

# ARKANSAS CONSERVATION NEWS

 NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE 

First Quarter  
2017

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First Quarter  
2017



## LAWRENCE CONYER

*wins Lloyd Wright Small Farmer of the Year award*



\$20 Million Available to Restore  
Wetland Habitat.  
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Wildflowers abound in glade restoration.  
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Working Lands for Wildlife  
comes to Arkansas.  
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# From the State Conservationist



We are pleased to provide you with our first quarter newsletter for Fiscal Year 2017. We have much to be proud of because 2016 was another banner year for NRCS helping producers implement conservation practices and systems addressing natural resource concerns. Thanks to the extra efforts of Arkansas NRCS employees and our conservation partners, we continued to manage very heavy workloads in many counties to service existing Farm Bill contracts while improving conservation planning and technical assistance and servicing new Farm Bill requests. Working closely with our partners, we have made great progress with many wonderful accomplishments above and beyond what we could ever achieve on our own. Through hard work and extra effort, we've attempted to deliver the high quality service helping you (producers) address your most pressing natural resource concerns and achieving operational/production goals. We continued to achieve even more through targeted conservation efforts such as the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative, StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity Initiative, Illinois River Watershed Initiative, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and funding directed to help address critical ground water declines.

I recently had an opportunity to attend the Innovative Partnerships for Working Lands Conservation Conference in Atlanta, Ga. NRCS Chief Jason Weller's strong leadership and vision were clear as he said: "there is still much work to be done. Global conservation challenges will require us to explore even more opportunities for collaboration. We will need to grow private-sector investment, harness innovation and creativity, and ensure the latest science and research is available to inform our efforts. We will need to continue to rally around the sense of common purpose that has propelled our work forward."

As we look to the future here in Arkansas, we need to keep Chief Weller's comments in mind and look for more opportunities for collaboration, private sector investment, use of science, technology, innovation and creativity through the common sense approach called voluntary incentive-based conservation—that begins with conservation planning. Working together, I'm confident we'll continue to help get conservation on the ground better and faster than ever before! Please take time to visit one of our 61 field offices to see how we may be able to better assist you in meeting your operational objectives for 2017 and beyond.



Mike Sullivan, State Conservationist

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Department of  
Agriculture

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# \$20 Million Available to Help Arkansas Landowners Restore Wetlands

Nearly \$20 million is available to help landowners protect and restore wetlands across the state and in two special project areas.

The funding is provided through the Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) portion of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Through the voluntary sale of an easement, landowners limit future development to protect critical water resources and wildlife habitat.

WRE applications may be submitted at any time to Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS); however, applications for the current funding round must be submitted by Jan. 27. Landowners statewide should visit their local USDA field service center to apply. The statewide funding totals \$13.4 million.

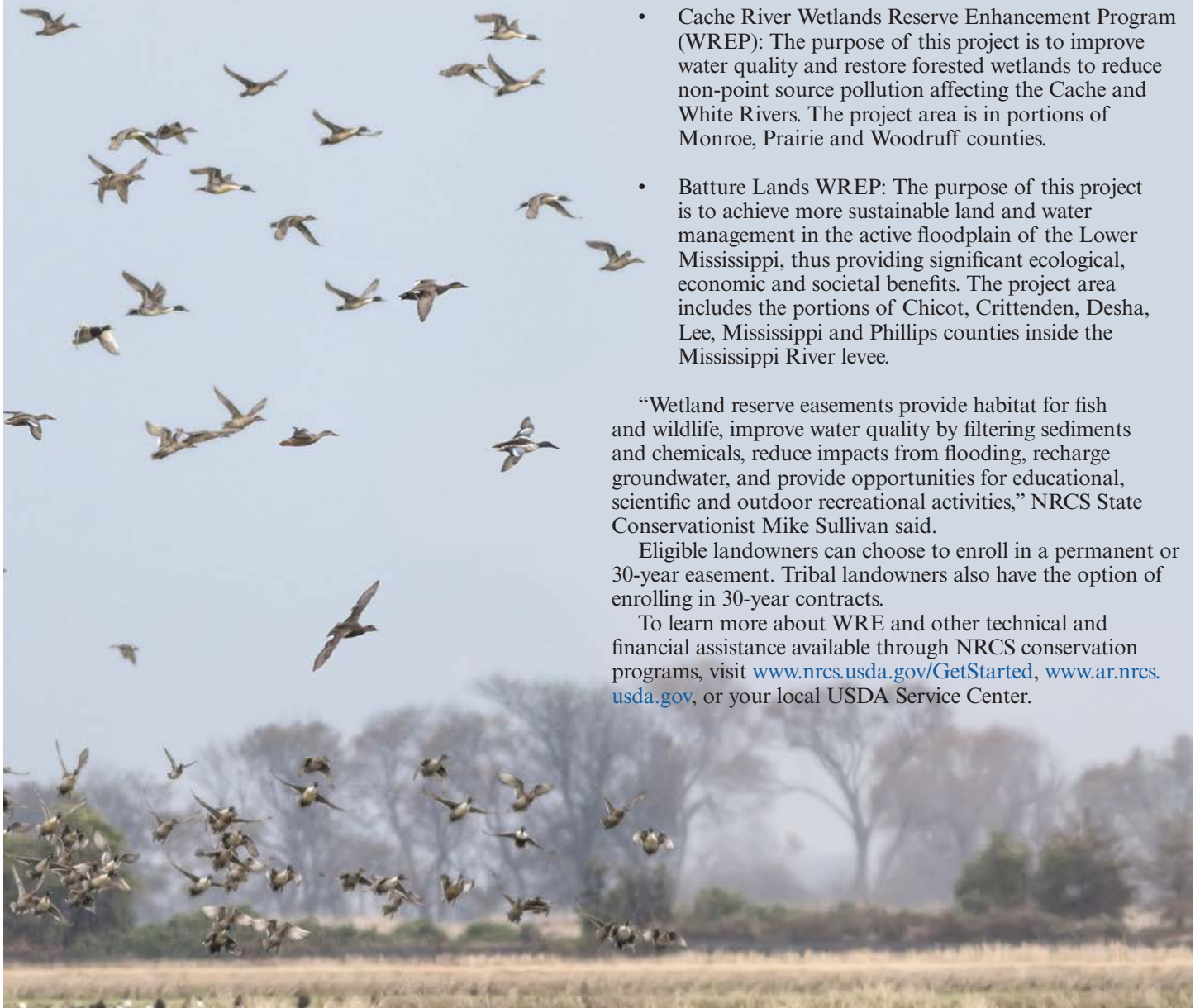
Two special Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) projects share \$6.4 million in funding available through WRE. They are:

- Cache River Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP): The purpose of this project is to improve water quality and restore forested wetlands to reduce non-point source pollution affecting the Cache and White Rivers. The project area is in portions of Monroe, Prairie and Woodruff counties.
- Batture Lands WREP: The purpose of this project is to achieve more sustainable land and water management in the active floodplain of the Lower Mississippi, thus providing significant ecological, economic and societal benefits. The project area includes the portions of Chicot, Crittenden, Desha, Lee, Mississippi and Phillips counties inside the Mississippi River levee.

“Wetland reserve easements provide habitat for fish and wildlife, improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals, reduce impacts from flooding, recharge groundwater, and provide opportunities for educational, scientific and outdoor recreational activities,” NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan said.

Eligible landowners can choose to enroll in a permanent or 30-year easement. Tribal landowners also have the option of enrolling in 30-year contracts.

To learn more about WRE and other technical and financial assistance available through NRCS conservation programs, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted), [www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov), or your local USDA Service Center.







## NRCS Expands Targeted Conservation Effort for Wildlife

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) is adding 11 new projects to Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW), the agency's targeted, science-based effort to help producers restore and protect habitat for declining species on farms, ranches and working forests.

Producers in Arkansas are part of a project that focuses on helping enhance early successional habitat to aid in bobwhite quail recovery. The project targets grasslands, where NRCS is working with producers to replace non-native grasses with native grasses, forbs and legumes that benefit bobwhite and other wildlife, while creating alternative healthy grazing options for livestock. Other states included in this project are Virginia, Illinois, Indiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Missouri and Kentucky.

Arkansas producers in 20 counties have until Jan. 30 to apply for funding consideration to help install conservation practices such as native grass planting, pollinator habitat, forest stand

improvement, early successional habitat development and prescribed burning. Approximately \$400,000 is available.

The project area in Arkansas includes **Ashley, Baxter, Benton, Carroll, Drew, Faulkner, Fulton, Hempstead, Logan, Marion, Nevada, Newton, Pulaski, Randolph, Searcy, Sebastian, Sharp, St. Francis, Stone and Yell**. These counties were selected because they have Arkansas Game and Fish Commission Wildlife Management Areas where quail focused practices are being implemented.

"Agriculture and wildlife both thrive together through landscape conservation," said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas. "The northern bobwhite was once a familiar face in rural communities, and we're working with producers to make bobwhite-friendly improvements on working lands that will help the species and benefit operations."

When habitat is restored for the bobwhite, many other species benefit.

NRCS uses the bobwhite and other wildlife as indicators of ecosystem health.

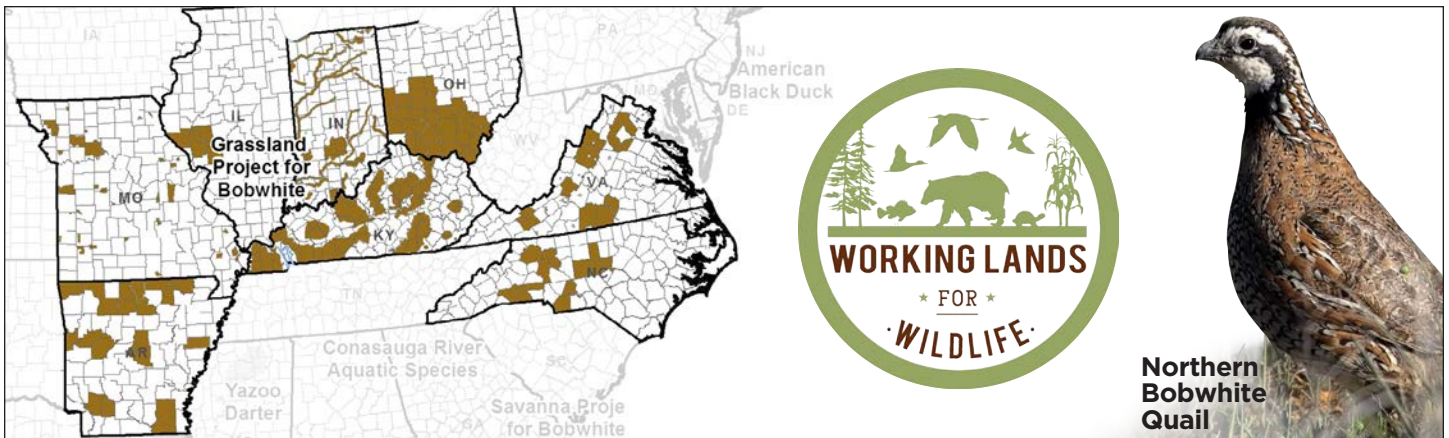
With more than two-thirds of the continental United States under private ownership, wildlife depend heavily on working lands for habitat and food.

NRCS staff worked with conservation partners to identify new species and landscapes. Considerations included the compatibility of the species and agriculture, the network of available partners and the needs of the species.

"The future of wildlife, agriculture and rural ways of life depend on our collective ability to transfer our Working Lands for Wildlife model to more species and working landscapes," Sullivan said.

Through WLFW, NRCS strategically invests where conservation returns are highest and measures how wildlife respond to management activities to refine conservation efforts.

To learn more, landowners should contact their local USDA service center or visit [www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov).



## *Initiative Aims to Spread Pollinator Habitat Across Arkansas*

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) has started a special pollinator initiative in 20 counties to help increase and enhance pollinator habitat.

Three-fourths of the world's flowering plants and about 35 percent of the world's food crops depend on animal pollinators to reproduce. Landowners in the initiative area can apply through their local USDA field service center for funding consideration to install conservation practices beneficial to pollinators. \$230,000 is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The application deadline is Jan. 30, 2017.

The project area includes **Ashley, Baxter, Benton, Carroll,**

**Drew, Faulkner, Fulton, Hempstead, Logan, Marion, Nevada, Newton, Pulaski, Randolph, Searcy, Sebastian, Sharp, St. Francis, Stone and Yell**.

Practices available are conservation cover, prescribed fire, forest stand improvement and early successional habitat development and management.

"Some of the most successful pollinator habitat has been created using natural regeneration techniques such as light disking and prescribed burning," said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas. "These practices promote native forbs that already exist in the seed bank."

To apply, visit your local USDA field service center.



# Initiatives



## USDA Invests \$1.4 Million in Three Arkansas Watersheds

### Funds Help Implement Conservation Practices to Improve Water Quality

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced an investment of more than \$1.4 million in three high-priority watersheds in Arkansas to help landowners improve water quality through the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI).

The three watersheds are Cousart Bayou-Little Cypress Bayou, Upper Deep Bayou and Lower Deep Bayou in portions of **Jefferson** and **Lincoln** counties.

Producers in these watersheds have until January 30 to apply for funding consideration at their local Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) office.

The NWQI helps farmers and ranchers implement voluntary conservation practices, such as irrigation water management, irrigation pipeline, land leveling, cover crop, field border, residue management and conservation crop rotation are the more commonly used practices in the contracts, which protect and improve water quality where it is needed most.

Conservation practices enhance agricultural productivity and profitability while also improving water quality by enhancing soil health and optimizing the use of agricultural inputs.

“USDA is committed to working hand-in-hand with farmers, ranchers, and landowners to address water quality issues and provide the tools necessary to ensure clean, safe water for communities and wildlife,” said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas. “This latest investment is yet another example of how voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs are benefitting both producers and our natural resources.”

#### NEW ASSESSMENT PROJECT

Buffalo Slough-Cache River, in portions of Greene and Lawrence counties, was also selected as one of 21 assessment projects. NRCS will provide resources for these assessment projects to leverage existing plans, data, and information, and fill gaps needed to complete watershed assessments and develop outreach plans. Experience

and data gained from several studies, including the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP), have shown that improvements in water quality are more likely to be detected when conservation systems are placed in the most vulnerable areas of a watershed.

In 2017, NRCS will be working with partners (state agencies, conservation districts and universities) to conduct a watershed scale resource assessment to look at the current conditions and what and specifically where is the best place to put conservation on the ground. In 2018, funds will be available for farmers to implement the practices.



Photo submitted by Mike Daniels

Flume collects water runoff from a crop field in Desha county for water quality analysis.

## *Initiative Addresses Groundwater Decline*

Agricultural producers in **Arkansas, Craighead, Cross, Lonoke, St. Francis, Poinsett** and **Prairie** counties have until January 30 to submit applications for funding consideration to voluntarily implement conservation practices through the NRCS Groundwater Decline Initiative.

More than \$3 million is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to address the water quantity issues in the Alluvial and Sparta aquifers.

“While Arkansas has an abundance of good quality groundwater in many parts of the state, groundwater is being depleted faster than the rate of recharge in the primary agricultural area for cultivated crops,” said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist for Arkansas.

“Though there is a critical decline of groundwater in the aquifer beneath these increasingly irrigated acres, NRCS uses its programs and technical expertise to install systems that convert from groundwater use to surface water utilizing the state’s annual rainfall,” Sullivan said.

All contracts will require Irrigation Water Management (IWM) for three years. Those practices which have the

biggest groundwater savings will be the highest priority.

Priority ranking will be given for:

- Locations within the greatest cones of depression in the Alluvial and Sparta aquifers.
- Systems converting to surface water systems where irrigation wells are pumping from the Sparta Aquifer.
- Management practices such as irrigation water management, pump automation, flow measuring devices and soil moisture sensors.

“Improving irrigation efficiencies on existing groundwater systems can increase water savings by more than 25 percent just by the use of IWM and computerized hole selection (Phaucet and Pipe Planner),” Sullivan said. “Further reductions in water use will be realized through scheduling tools and other irrigation water management devices such as atmometers, soil moisture meters, and pump automations.”

To sign up for EQIP, visit your local USDA field service center. To locate the local office, visit <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.





# Initiatives



## **RCPP:** New Arkansas Projects Address Water Quality, Water Quantity, Flood Prevention, Irrigation Efficiency

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced that 88 high-impact projects across the country will receive \$225 million in federal funding as part of the USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). In addition, partners have proposed to contribute up to an additional \$500 million to improve the nation's water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat and protect agricultural viability.

In Arkansas, the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) is investing more than \$8.3 million in three projects that address flood prevention, irrigation efficiency and water quality and water quantity. The projects are:

### **THE LITTLE RED RIVER WATER IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

**Proposed NRCS Investment:** \$1,200,000  
**Lead Partner:** Little Red River Irrigation District

**Number of Initial Partners:** 14  
**Project area:** White County

The Little Red River Water Improvement Project, managed by the District and 13 partners, will encourage irrigated cropland producers to implement structural irrigation practices. The project will result in a higher level of irrigation efficiency and water quality throughout the area. Wildlife habitat will also be increased on enrolled land.

### **DEPARTEE CREEK FLOOD PREVENTION PLAN**

**Proposed NRCS Investment:** \$180,000  
**Lead Partner:** Departee Creek Watershed Improvement District  
**Number of Initial Partners:** 8  
**Project Area:** Independence and Jackson counties

Departee Creek Watershed Improvement District and local partners, including beginning farmers and underserved producers, will implement a flood prevention plan and restore natural flow to Departee Creek. Frequent flooding results in high quantities of sediment buildup, nutrient loss and erosion along the waterway and adjacent lands. The partners will restore critical sections of

the creek and then develop a low water weir on a lake located mid-stream to maintain desired water levels. The work will improve wildlife habitat, limit loss of nutrients and crops, and reduce damage to personal property and roads. With successful implementation of the flood plan, the waterway also may be removed from the 303(d) Impaired List.

### **MID-SOUTH GRADUATED WATER STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM**

**Proposed NRCS Investment:** \$7,000,000

**Lead Partner:** USA Rice Federation

**Number of Initial Partners:** 24

**Participating States:** Arkansas (Lead State), Louisiana, Mississippi and Missouri

**Project Area in Arkansas:** Arkansas, Ashley, Chicot, Clay, Conway, Craighead, Crittenden, Cross, Desha, Drew, Faulkner, Green, Independence, Jackson, Jefferson, Lawrence, Lee, Lincoln, Lonoke, Mississippi, Monroe, Phillips, Poinsett, Pope, Prairie, Pulaski, Randolph, St. Francis, White, and Woodruff counties.

The Lower Mississippi River Valley region of the United States has long been fighting an uphill battle to retain groundwater levels, improve water quality and provide a suitable habitat for the diverse array of wildlife that inhabit the region. The Mississippi River Alluvial Aquifer serves as a vital and valuable irrigation source for rice growers throughout the region. Decades of annual withdrawals in excess of the aquifer's recharge capabilities have resulted in severely declining water levels that threaten the entire region's viability and could result in regulation for farmers. To address this, USA Rice has partnered with Ducks Unlimited and more than 20 other partners to increase conservation efforts at all levels of producers – from those who are just beginning their conservation efforts to those who are on the cutting edge of conservation innovation. In addition to offering appropriate practices/enhancements for producers, the Mid-south Graduated Stewardship project will include an innovative option for



producers to enter the carbon market by adopting advanced Alternate Wetting Drying through Environmental Quality Incentives Program/EQIP 449 Irrigation Water Management practice.

By 2018, NRCS and its partners, including Indian tribes, nonprofit organizations, state and local governments, private industry, water districts, universities and many others, will have invested at least \$2.4 billion through RCPP, which was created by the 2014 Farm Bill.

"RCPP plays a critical role in connecting partners with producers to design and implement conservation solutions that benefit both natural resources and agriculture," Vilsack said. "The Farm Bill is the largest source of federal funding for private lands conservation, and RCPP is contributing innovative conservation solutions to communities across the country."





## RE-ESTABLISHING THE GLADE



In the Ozarks, glades are treeless or sparsely wooded openings in woodlands, with bedrock at or near the surface. Glades contain some of the richest floras and unique plant communities in North America. Glades feature a rich variety of native grasses and prairie wildflowers, which in turn support an abundance of insects and wildlife.

Savannas, glades, and woodlands in the Ozarks remained open in the past due to fire. Encroachment of cedar and hardwoods has resulted in a loss of 80 percent of the Ozark glade habitats.

A few plant species, such as Missouri bladderpod, glade coneflower, and bottlebrush blazing star are restricted to glade communities. Glades support a variety of different wildlife

species including tarantula, eastern collard lizard, painted bunting, and prairie warbler. Wild turkey, bobwhite quail, and white tail deer also occur on glades.

Because of the lack of fire in our land management, we are losing thousands of acres of significant and unique glade communities.



**Haircap moss (*Polytrichum commune*) growing on a rock in the glade. The moss can be found in the southeastern United States.**

One of the goals of the Western Arkansas Woodland Restoration Initiative (WAWRI) is to restore these glade communities through partnership with private landowners.

David Lester is a cattle farmer who signed up to restore 20 acres of glades on his farm in Baxter County.

His goal was to open up the glades because he enjoys the large diversity of wild flowers, grasses, and collared lizards.

Glade restoration begins with the removal of undesirable woody vegetation. The glade was cleared using a chainsaw to remove undesirable cedar and hardwoods and a tractor to haul

the logs away. The woody vegetation was removed and burned.

"Following the removal of the unwanted trees we did a prescribed burn on all 20 acres of the glade," said Zechariah Landers, Natural Resources Conservation Services soil conservation technician at the Baxter County Field Service Center. "Burning stimulates the seedbed allowing wildflowers and native grasses to rejuvenate the glade to its natural state."

Burning is an essential part of the glade ecosystem and must be done every three to five years to control invading woody species.

Following the removal of undesirable vegetation and a prescribed burn, the wildflowers and native grasses began to flourish. Collard lizards began to move back into the glade and take up residence.

"Our office had no idea the impact of this project would have with developing working relationships with other agencies, surrounding states agencies and landowners," Landers said. "The project has sparked interest in glade restorations in our area. The University of Missouri, University of Arkansas, and other agencies have come to look at the project so they can do similar projects."

More than 90 people from private landowners and business to state and federal agencies, have attended glade field days in the area.

One of the attendees is a graduate student at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. He is using the glade to put tracking collars on the lizards to study their movements.

To find out more about WAWRI, contact George Rheinhardt at 501-301-3143 or [george.rheinhardt@ar.usda.gov](mailto:george.rheinhardt@ar.usda.gov)





# Giving Veterans Opportunities to Grow Through Agriculture

Veterans returning from active duty face many challenges. The Department of Labor reports that as of May 2010, over 20 percent of young veterans are unemployed. Moreover, recent data show that 45 percent of armed service members are from rural America. The agricultural industry is a logical solution to fill the economic gap veterans face. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to assisting veterans start or continue farming and ranching operations in order to strengthen the American economy and provide livelihoods to our returning veterans.

The USDA is strengthening service delivery to members of the military who live in rural America or who are interested in farming or ranching.

Veterans of the U.S. Armed Services receive preference for Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) conservation programs offered in the 2014 Farm Bill. These voluntary conservation programs benefit both agricultural producers and the environment, and include financial and technical assistance as well as easements.

Preference will be given to eligible veteran farmers or ranchers applying for several types of conservation financial assistance

through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

### Eligibility

An eligible Veteran Farmer or Rancher:

- meets the definition of a Beginning Farmer or Rancher
- has not operated a farm or ranch; or hasn't operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 consecutive years
- was discharged or released, under conditions other than dishonorable, from the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, its reserve components and the National Guard

For a legal entity or joint operation to be considered a Veteran Farmer or Rancher entity, all members must meet the above definition. Veteran Farmers or Ranchers may also qualify as a Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher by meeting additional criteria.

To learn how to get started with NRCS, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted) or the local USDA Field Service Center.







## Entities Receive Conservation Innovation Grants

Mike Sullivan, Arkansas state conservationist for Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), announced five proposals were selected to receive funding through the 2016 Arkansas Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program.

“CIG invests in innovative, on-the-ground conservation technologies and approaches, with the eventual goal of wide-scale NRCS adoption to address water quality and quantity, air quality, energy conservation, and environmental markets, among other natural resource issues,” Sullivan said.

Grant awardees must provide non-federal matching funds for at least 50 percent of the project cost. Of the non-federal matching funds, a minimum of 25 percent must be from cash contributions; the remaining 25 percent may come from in-kind contribution.

Entities and their proposals receiving the state-level grants, are:

• **University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture (\$58,318):** Assessment of NRCS Water Quality (WQ) Tool, Field to Market FieldPrint Calculator, Phosphorus (P) Index Metrics to Evaluate WQ Impacts with Edge of Field Runoff Ground-truthing.

The goal of this project is to evaluate the metric outputs from the WQIag, Fieldprint Calculator, and P Indices tools by comparing the outcomes to measured field nutrient runoff using management scenarios to determine the integrity, robustness, and flexibility of the metrics to account for land and the effect of conservation management on the potential for nutrient runoff. These tools can then be used as a basis to make changes to farm land use, nutrient management, and conservation adoption. The field testing will be conducted at existing edge-of-field water quantity and water quality sites from ten Discovery Farms across Arkansas.

• **University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture (\$74,999):** Water Efficient Irrigation Strategies in Arkansas Rice Production.

This project's goal is to evaluate alternative crop and water management

schemes that reduce water use in the production of rice to reduce water use in areas where irrigation efficiency has become necessary due to decreased groundwater supplies. Specifically, the objectives of this project are to: 1) determine the impact of alternate wetting and drying (AWD) irrigation water management with and without the use of Filamentous Green Algae (FGA) as an off-season cover and growing season mulch on agronomic and field parameters, and 2) determine field considerations necessary to support off-season FGA growth in quantities for field application and management.

• **East Arkansas Enterprise Community (\$49,922):** Conservation Innovation Demonstration Farm

The goal of the project is to provide education, outreach and technical assistance to fruit and vegetable producers to promote the use of conservation systems by incorporating one or more of the following: high tunnel, cover crops, conservation crop rotation, tillage, and or soil amendments. These practices improve soil health, makes growth of food more environmentally sustainable, and increases the amount of crops not traditionally grown in Arkansas available locally to Arkansans. The goal will be accomplished by conducting workshops, field days, and increasing awareness of presence of NRCS and the programs and assistance NRCS can provide to farmers.

• **Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts (\$20,000):** Demonstrating the benefits of Conservation on Soil Health, Water quality and Climate Change Utilizing a Farmer-led Soil Health Alliance.

The overall goal of this project is

to develop a farmer led Arkansas Soil Health and Climate Change Alliance that would establish the foundation for an effective educational program among Arkansas farmers. The network would acquire non-profit status and form a governing board, develop bylaws and a strategic plan as well as establish a technical advisory board. The Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts will work with the Alliance, University of Arkansas Department of Agriculture and Arkansas State University to: 1) Work with Alliance farmers to identify private landowners that could serve as Soil Health and Climate Change demonstration sites, 2) identify metrics and collect field data to document the effects of conservation practices that

promote soil health, water resource protection and climate change mitigation, and 3) utilize the collected information from these farms to develop and deliver an educational program including tours, workshops and fact sheets.

• **SMART Farm Systems LLC (\$74,910):** Precision Irrigation Monitoring and Control Systems.

The project is designed to evaluate alternative crop

and water management schemes that reduce water use in the production of rice in areas where irrigation efficiency has become necessary due to decreased groundwater supplies. Specifically, the objectives of this project are to: 1) determine the impact of alternate wetting and drying (AWD) irrigation water management with and without the use of Filamentous Green Algae (FGA) as an off-season cover and growing season mulch on agronomic and field parameters, and 2) determine field considerations necessary to support off-season FGA growth in quantities for field application and management.



Produce on display at the Jonesboro Farmers Market.



# Programs



## Program changes help producers evaluate options, operation

*Application deadline Feb. 3 for Conservation Stewardship Program*

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) has undergone several changes for Fiscal Year 2017 to help producers better evaluate their conservation options and the benefits to their operations and natural resources.

Changes producers can expect to see include nearly double the enhancements and conservation practices offered and better reporting tools to tell producers the results of their conservation efforts.

In Arkansas, CSP funding is available for producers statewide and, through three Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) projects and a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project. The application deadline is Feb. 3, 2017, statewide and in the following project areas:

- Upper Cache River MRBI – portions of Clay and Greene counties;
- Cache Willow/Podo – portions of Craighead, Jackson and Lawrence counties; and
- Tupelo Bayou-Beaverdam Creek – a portion of Faulkner County.
- Bayou-Meto Lower Watershed RCPP – portions of Lonoke and Pulaski counties.

Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) operates under a continuous sign-up, however specific deadlines are used for ranking, contracting and funding. Additional ranking pools and deadlines may be established if more acres are available.


“This year, the CSP provides even more opportunities for conservation and greater flexibility at the local level to prioritize resource concerns and conservation approaches,” says NRCS Chief Jason Weller. “State and locally customized CSP tools will improve the customer experience during application evaluations.”

People interested in the additional opportunities CSP offers can find information on the new CSP portal, located at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/csp>.

“Through CSP, agricultural producers and forest landowners earn payments for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities like cover crops, grazing management, forest stand improvement, and pollinator and beneficial insect habitat – all while maintaining active agriculture production on their land,” said NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. “CSP also encourages the adoption of cutting-edge technologies and new management techniques such as precision agriculture applications, on-site carbon storage and planting for high carbon sequestration rate, and new soil amendments to improve water quality.”

NRCS has addressed producer and stakeholder input requesting greater flexibility to address local resource concerns. Now, NRCS will more effectively utilize input from farmers, ranchers and partners in State Technical Committees and local workgroups to inform and expand conservation strategies under the program.


Producers interested in the program should visit their local USDA Service Center to submit an application.



**ELLIS BELL**  
ST. FRANCIS COUNTY

“To me, conservation is preserving the land and the environment as well as learning how to wisely use the natural resources available to me.”

<b>Years farming:</b> 45	• Irrigation water management
<b>Crops:</b> Soybean, Rice, Corn, Wheat	
<b>Years in CSP:</b> 5	<b>Benefits as a result of participating in CSP:</b>
<b>Acres enrolled in CSP:</b> 540 acres	• Increase in yield
<b>Enhancements applied:</b>	• Time savings in land preparation
• Using drift reducing nozzles	• Savings in chemical and fertilizer costs
• Using GPS target spray application	• More effective irrigation effort
• Nitrification inhibitors	



**MATT AND RACHEL HOEN**  
POPE COUNTY

“The enhancements list helped me to realize opportunities that I was missing and would never have used without CSP.”

<b>Years farming:</b> 8	bats and bird species
<b>Crops/livestock:</b> Beef Cattle, Hay, Boiler Chickens	• Stockpiling forages to extend grazing season
<b>Years in CSP:</b> 2	
<b>Acres enrolled in CSP:</b> 786.94 acres	<b>Benefits as a result of participating in CSP:</b>
<b>Enhancements applied:</b>	• Extended grazing season
• Managing livestock parturition to coincide with forage	• Increase in cattle conception rate and decrease in supplemental feeding
• Monitoring nutritional status of ruminant livestock using the NUTBAL system	• Able to better analyze the quality of forage
• Retrofit watering facility for wildlife escape and enhanced access for	





# Programs



## USDA portal enables farmers, ranchers to request conservation assistance online

Farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners can now do business with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through a new online portal.

Conservation Client Gateway, will give producers the ability to work with conservation planners online to access Farm Bill programs, request assistance, and track payments.

Conservation Client Gateway enables farmers, ranchers and private landowners to securely:

- Request NRCS technical and financial assistance;
- Review and sign conservation

- plans and practice schedules;
- Complete and sign an application for a conservation program;
- Review, sign and submit contracts and appendices for conservation programs;
- Document and request certification of completed practices;
- Request and track payments for conservation programs; and
- Store and retrieve technical and financial files, including documents and photographs.

Conservation Client Gateway is entirely voluntary, giving producers a

choice between conducting business online or at a USDA service center.

Conservation Client Gateway is available to individual landowners and will soon be extended to business entities, such as Limited Liability Corporations.

Conservation Client Gateway is part of the agency's ongoing Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative, which will feature additional capabilities in the future.

For more information about Conservation Client Gateway, visit: [www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway).

**USDA**  
United States Department of Agriculture

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
**CLIENT GATEWAY**  
CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE IS JUST A **CLICK AWAY**

**Client Gateway** is a new public website that allows clients secure ability to request conservation technical and financial assistance from the USDA.

Through **Client Gateway**, clients can also access their:

- conservation plans,
- conservation program applications and contracts,
- financial assistance contract payments,
- and much more.

**ONLINE FEATURES**  
[www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway)

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- REQUEST TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
- APPLY FOR CONSERVATION PROGRAM FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
- REVIEW, SIGN, AND SUBMIT APPLICATIONS, CONTRACTS, AND CONSERVATION PLANS
- TRACK PAYMENTS DUE CLIENTS





## Soil Survey Information

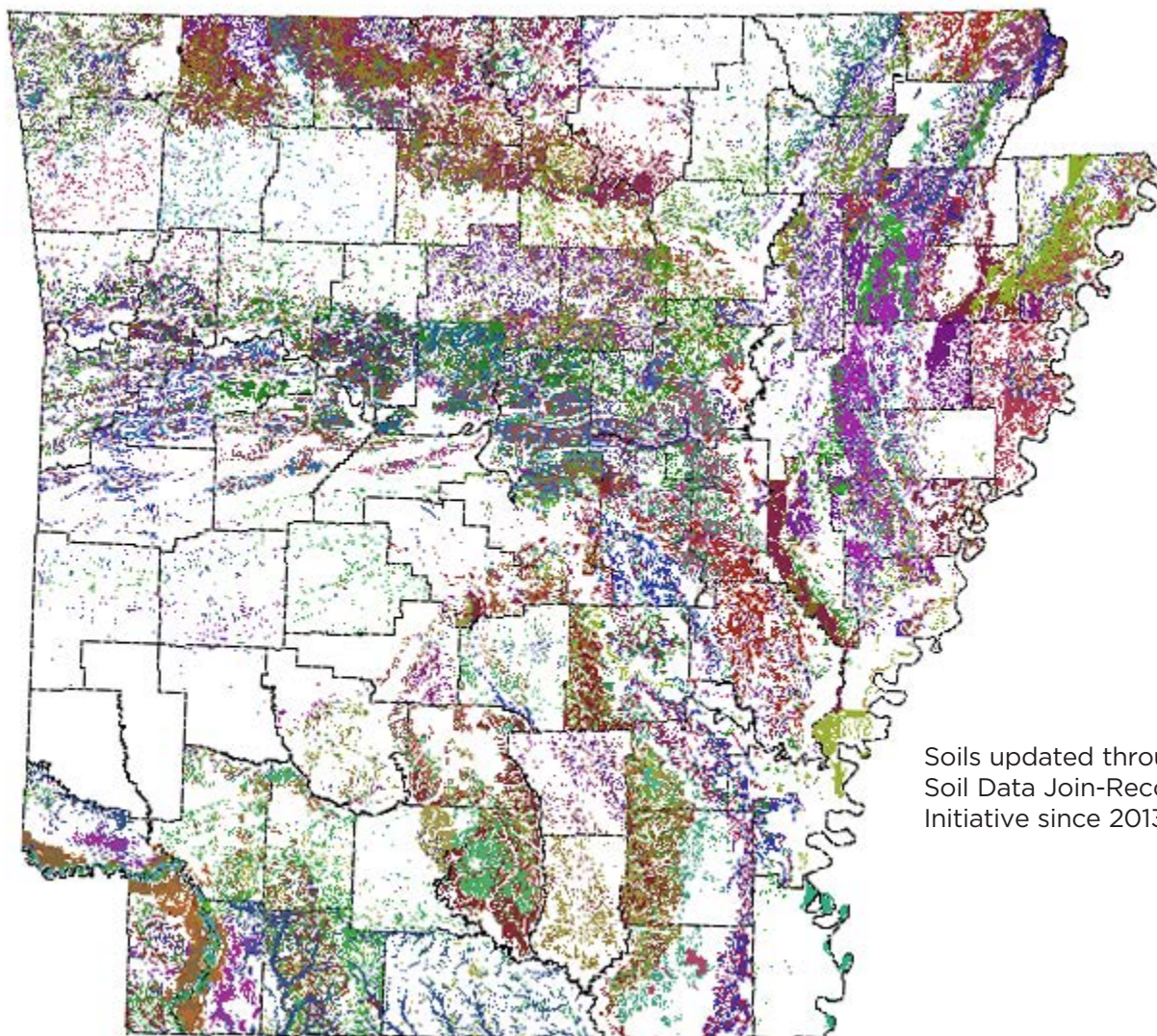
The most recent soil survey information was released in November 2016. The spatial data (soil polygons, lines and points) and tabular data (physical and chemical properties data and interpretive information) for all soil survey areas are available free from Web Soil Survey (WSS) at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>. This site is the most widely used web site for accessing soil information and is used to make important land use decisions.

Nationally, the Web Soil Survey website logged over 2.8 million user visits, averaging 233,000 visits per month in 2016. Over 536,663 customized soil reports for individual portions of the country were developed through Web Soil Survey in 2016 (a 2.4 percent increase over 2015). There were over 1.5 million soil ratings, and 386,000 soil reports generated. Customers downloaded SSURGO data for over 270,000 soil survey areas. At the end of 2016, the total number of visits to the website

since its initial release in 2005 topped 20 million. The top 5 surveys in Arkansas visited through the Web Soil Survey are Washington, Benton, Craighead, Clark & Hot Spring, and Mississippi.

The areas that have been updated through the Soil Data Join-Reconciliation Initiative since 2013 are shown in map below. Other projects include the separation of multi-county surveys into their separate counties. The purpose of this to give more accurate data for a particular county to the user. The Baxter & Marion Soil Survey, and the Fulton & Izard Soil Survey were separated for the Web Soil Survey into its separate counties. Additional projects such as these are planned in 2017.

If you need further information about the Web Soil Survey or other soils data products, contact Edgar Mersiovsky, State Soil Scientist, at [edgar.mersiovsky@ar.usda.gov](mailto:edgar.mersiovsky@ar.usda.gov).



Soils updated through the Soil Data Join-Reconciliation Initiative since 2013.





# CONYER REAPS WHAT HE SOWS

By CRESTON SHRUM

After a career with the U.S. Army, Lawrence Conyer returned to Jefferson County. His plan was to grow hay on 23 acres of family land since as a youth he had helped his father grow and harvest hay around the county.

Instead, he started growing green beans, sweet corn and greens for his family and the local community to use. Since 1999, Conyer has expanded his operation and now grows rice, corn and soybeans on about 1,500 acres in Jefferson and Lincoln counties.

He owns 200 acres and leases the rest. He has land enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, National Water Quality Initiative and Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative.

"These programs help me improve my land and farming

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*"Land will only put out what you put in it."*

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—Lawrence Conyer

operation," Conyer said. "I can also protect wildlife habitat while preserving the land."

Conyer has installed at least one conservation practice on most of the 200 acres he owns in Jefferson County.

Practices such as water management structures, wells, cover crops, nutrient and residue management and land leveling are not only helping Conyer, but also the environment.

"Land will only put out what you put in it," he said. "Through Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) assistance, I've decreased water use, increased my yields and saved time and money."

Conyer, who has farmed for 17 years, has a passion for farming and his community. He plants a "community" garden with corn, greens and peas for those in need to come pick fresh produce. He also uses it as an opportunity to teach youth about farming.

"Mr. Conyer is one of our better small farmers," said Levell Foote, NRCS Jefferson County district conservationist. "We've worked with him since 1999. He's worked in different conservation programs trying to be a better steward of the land."

"He not only works from the standpoint of just trying to conserve his land, he also works to help save the land of the other farmers in the area. He truly wants to preserve the land for the generations to come," Foote said.

Conyer's work and dedication was recognized by the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees as the third place winner of the national 2016 Lloyd Wright Small Farmer of the Year at its annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia, on December 10.

The Lloyd Wright Small Farmer Award is named after the organization's founder, Virginia native and 37-year USDA Employee Lloyd Wright. The award is given to producers who share a passion for improving awareness and development in the field of agriculture.



photo by Christopher Willis



photo by Reginald Jackson

Lawrence Conyer, center, stands next to Lloyd E. Wright, Founder of the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees. From left clockwise Edna Conyer, Robert K. Smith MRBI Specialist NRCS Arkansas, and John Lee Agronomist NRCS Arkansas.



## New Brand and Identity Standards Come to NRCS

The last time the agency received a new facelift was back in 2013. Three years later we get a new visual brand for everything from banner stands to reports. New typefaces (fonts) are also included. Gone are the days of Helvetica, it's now Gotham!

The new look and feel for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) comes on the heels of the newly updated CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program). The updated visual identity is rooted within the USDA Visual Standards. While it is very important to maintain the legacy and heritage that serves as its foundation, the new visual identity clearly identifies the NRCS as a unique organization within the USDA agency structure. The identity is a combination of multiple integrated components ensuring uniformity while allowing for flexibility.

The new identity doesn't stop at printed materials, the NRCS website will also be getting the visual upgrade in later 2017.

If you would like to know more about the new NRCS identity contact Reginald Jackson, state public affairs specialist at 501-301-3133 or [reginald.jackson@ar.usda.gov](mailto:reginald.jackson@ar.usda.gov).

Cover Option 1 - Preferred Palette



Cover Option 2 - Preferred Palette



Interior slide - Preferred Palette



Report Cover Template



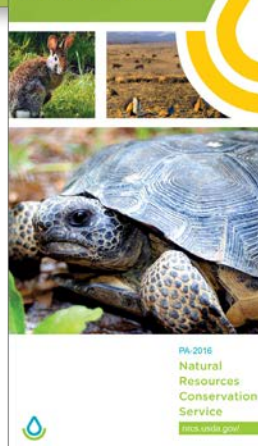
PowerPoint Cover



Fact sheet



Examples of the new Raindrop.



Brochure



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Natural Resources Conservation Service  
[nrcs.usda.gov](http://nrcs.usda.gov)





### *Denniston named new NRCS State Resource Conservationist in Arkansas*

Helen Denniston, a native of North Little Rock, was recently named USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Resource Conservationist in Arkansas.

Denniston began her career with NRCS in 1987 after earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Dairy Science and Soil Fertility from the University of Arkansas. She has worked as a soil conservationist and water quality specialist in Fayetteville, Huntsville and Bentonville and served as the district conservationist for Pulaski County.

Other NRCS jobs she's held include resource conservationist and state agronomist at the NRCS state office in Little Rock and soil conservationist at NRCS headquarters in Washington D.C. Her most recent position was state resource conservationist with NRCS in Alaska.

As the state resource conservationist, Denniston will direct the ecological sciences division for NRCS Arkansas.



Helen Denniston

### Upcoming Application Deadlines

Application deadlines for the following programs and initiatives are quickly approaching. Some are statewide and others are only offered in certain counties. To learn more about these sign ups, visit [www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov) or your local NRCS office.

- Wetland Reserve Easements – Jan. 27
- National Water Quality Initiative – Jan. 30
- Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative – Jan. 30
- Critical Groundwater Decline Initiative – Jan. 30
- Pollinators Initiative – Jan. 30
- Conservation Stewardship Program – Feb. 3
- Conservation Innovation Grant Pre-proposals:
  - National Level – Jan. 9
  - State Level – March 3



### *Rice Stewardship Conference*



Over 750 attendees, 59 exhibitors, and 34 sponsors were on hand at the 2016 USA Rice Outlook Conference, Dec. 7–9, 2016, in Memphis. The conference is the largest annual rice-specific gathering in North America and is an educational service of USA Rice. From left to right: Chuck Lea, Mississippi NRCS outreach coordinator; Karen Brinkman, Missouri NRCS assistant state conservationist-partnership coordinator (ASTC-PC); Mike Sullivan, Arkansas NRCS state conservationist; Jason Weller, NRCS chief; Amanda Mathis, Arkansas ASTC-PC; and Kevin Norton, Louisiana NRCS state conservationist. Sullivan served on a panel focusing on conservation and sustainability practices in the rice industry that was moderated by outgoing NRCS Chief Jason Weller who spoke about the importance of industries telling their stories. "In my view, production agriculture is sustainable agriculture, full stop," Chief Weller said. View a video about Chief Weller's remarks at <http://bit.ly/2iakyX6>.



# Dates to Remember



Arkansas State University

## **19th Annual Soil and Water Education Conference and Expo**

January 25, 2017

Arkansas State Convocation Center, Jonesboro, AR

For more information visit <https://www.astate.edu/college/agriculture-and-technology/outreach-programs/arkansas-soil-and-water-education-conference/>



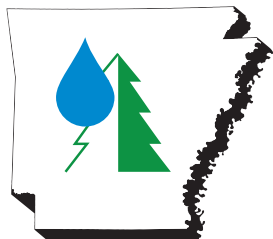
## **Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation**

### **Annual Winter Farmers and Rural Community Development Conference 2017**

January 27, 2017

ALCDC Business Center, 484 Floyd Brown Drive, Fargo, AR

If you have any questions or a need for additional information, please contact Mary Harris at (870) 734-3005, email at [alcdc1934@yahoo.com](mailto:alcdc1934@yahoo.com)



Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts

## **Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts 2017 Annual Meeting**

February 7-8, 2017

Wyndham Hotel, North Little Rock, AR

If you have questions or need additional information contact Debbie Moreland, Program Administrator at (501) 425-2891 or email at [Debbiepinreal@aol.com](mailto:Debbiepinreal@aol.com)

