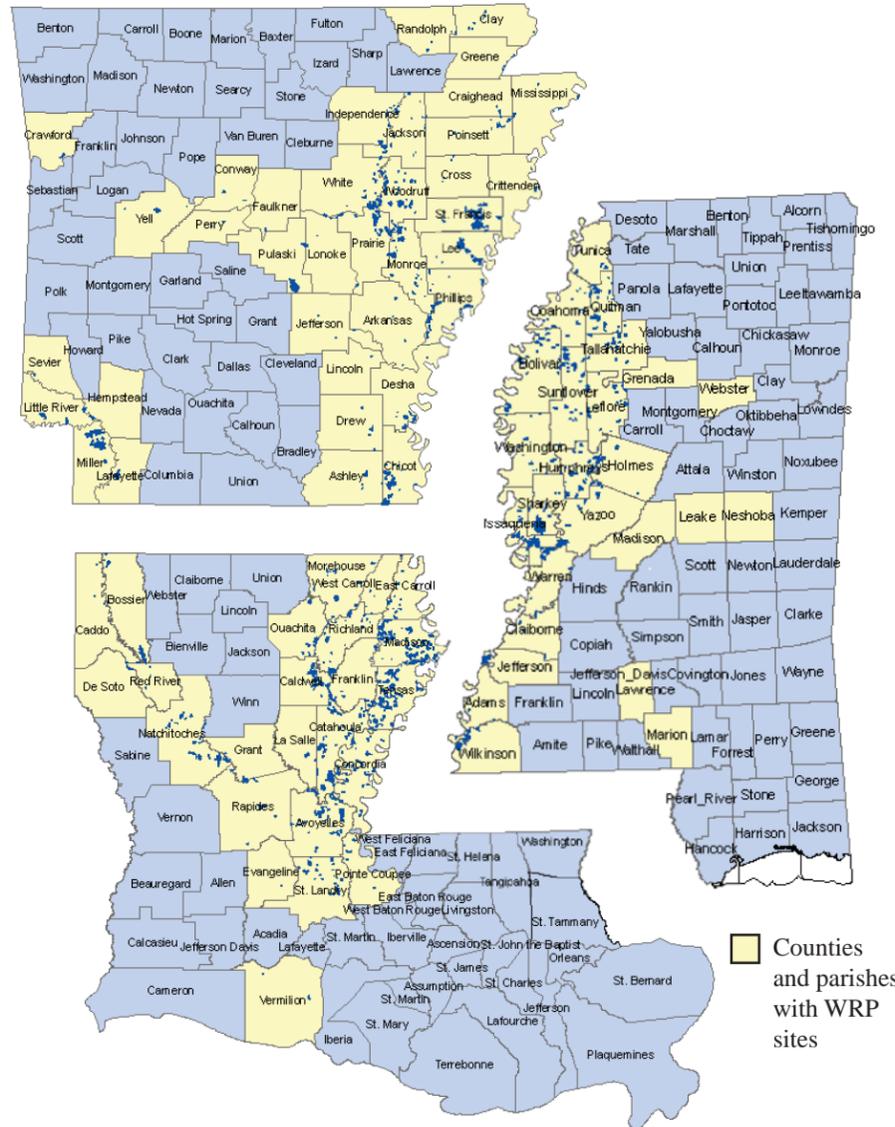
improving water quality. The northeast region, working in conjunction with the Fish and Wildlife Service, is reestablishing the bottomland hardwood forest that once covered the area. And, in northwest Arkansas, WRP is being used as a tool to address farm nutrient run off issues that have developed over the past decade.

All of these accomplishments are in addition to providing habitat for migratory birds and other native wildlife.

Currently, the largest project NRCS is working on is in Pulaski County, covering 11,281 acres owned by 18 landowners. The site is directly across the Arkansas River from a 7,196 acre project with 12 landowners completed in 2005.

“Once completed, the work will create a four-mile long riparian area on both sides of the Arkansas River,” said Kalven L. Trice, Arkansas state conservationist.

“I am proud of the work NRCS employees do with partners such as Ducks Unlimited, Audubon Arkansas, the Central Arkansas Resource Conservation and Development Council, the Nature Conservancy, the Mississippi River Trust and landowners,” Trice said.



Funded Acres 1994 - March 2007	
Permanent	345 easements, 172,389 acres
30 year	65 easements, 17,201 acres
10 year	10 agreements, 811 acres
Total	421 easements, 190,401 acres

3,926 acres of wetlands are under permanent easement through the Emergency Watershed Program/Floodplain.

Unfunded Acres as of March 2007
52,819 acres

Louisiana leads nation in total acres enrolled in WRP

Through the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), NRCS and private landowners are restoring marginal bottomland hardwood forested wetlands in Louisiana. Louisiana NRCS, in cooperation with participating landowners and partners, is focusing on restoring the former hydrology and native plant communities on all Wetlands Reserve Program conservation easements.

Louisiana continues to lead the nation in the total number of acres enrolled in WRP with 218,687 acres enrolled. Statewide, Louisiana has more than 550 perpetual easements on 202,387; thirty-nine 30-year easements on 13,948 acres and sixteen 10-year agreements for 2,352 acres.

In May 2005, NRCS, along with landowners and partners from throughout the state, celebrated 200,000 acres of land enrolled in the WRP in Louisiana. “The 200,000-acre celebration was a tremendous milestone for Louisiana,” said Don Gohmert, Louisiana state

conservationist. “This was a community effort, a true partnership with many organizations, agencies and individuals coming together to add value and quality to the program. It is cooperative conservation to the maximum extent involving landowners and many partners.”

In August 2005, Louisiana NRCS joined the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, and the Black Bear Conservation Committee in cooperation with private landowners and soil and water conservation districts to make a presentation at the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation, the fourth such conference in American history.

The presentation, “Wetlands, Birds and Bears ... A Louisiana Happening” focused on the WRP Black Bear Corridor Special Project that targets the easement acquisition and restoration of over 56,000 acres in Louisiana.

The project, along with other work in the state, will help provide uninterrupted habitat for wildlife, and neotropical songbirds and waterfowl during spring and fall migrations.

Funded Acres 1992 - March 2007	
Permanent	550 easements, 202,387 acres
30 year	39 easements, 13,948 acres
10 year	16 agreements, 2,352 acres
Total	605 easements, 218,687 acres

7,715 acres of wetlands are under permanent easement through the Emergency Watershed Program/Floodplain.

Unfunded Acres as of March 2007 -- 5,241

Mississippi habitat work benefits endangered bears

Mississippi’s conservation work through the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is benefiting the threatened Louisiana black bear, migrating waterfowl and shorebirds, and other wildlife.

A 220-pound female black bear chose a WRP site to den and give birth to two healthy female cubs.

The births were the first documented reproduction of the bears on a WRP in Mississippi in more than 30 years.

“As a landowner, it is extremely gratifying to see the habitat restoration efforts actually coming to fruition with the birth of these cubs,” said Hunter Fordice. “The fact the den site is in the middle of a WRP field is evidence the habitat restored under this program is suitable for supporting these animals. I am proud to be a part of their return to this area.”

Historically, bottomland hardwood forests and wetlands in Mississippi supported plant and animal ecosystems not found anywhere else. However, by the late 1970s, only about 20 percent of these wetlands existed. Through WRP, Mississippi is reducing the loss of this valuable habitat throughout the state.

This is accomplished through hydrologic and vegetative restoration consisting of creating and restoring wetlands, planting bottomland hardwood trees and planting native grasses. Restoration partners in Mississippi include landowners, Ducks Unlimited, Wildlife Mississippi, Delta Wildlife and other organizations. Mississippi is third in the nation with 160,051 acres enrolled in WRP.

The restoration efforts and practices on WRP lands in Mississippi provide essential benefits for wetland conservation.

“The success seen with WRP shows the great interest of agricultural producers in helping sustain America’s natural resources while maintaining economic viability,” said Homer L. Wilkes, Mississippi state conservationist.

Funded Acres 1994 - March 2007	
Permanent	435 easements, 150,410 acres
30 year	42 easements, 9,340 acres
10 year	2 agreements, 301 acres
Total	481 easements, 160,352 acres

Unfunded Acres as of March 2007	
	30,569



S. Ginger 2003