



United States Department of Agriculture

Arkansas Conservation News

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Room 3416, Federal Building, 700 W. Capitol Ave., Little Rock, AR 72201

Phone: (501) 301-3100 ♦ Web site: www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov

In this Issue ...

From the State	
Conservationist	2
Woodland Restoration	
Project	4
Operational Changes	
Require Notification	4
Multi-Species Grazing	5
Watershed Dam Rehab	6
Web Soil Survey	7
MRBI Overview	8
From the Field	9
USDA StrikeForce	10
Volunteers	11



The 2014 Farm Bill was enacted Feb. 7, 2014. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers voluntary Farm Bill conservation programs that benefit both agricultural producers and the environment. Turn to Page 3 for a summary of changes to NRCS programs. For more information, visit the Farm Bill Web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/>.

Did you know ...

Current program application deadlines

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Organic Initiative: May 16
- EQIP, High Tunnel Initiative: May 16
- USDA StrikeForce Initiative: May 16
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (agricultural land and wetland components): June 6
- Western Arkansas Woodland Restoration Project: June 13

GovDelivery: Free on-line news service

GovDelivery is a free news service providing up-to-date

information on NRCS programs. Through GovDelivery, users can subscribe to specific farm program topics.

GovDelivery is also the best way to ensure you receive the latest edition of the Arkansas Conservation News newsletter. (The newsletter will also be available on the Arkansas NRCS web site at www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/news/.)

To begin using GovDelivery, subscribe at <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDANRCS/subscriber/new>.

Ask the State Conservationist

Have a question for the state conservationist? Send an e-mail to: ARstate.conservationist@ar.usda.gov



From the State Conservationist ...

NRCS, partners work together to provide assistance to farmers

Newsletter highlights our work, progress and projects

Welcome to the latest edition of the Arkansas Conservation News. Our quarterly newsletter is designed to provide agricultural producers, conservationists, conservation districts, conservation partners and the general public with information on NRCS activities, progress and projects.

NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to help farmers and ranchers implement their conservation plans to address natural resource concerns and maintain productivity. The basic foundation for our work is underpinned by sound technology using conservation practice standards, an effective delivery system providing voluntary assistance through the local leadership of Conservation Districts, and a sound planning process permitting a systematic approach to help address identified natural resource concerns.

We are very fortunate in Arkansas to have a long history with an effective Arkansas Conservation Partnership. The Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts, and NRCS form the core of the partnership. Other formal members include the University of Arkansas Extension Service, Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts Employees, Arkansas Resource Conservation



Mike Sullivan
State Conservationist

and Development Councils, Arkansas Forestry Commission and the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

Additionally, there are many other public and private partners we collaborate with to help improve conservation assistance. In a recent meeting with Chief Jason Weller, The Arkansas Conservation Partnership was recognized as an example of a great partnership working proactively and collaboratively to address conservation issues in Arkansas.

We plan to use this newsletter as another means for helping to get the word out on technology, conservation planning, programs, special projects or initiatives and other topics related to our work. We are working hard to deliver assistance through the new Farm Bill and provide a glimpse at some of the new and streamlined programs in this issue.

We hope you will find information in this newsletter informative. Please provide feedback or suggestions including topics of interest to: Reginald Jackson at reginald.jackson@ar.usda.gov or call (501) 301-3133.

We will do our best to continue to improve our outreach and assistance to help you get the conservation assistance needed faster and better than ever before.

The Arkansas Conservation News is published quarterly by the Arkansas Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Please send submissions to Reginald Jackson, state public affairs specialist, or Creston Shrum, public affairs specialist at: Room 3416, Federal Bldg.; 700 W. Capitol Ave.; Little Rock, AR 72201

Phone: (501) 301-3168, Fax: (855) 681-7044
E-mail: Reginald.Jackson@ar.usda.gov or
Creston.Shrum@ar.usda.gov

All submissions are the property of NRCS and may be edited for content or space limitations.

For more information on Arkansas NRCS visit:
Web site: www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov; Twitter: <https://twitter.com/arkansasnrncs>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against its customers, employees, and applicants for employment on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal, and where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. (Not all prohibited bases will apply to all programs and/or employment activities.)

To file a complaint of discrimination, complete, sign and mail the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form (PDF), found on line at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at: USDA; Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights; 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.; Washington, D.C. 20250-9410

Or by email at program.intake@usda.gov.

Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities and you wish to file either an EEO or program complaint please contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339 or (800) 845-6136 (in Spanish).

Persons with disabilities who wish to file a program complaint, please see information above on how to contact us by mail directly or by email. If you require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) please contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

New Farm Bill consolidates programs and ensures programs are working for producers

The Agricultural Act of 2014, commonly called the Farm Bill, continues the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's focus on critical resource concerns.

By streamlining programs, the Farm Bill provides added flexibility and ensures conservation programs are working for producers in the most effective and efficient way.

Through the bill, USDA is able to assist farmers, ranchers, non-industrial private forest landowners and other

land stewards with addressing the resource issues of today while having the flexibility to address emerging issues.

The conservation title contains key new provisions to protect the environment and ensure a healthy balance between maintaining our working lands and providing for agricultural easements.

Opportunities for working lands:

□ The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is reauthorized to be funded at more than \$1 billion annually. Funding begins at more than \$1.3 billion in FY 2014 and increases to more than \$1.75 billion by FY 2018.

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program is rolled into EQIP, however the core mission and focus of these programs enables increased opportunities to address wildlife habitat development through EQIP.

□ The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is reauthorized to enroll 10 million acres annually. The CSP enrollment level is down from the 12.7



Marshall Handcock, Arkansas County district conservationist, discusses a conservation plan with a landowner.

million acre level in the 2008 Farm Bill, but it remains a substantial contributor toward improving land stewardship across the country.

Nationwide, more than 60 million acres are currently enrolled and all contracts have the opportunity to be renewed for an additional 5 years if they address additional priority resource concerns.

□ Entities who have an interest in protecting working agricultural lands may participate in the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) that consolidates the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, Grassland Reserve Program and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

The Agricultural Land Easements component of the program is targeted to working agricultural lands. These working land easements provide for the long-term viability of the nation's food supply by preventing conversion of productive lands to nonagricultural use.

The Wetlands Reserve Easements component incorporates the purposes of

the WRP, enabling USDA to protect wetlands.

Regional Priorities and Partnerships:

□ The new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) consolidates four existing programs into one that will support projects that improve soil quality, water quality, water quantity, air quality, or wildlife habitat in a specific area or region.

Consolidated programs include: Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative, Cooperative Conservation Partner-

ship Initiative, the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, and the Great Lakes Basin Program.

With this new focus on regional conservation priorities USDA can maintain and strengthen existing regional initiatives while developing new priorities with partnership involvement. This program affords NRCS the opportunity to work in priority areas designated at the national, state and regional levels.

□ In addition to the expanded opportunity for partnerships under RCP, NRCS maintains its ability to work with partners to purchase working land easements and implement a wetland reserve enhancement option under ACEP, obtain partner assistance for delivery of technical assistance, and target resources of priority resource concerns by local stakeholders.

To learn more, visit the NRCS web site at www.nrcs.usda.gov. For Arkansas specific information, such as application deadlines and payment rates, visit www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov or your local USDA field service center.

NRCS, Forest Service partner to restore, improve forest health

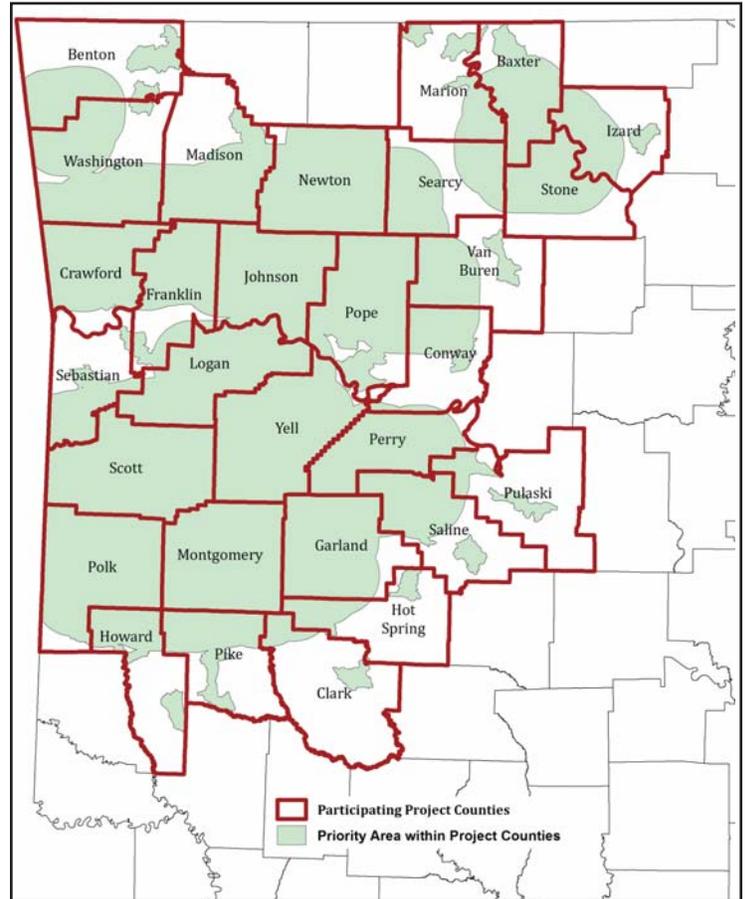
The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and United States Forest Service (FS) recently announced a multi-year partnership to improve the health and resiliency of forest ecosystems across the nation.

In Arkansas, the Western Arkansas Woodland Restoration project aims to double the conservation activity on private lands in 29 counties and on the Ozark-St. Francis and Ouachita National Forests over the next three years.

“Both of these agencies have the same goal – improving the health of our forest lands,” Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist said. “The project has two components that will restore and improve forest land. NRCS will provide voluntary, incentive-based assistance to private landowners, while the Forest Service will focus on Forest Service lands.”

NRCS will receive \$2.18 million in 2014 for the voluntary installation of forest land conservation practices to help restore, maintain and enhance more open woodland. Key conservation practices include forest stand improvement (thinning), prescribed burning, firebreaks, tree and shrub planting and forage and biomass planting. All trees, shrubs and grass planted must be native. The Forest Service will receive \$1.3 million.

“As with all NRCS programs, participation is completely voluntary,” Sullivan said. “This project incorporates the same practices at an accelerated pace landowners have been voluntarily implementing for years.”



Notify NRCS of operational changes that impact contracts

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) contract participants have the responsibility of notifying the agency of changes that take place on their operations.

For example, if all or part of the land under contract is transferred from your possession or control, the contract ends in respect to that acreage. Land is considered transferred if the participant voluntarily or involuntarily loses control of the acreage for any reason.

The most common reasons for land transfer is the selling of land and lease terminations. The transferor, who is the original participant, is responsible for contacting the transferee about assuming the contract obligations on the transferred land. A transferee that becomes eligible within 30 days of the land transfer may assume the obligations of the contract with respect to the transferred acreage by completing the contract transfer agreement within 60 days of the transfer of interest.

If the transferee cannot become eligible within 30 days or elects not to assume the obligations of the contract with respect to the transferred acreage, the transferor is in violation

and subject to termination and forfeiture of payments received on the transferred acreage.

If the contract is terminated, liquidated damages may be assessed at a rate of ten percent of the original obligation of the conservation program contract.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) participants should ensure all scheduled enhancements are implemented on schedule and reported to NRCS before September 30 to be eligible for annual payments. If unable to complete the contract according to the schedule, a specific request justifying an extension should be made to the NRCS state conservationist.

Producers interested in enrolling land in CSP must be the operator of record. Producers listed as “owner,” “other tenant,” or “other producer” must make a written request to Arkansas State Conservationist Mike Sullivan before the ranking period closes for a waiver of this requirement.

For additional information, contact Kenneth Lee, assistant state conservationist for programs, at kenneth.lee@ar.usda.gov or visit your local USDA service center field office.

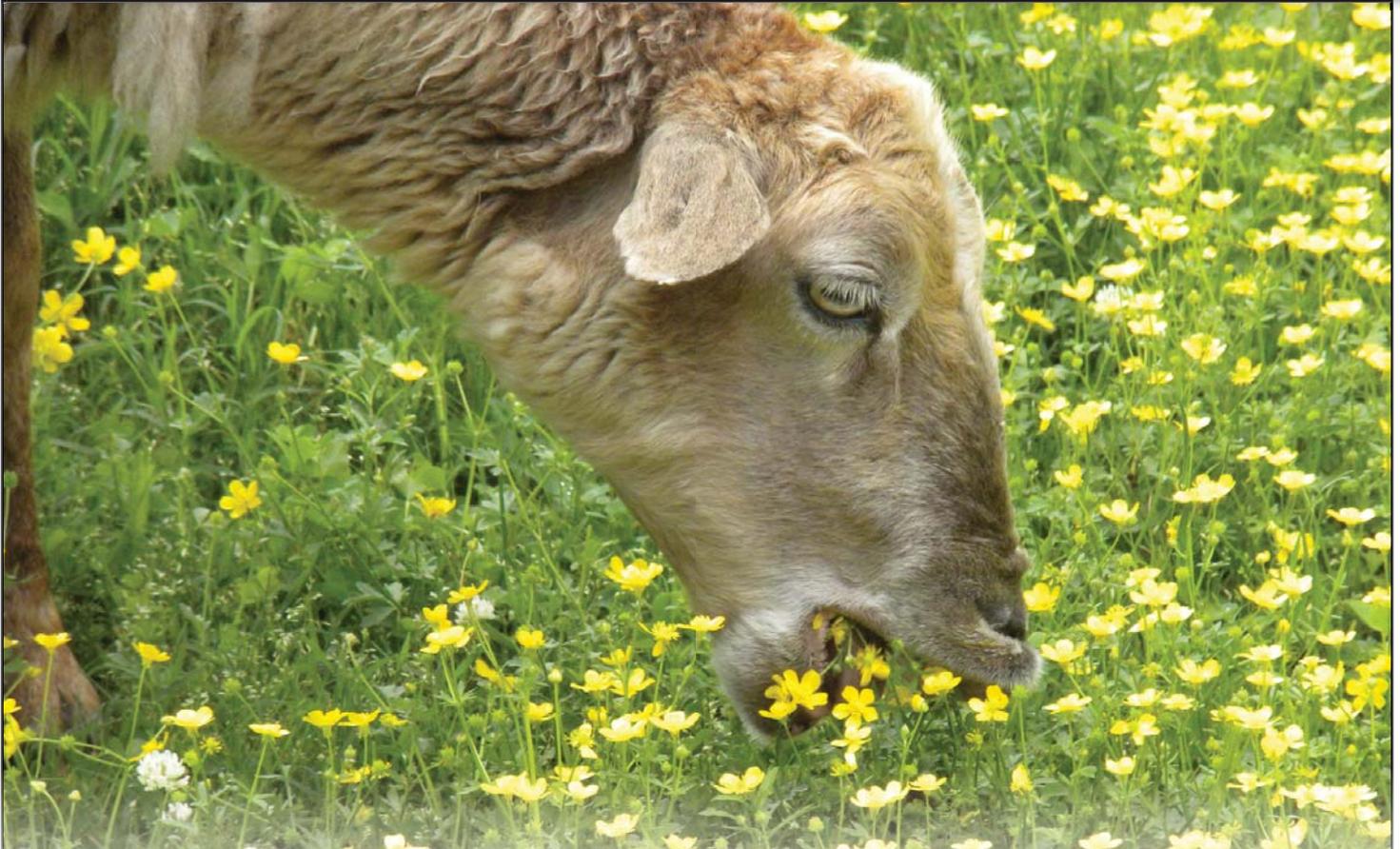


Photo courtesy of Heifer Ranch

A biological approach to weed control: Multi-species grazing

Cattle, goats and sheep are common livestock species used for multi-species grazing. The grazing characteristics can significantly differ among these species.

Cattle graze forages by wrapping their tongue around grasses and pulling the vegetation into their mouth, gripping the forage between the upper and lower molars or clasp the forage between their lower incisors and the upper dental pad. Cattle have a large muzzle (mouth) compared to other common livestock species.

Sheep and goats have a narrow muzzle which allows them to better target their desired forage species. Sheep and goats also have more flexible lips compared to cattle which allow them to better ingest specific parts of the plant. Sheep tend to graze close to the ground while goats tend to browse on plants at head height and above.

The grazing characteristics of small ruminants result in the animals being able to better target high quality plant parts, such as green leaves. Therefore, small ruminants can meet their daily nutrient demands comparatively faster than cattle because of their grazing preferences and characteristics.

One benefit of multi-species grazing is increased pasture utilization and efficiency.

Many plants that may be considered weeds to a cattle pro-

ducer are desirable plant species for sheep and goats.

Cattle prefer to graze grasses and legumes while goats consume brush, shrubs and forbs. Sheep tend to graze forbs over grasses which may include undesirable broadleaf weeds.

The reduction of typical broadleaf weeds and brush in pastures by small ruminants can result in enhanced grass growth for cattle. Additionally, multi-species grazing will increase the livestock carrying capacity of the land.

Obstacles that may challenge cattle producers seeking to control weeds with multi-species grazing include:

- Fencing that will contain small ruminants.
- Predators are a major problem for sheep and goats.
- Supplemental feeding of minerals should be done cautiously for sheep. Sheep are very susceptible to copper toxicity. Mineral supplements not formulated for sheep, but intended for other livestock species, may have excessive copper amounts for sheep consumption.
- Small ruminants are more susceptible to internal parasites compared to cattle which may increase management and labor.

For producers who desire alternative weed control methods, multi-species grazing can provide many benefits including a biological approach for enhanced pasture utilization.

Farm Bill provides \$250 million for rehabilitation of small watershed structures to extend design life

The 2014 Farm Bill authorized \$250 million for the Natural Resource Conservation Service's (NRCS) Watershed Rehabilitation Program.

In Arkansas, there are 207 small and medium size dams built through the Small Watershed Program through partnerships with NRCS and local watershed districts. These dams provide an average annual benefit of \$51 million through the reduction of flooding. However, urbanization and time has taken their toll on these dams.

One such watershed is the Big Creek Watershed near Jonesboro. Twenty-one flood control dams were built in the 1960s and provide an annual benefit in today's dollars of over \$2 million. When these dams were built they were in very rural areas with no houses downstream. Because of that, there was not any risk to people in the event of a failure from overtopping from a major rainfall or an earthquake. Now however, they need to be made safer because if they fail, people's lives are at risk. Engineers refer to this change as from a low hazard dam to a significant or high hazard dam.

Arkansas has 45 dams (Public Law 83-566, Pilot Watershed Program (PL-566), and Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D) of 1981) which have changed hazard class.

Only dams originally constructed through PL-566 and RC&D programs, are eligible for rehabilitation assistance. Rehabilitation will extend the design life of the structure, thereby maintaining the original purpose of the project such as flood control and in some cases water supply or recreation.

Rehabilitation work will result in changes to a dam's "as-built" condition.



Houses and other structures built in the floodplain of watershed dams have raised the hazard classification of many Arkansas dams.



Rehabilitation work on the dam (left) and principal spillway (above) at Poteau Site 5 in Scott County.

Typically this includes raising the top of the dam, widening the auxiliary spillway and repairing the principal spillway pipe.

The rehabilitation program is not for maintenance. A dam is not eligible for rehabilitation assistance if there are maintenance needs that have not been addressed or if the need for rehabilitation is the result of lack of maintenance.

The rehabilitation program requires 35 percent of the project cost to be funded by non-federal money. The project costs

include construction, relocation of eligible structures, real property rights, flood proofing of downstream property and project administration. Typically, this will include the cost of administering a construction contract, acquiring additional easements, and replacing fences. Costs can be paid through cash or by approved "in-kind" services.

For more information, contact Walt Delp, NRCS state conservation engineer, at (501) 301.3141 or email walter.delp@ar.usda.gov.

Soil and Soil Health



NRCS releases Web Soil Survey 3.0

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recently released version 3.0 of the Web Soil Survey (WSS).

The WSS, located at <http://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm>, provides soil data and information produced by the National Cooperative Soil Survey and provides access to the largest natural resource information system in the world.

NRCS has soil maps and data available on line for more than 95 percent of the nation's counties and anticipates having 100 percent in the near future. The site is updated and maintained on line as the single authoritative source of soil survey information.

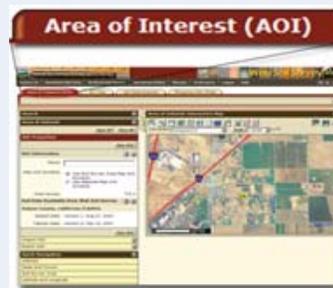
A couple of new features have been developed for this version. The Area of Interest limit has been increased from 10,000 to 100,000 acres. The map background is now provided by Bing Maps®. Many of the map properties are editable. Go to <http://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/NewFeatures.3.0.htm> to find more information on these features.

Soil surveys can be used for general farm, local, and wider area planning. On-site investigation is needed in some cases, such as soil quality assessments and certain conservation and engineering applications. Soil Survey data is available for all counties in Arkansas.

For more detailed information, contact your local USDA Service Center or Edgar Mersiovsky, Arkansas State Soil Scientist, at edgar.mersiovsky@ar.usda.gov.

The WSS works in four basic steps:

1. Define: Use the Area of Interest tab to define your area of interest.



2. View: Click the Soil Map tab to view or print a soil map, and detailed descriptions of the soils in your Area of Interest.



3. Explore: Click the Soil Data Explorer tab to access data for your area and determine the suitability of the soils for a particular use.



4. Check out: Use the Shopping Cart tab to get your custom printable report immediately, or download it later.



Tamara Sued, the author, is the coordinator; Mike Sullivan is the soil scientist; and Pat McQueen is the state volunteer coordinator with the Soil Team.

Initiatives

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative drives tremendous conservation improvements

The Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) in Arkansas has driven tremendous improvements in achieving conservation since its inception in 2010.

“Concentrated efforts and dedicated funding for water quality resource concerns in the 24 Arkansas MRBI project areas have produced a high impact for conservation in the state,” said Mike Sullivan, state conservationist.

These conservation efforts by more than 80 partners, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and landowners have increased the exposure of programs in all of the affected focus watersheds.

The goal for MRBI in Arkansas is to reduce the nutrient loss from agricultural lands by improving nutrient use efficiency and reducing runoff.

Initiative participation by landowners and partners have resulted in 1,170 contracts on 287,285 acres with obligations totaling more than \$81.85 million from 2010 through 2013.

Water Quality

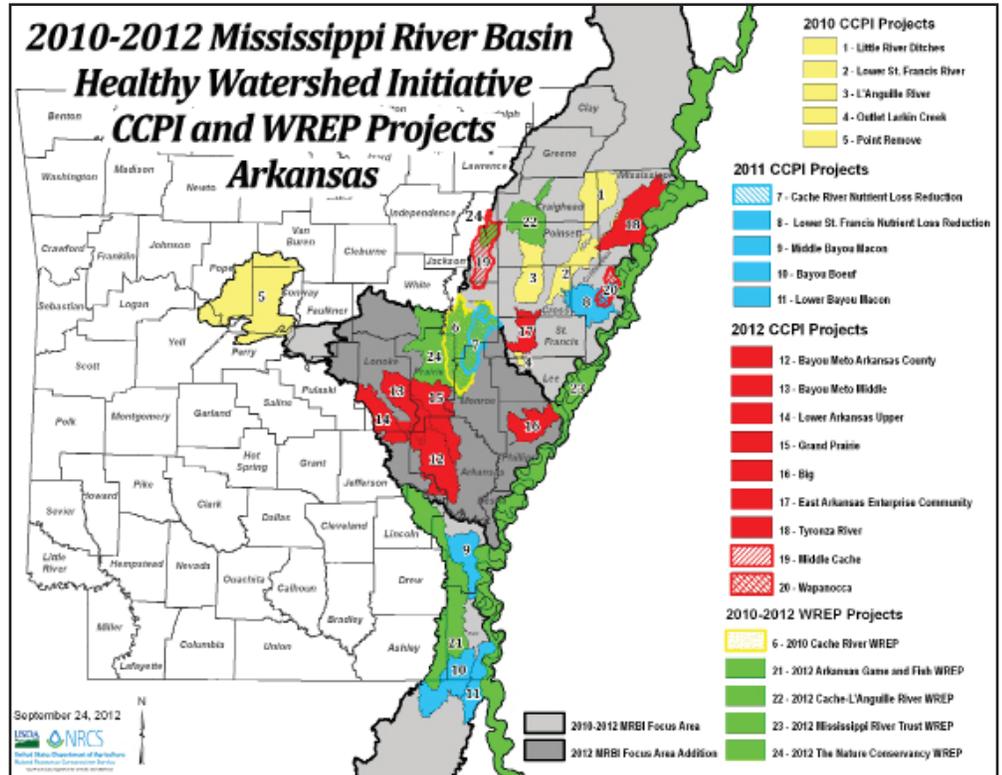
Water quality is addressed by implementing structural practices along with other conservation practices.

The top five practices applied through MRBI in 2013 were: nutrient management (36,080 acres); cover crop (11,364 acres); irrigation pipeline (208,265 feet); residue and tillage management, mulch till (6,654 acres); and structure for water control (56 structures).

Water Quality Monitoring

Water quality monitoring is a viable component of the MRBI to assess Best Management Practices.

“Our water quality monitoring partners are taking samples in the project



areas and on Discovery Farms across the state,” Sullivan said.

The partnership includes the University of Arkansas, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and Arkansas State University. Monitoring stations are installed, water quality sampling is ongoing and partners are keeping us informed of the progress.

In 2013, NRCS offered funding for Edge of Field Water Quality Monitoring in select MRBI watersheds to measure the effectiveness of conservation practices and systems. Producers signed up 1,084.5 acres through 10 contracts totaling \$1,109,403.

Water Quantity

“Arkansas not only has water quality concerns, we also have water quantity issues that need to be addressed for our future generations,” Sullivan said.

The Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (ANRC) has designated a significant area that is defined as a critical ground water decline area due to aquifer overdraft.

“We have a high emphasis on supporting conservation measures that decrease the use of ground water and increase the use of surface water,” Sullivan said.

Landowners and conservation districts recognize the need for irrigation conservation and have partnered with NRCS, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, ANRC and others to form Irrigation Districts that have developed projects to prevent the collapse of the affected aquifer.

Arkansas’s MRBI focus areas enhance the ongoing state water quality and quantity efforts.

To learn more about MRBI, visit the Arkansas NRCS web site at www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov.

Illinois River Watershed Initiative helps couple with livestock operation in Washington County

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is helping provide farmers and ranchers in Arkansas and Oklahoma with opportunities to voluntarily execute conservation practices to reduce nutrients, bacteria and sediment within the Illinois River Sub-Basin and Eucha-Spavinaw Lake Watershed (IRWI) through a comprehensive and collaborative approach toward conservation.

The IRWI helps improve water quality of the watershed (which include Lake Tenkiller, Lake Eucha and Lake Spavinaw in Oklahoma) while maintaining the food and fiber production in the area.

The project is located in portions of Benton and Washington counties in Arkansas and parts of Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, Mayes and Sequoyah counties in Oklahoma.

Livestock producers Eddie Presley and Helen Squires Presley own 45 cows and their calves in Washington County.

“When we started our livestock operation, we had some old cross fences that were falling down,” said Eddie. “The cows had the whole 100 acre pasture that they grazed on so that made it hard to keep up with them.”

The Presleys researched various resources for assistance with their livestock operation, and eventually heard about the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) through the



Richard Gutierrez, NRCS soil conservation technician in Fayetteville, meets with the Presley's on their Washington County farm.

NRCS field office in Fayetteville. They signed up for an EQIP contract through the IRWI to address their natural resource concerns and to meet their livestock operation goals.

“Another reason we are participating in the IRWI is we were very concerned about run off from the pasture,” said Helen. “The runoff was going directly into the Illinois River sub-basin. We wanted to be respectful of that and one of the things that helps is good grass in the field. Rotational grazing helps increase grass quality and quantity.”

Their conservation plan calls for rotational grazing by dividing their one pasture into four pastures, installing fencing, and watering facilities to provide water for their livestock.

“Our neighbors are tired of hearing us tell them how great NRCS is. NRCS practices have made an incredible amount of difference for us compared to what we used to do,” said Helen.

Water quality enhancement is crucial to ensuring an adequate supply of drinkable water for the municipalities and individuals who rely on these water resources for their water supply.

The Presleys can now better manage the rotation of their cows and calves throughout the farm and improve their distribution and movement, while improving air quality, water quantity and quality and reducing soil erosion in the Illinois River watershed with the help of NRCS and IRWI.

STRIKEFORCE: *Combating persistent poverty for rural growth, opportunity*

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced the expansion of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's StrikeForce Initiative into four additional states: Kentucky, Louisiana, Tennessee and West Virginia.

"The StrikeForce strategy of partnering public resources with local expertise is helping to grow rural economies and create jobs in persistent poverty communities," said Vilsack. "This is a strategy that is working in rural America and I am pleased that we continue to build on these efforts to bring assistance to areas that need it the most."

The StrikeForce Initiative started as a pilot project in 2010 with Arkansas as one of three pilot states. The expansion brings StrikeForce attention to more than 700 rural counties, parishes, boroughs, tribal reservations, and colonies in 20 states, including 48 counties in Arkansas.

The 25 original StrikeForce Initiative counties in Arkansas are:

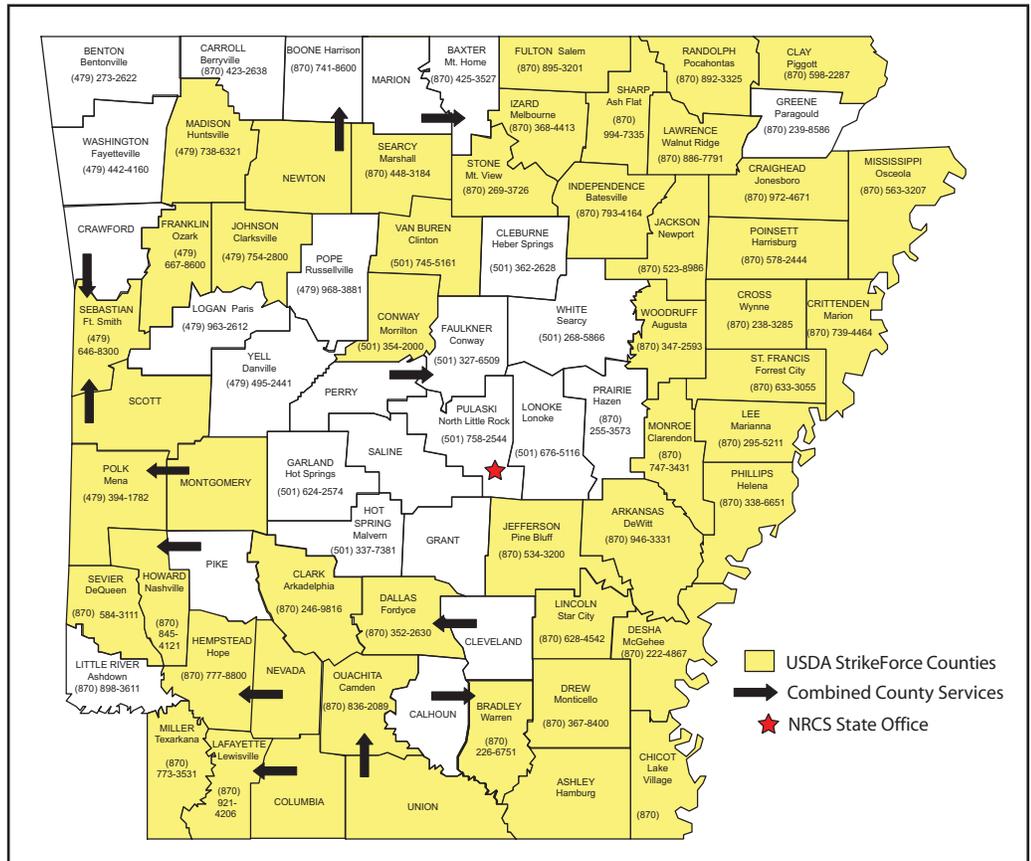
Arkansas, Bradley, Chicot, Clark, Colombia, Dallas, Desha, Drew, Hempstead, Howard, Jackson, Lafayette, Lawrence, Lee, Mississippi, Monroe, Nevada, Newton, Ouachita, Phillips, Randolph, Searcy, Sevier, St. Francis, and Woodruff.

The 23 expansion StrikeForce Initiative counties in Arkansas are:

Ashley, Clay, Conway, Craighead, Crittenden, Franklin, Fulton, Independence, IZARD, Jefferson, Johnson, Lincoln, Madison, Miller, Montgomery, Poinsett, Polk, Scott, Sebastian, Sharp, Stone, Union, and Van Buren.

The StrikeForce Initiative in Arkansas is addressing needs in persistent poverty counties to more effectively use farm loans, conservation programs and housing programs.

"Since its inception, the StrikeForce Initiative has helped



our agency direct additional resources to better serve producers in persistent poverty counties and accelerate implementation of conservation practices on their land," said USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. "NRCS provided more than \$2.8 million in financial assistance in StrikeForce counties in fiscal year 2013 though the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Much of the EQIP funding provided financial assistance to producers on small acreage farms to construct High Tunnels that extend the growing season in an expanding alternative and vegetable crop industry. EQIP funding also supported the installment of conservation practices including irrigation water management, conservation cropping systems, and nutrient management.

"With the Secretary's StrikeForce expansion announcement, we can increase our outreach, and financial and technical assistance to serve as better partners and help those in persistent poverty rural communities prosper," Sullivan said.

Earth Team Volunteer Program

Conservation volunteers honored during National Volunteer Week

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) celebrated National Volunteer Week April 6-13 by thanking and honoring its Earth Team volunteers for their service to conservation.

Earth Team is the agency's volunteer workforce. In 2013, Arkansas had 844 Earth Team volunteers who worked 35,908 hours to assist NRCS in promoting conservation programs and activities throughout the state. Nationally, more than 22,000 people donated 330,084 hours of service to NRCS worth approximately \$7.3 million.

"Volunteers work closely with our staff to play an important role in our conservation work," said Mike Sullivan, Arkansas's state conservationist.

Arkansas's national NRCS Earth Team volunteer program winners are:

- Chief's Cup: Arkansas NRCS for the best Earth Team program in the

nation (second consecutive year).

- Group Volunteer of the Year: The Miller County Back to Nature Group presented education information to 150 inner city, at risk minority youths across the county.

- National and State NRCS Employee of the Year: Terry Reeves, Soil Conservation Technician in Miller County, helped organize and manage four outdoor recreation, education and agriculture events reaching approximately 3,500 youths. He also worked with landowners to facilitate a rain gauge volunteer program in which volunteers measured rainfall and posted the data on the CoCoRaHS web site for use by NRCS and others across the nation.

Arkansas's state Earth Team volunteer program winners are:

- Volunteer of the Year: Doris Williams is a retired NRCS employee

Arkansas Names New Volunteer Coordinator

Tamara Sneed is the new Arkansas NRCS Earth Team volunteer coordinator.

The Earth Team partners volunteers with NRCS employees. It was created in 1985 and offers many opportunities to individuals 14 and older who are interested in volunteering to improve the nation's natural resources.

Learn more about the Earth Team Volunteer Program on line at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/volunteers> or by calling Tamara at (501) 301-3145.

who assists customers in the Lawrence County office, helps with outreach meetings and manages the office's vehicle fleet. His assistance allows paid staff to provide more conservation program assistance to customers and get more conservation on the land.

- Partnership Award: The Buffalo Conservation District partnered with the NRCS Marshall Field Service Center staff to achieve an outstanding volunteer program in Searcy County. Volunteers built 40 bat boxes that encourage the nesting of bats to eat insects and promote other environmental benefits. Volunteers participated in a People's Garden and helped collect and deliver more than 600 pounds of food to a food bank, conducted three fishing derbies that provided educational outreach, two Envirothon teams that promoted conservation education and coordinated a rain measurement and reporting project.

- Field Service Center of the Year: The Texarkana Field Service Center has 88 volunteers who contributed 2,307 volunteer hours in organizing and implementing a fishing derby for youth, a Back to Nature educational field day and measuring and reporting daily rainfall data across the county.



Tamara Sneed, state volunteer coordinator; Mike Sullivan, state conservationist; and Patricia Hoeffken, Earth Team volunteer and former coordinator, hold the Chief's Cup.