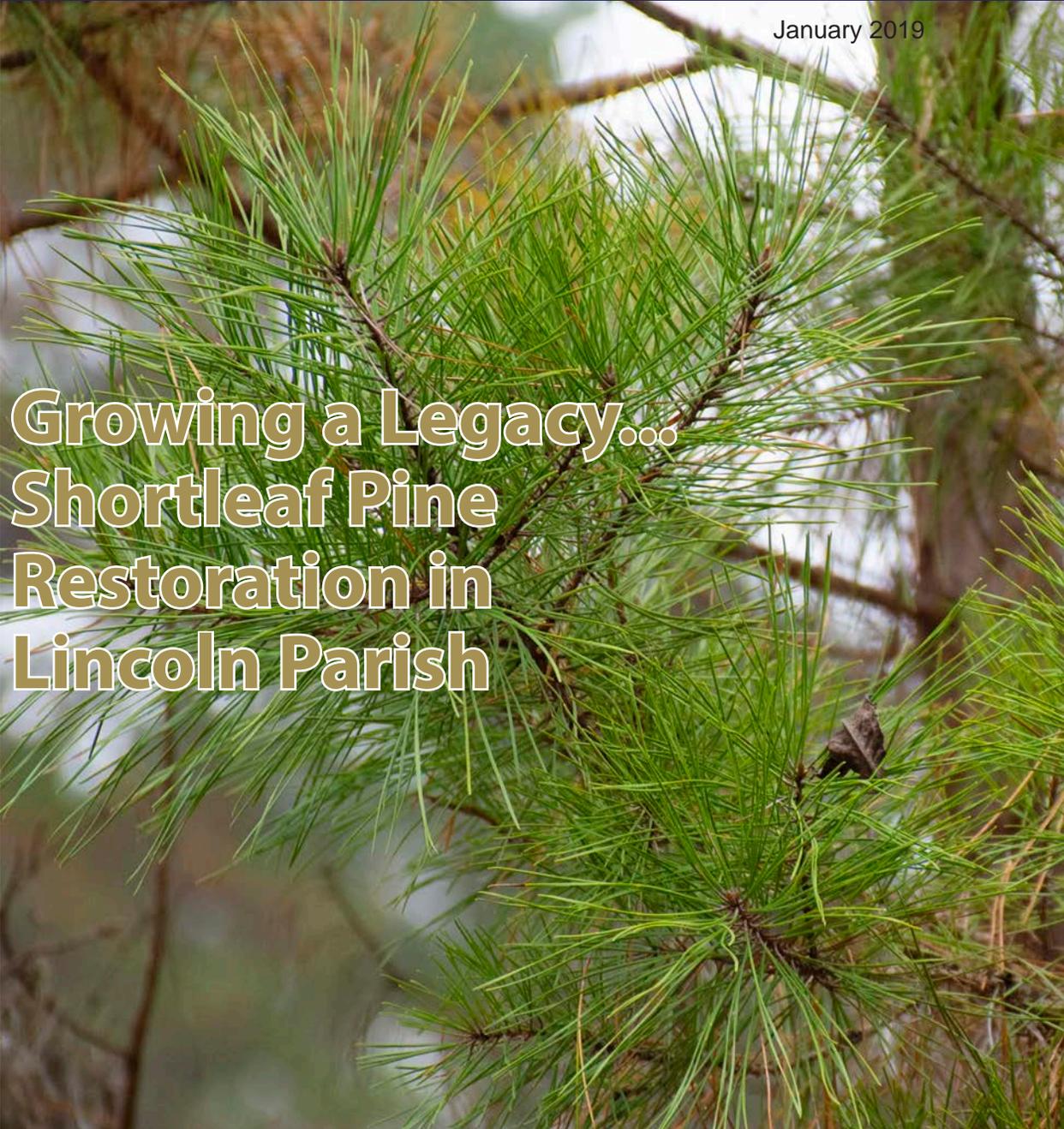




United States Department of Agriculture

# Louisiana Conservation Update

January 2019



## Growing a Legacy... Shortleaf Pine Restoration in Lincoln Parish

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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## On the Cover



Find out how Johnny and Karen Armstrong are growing a legacy of shortleaf pine forest in Lincoln Parish, on pages 4 and 5.

The Conservation Update is distributed monthly by mail and e-mail.

If you would like to receive monthly issues of the Conservation Update, please send your mailing address or e-mail address to:

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## Notes from the Acting State Conservationist

I'm thrilled to be serving Louisiana as the acting state conservationist. I'm certainly enjoying Louisiana... the history, culture, food and of course the people! My arrival the week of January 6th corresponded with one of the state's key conservation events, the 73rd annual meeting of the Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts (LACD) held in Baton Rouge. I can't think of a better venue to get acquainted with the state and have the opportunity to meet and visit with many of you and discuss Louisiana agricultural issues.

I'd like to share just a little about me. I grew up on a cattle operation in Northwest Arkansas. During those early years I developed a love for agriculture and nature. That interest and love of all things ag drew me to a career with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). My career includes holding positions as district conservationist in multiple counties, assisting producers and partners with conservation issues such as nutrient reduction and declining aquifers. Currently, I serve as the Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships in Arkansas, working to enhance collaborative efforts with conservation partners and providing leadership for initiatives, including the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and the Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI).



All that to say, I'm passionate about working with producers and getting conservation on the ground. It is an incredible opportunity to work alongside the dedicated Louisiana NRCS employees, our conservation partners and YOU, our incredible producers.

In this issue of the Conservation Update we visit Wafer Creek Ranch in Lincoln Parish. This unique forest-land operation utilizes natural management techniques to favor upland hardwoods and shortleaf pine in an open condition that allows native grasses to flourish in the understory. Dr. Armstrong is such a believer in NRCS and the conservation work we do throughout the state, he is the first to tell other producers, "If you are not working with NRCS, you should be!"

I completely agree!

Amanda Mathis  
Acting State Conservationist

## Get Involved With the Earth Team!

Are you interested in volunteering with conservation professionals on private lands to improve soil quality, conserve water, improve air quality and enhance wildlife habitat? If you answered yes, then volunteering as part of the Earth Team at your local NRCS office is for you!

Available to anyone 14 and older, the Earth Team provides a variety of opportunities: full- or part-time; outdoor or indoor activities; and as an individual or group. There is something for everyone.

For more information, contact Amy Robertson at 318-473-7762 or by e-mail at amy.robertson@la.usda.gov or Adele Swearingen at 318-473-7687 or by e-mail at adele.swearingen@la.usda.gov.



## Growing a Legacy...Shortleaf Pine

In the rolling hills of north Louisiana stands a unique forest. Wafer Creek Ranch, a beautiful stretch of land, home to shortleaf pine, hickory and oak trees with an understory of blue stem grass. This upland savanna is also known as the Upper West Coast Eco Region, known for a mix of hardwoods and pine trees.

Located in Lincoln Parish, Wafer Creek Ranch is home to Johnny and Karen Armstrong.

Early settlers found virgin forests here. Many times, they would comment about the expanse of land they would see before them and described what they saw as an "open park-like setting." This ecosystem thrived on fire, "The shortleaf pine, oak and hickory trees grew on the tops of the hills and upper slopes of this area," explained Armstrong. "Because there was a tall grass prairie growing underneath, fire was abundant."

In the mid to late 1800's and early 1900's much of this land was de-forested and was utilized for agriculture. In fact, Dr. Armstrong's great-great grandfather bought up most of the land that makes up Wafer Creek Ranch back in the 1880's. "He wanted to be a cotton farmer," said Armstrong. The land was cleared, and cotton farming began.

Ultimately, the land and soil were not well suited for agriculture and over time, with no farming practices and fire suppression, the forest returned, thick and overgrown.

Dr. Armstrong has always been interested in conservation but began applying conservation practices about ten years ago. With over 500 acres on his ranch, developing a management philosophy was paramount.

"It dawned on me several years ago that I have this land and it is a huge responsibility," explained Armstrong. "Because this is an urban forest, I believe that if I don't protect the land, it will be destroyed and ultimately developed." To keep Wafer Creek safe, Armstrong decided to enroll nearly 400 acres in a conservation easement with The Nature Conservancy. "That way the land is protected for perpetuity."

As far as management, Armstrong's philosophy is one that mimics what naturally occurred on this land years and years ago. Rick Williams, state forester for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Louisiana emphasized, "The Southern pine tree species, including shortleaf pine, can be significantly enhanced using natural management techniques often overlooked by landowners." Williams goes on to say, "Dr. Armstrong is using natural management to favor upland hardwoods and shortleaf pine in an open condition to allow for native grasses to flourish in the understory." To achieve this Armstrong uses herbicides followed by a two-year rotation of prescribed burning.

Early on there were 2.2 million acres of tall grass prairies, a vast expanse that began at the Gulf Coast and grew all the



## Restoration in Lincoln Parish

way to Canada. Blue stem grass, along with other forbs and grasses found in this ecosystem require the open park-like setting and periodic prescribed fire to thrive.

Blue stem grass seeds that are compatible for the Upper West Eco System requires Armstrong to be creative. In fact, The Nature Conservancy started a partnership with Kisatchie National Forest where Armstrong and others can gather Blue stem seeds; because Kisatchie is also located in the same ecosystem.

And that is where the partnership with NRCS and the D'Arbonne Soil and Water Conservation District began. Armstrong visited his local NRCS field office to learn more about the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for prescribed burning and chemical work for Wafer Creek. To help Armstrong achieve his goals, NRCS developed a conservation plan to guide him as he worked toward his conservation goals.

Brant Bradley, NRCS district conservationist in Lincoln Parish, worked with Armstrong for several years. "After visiting his property, I knew that he would be an ideal candidate for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). CSP allowed Armstrong to expand conservation on his land by establishing an advanced pest management strategy (Prevention, Avoidance, Monitoring, and Suppression) PAMS. These strategies are used to reduce the need for chemical use while maintaining satisfactory pest control. Secondly, Armstrong is managing riparian zones

by utilizing techniques that maintain diverse vegetation along streams, creating beneficial wildlife habitat and improving the quality of surface water.

Bradley smiles, "It is easy to work with Dr. Armstrong, because he already has a passion and desire to take conservation on his property to the next level." Bradley and the D'Arbonne Soil and Water Conservation District have established a strong partnership with Armstrong and the results are easy to see. Just ask Armstrong.

Standing out on the top of a hill and surveying his land below, Armstrong laughs, "I don't mean to brag but, this is one of the finest examples of shortleaf pine restoration in the state!"

Bradley smiles and agrees.

To learn more about how NRCS can help you achieve your conservation goals, visit one of the 44 offices state-wide or at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).



Written by: Michelle Thomas,  
Farmers.gov Lead, FPAC-BC

The vision of farmers.gov is to provide farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners with online self-service applications, educational materials, engagement opportunities, and business tools.

Many of these self-service features are available through the secure farmers.gov portal, where you can log in to your dashboard to apply for programs, process transactions, and manage accounts.

If you work with USDA, we encourage you to get an USDA eAuthentication account, providing you access to the farmers.gov portal and enabling you to better manage your USDA business online.

### Sign Up Today

We encourage you to register for a Level 2 eAuthentication account:

1. Contact your local service center to ensure your correct email address is on file.
2. Create an account at [www.eauth.usda.gov](http://www.eauth.usda.gov). When creating your account, be sure to request Level

2 access and use the email address on file.

3. Complete identity verification by either using the online self-service identity verification method or by completing the identity verification in-person at your USDA service center.

4. Now that you're enrolled, contact your local USDA service center to have your account linked with your USDA customer record.

5. You're ready to login!

Currently, only customers doing business as individuals can access their records using a USDA eAuthentication account. Access for customers doing business as an entity (such as an LLC or Trust) or on behalf of another individual will be available in the future.

### Available Features

USDA is building farmers.gov for farmers, by farmers, based on feedback from you and our field employees who serve you. Once you're logged in to the secure farmers.gov portal, you can view a dashboard personalized with your customer profile and complete the following activities:

- Apply for the Market Facilitation Program; and

- Track your application for the 2017 Wildfires and Hurricanes Indemnity Program.

You can also link directly to our existing business applications, such as Farm Service Agency's FSAfarm+ and Natural Resources Conservation Service's Conservation Client Gateway. As we grow, these and other USDA business applications will be integrated into the dashboard.

### Other Upcoming Features

In the next year, USDA plans to add new features, enabling you to:

- view information on current and previous farm loans;
- evaluate loan programs to find the best fit for your business goals;
- submit loan documents to your service center; and
- view your farm records, including your farm and tract number and maps.

### Need Help?

For help setting up your account, call our help desk at 1-800-457-3642. For other questions, we encourage you to reach out your local USDA service center.

## Outreach Corner

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, State Outreach Coordinator

The Horseshoe Casino Hotel in Robinsonville, Mississippi, was the site of the 2018 National Black Growers Council Conference (NBGC). Over 200 people attended the 3-day conference. There were panel sessions that covered topics such as Co-Op's From A to Z, Financing & Crop Marketing Panel, Precision Ag Panel and Integrated Pest Management Panel. The NBGC received a lot of accolades for incorporating a Women in Ag Forum into their agenda. During the Women in Ag Forum, I got the chance to plug the Louisiana Women in Ag Conference 2019 and was able to pass out flyers for the conference.

In addition, attendees got to hear presentations from FSA, NRCS, Farm Credit representatives and there was a presentation on land utilization.

Louisiana was well represented at the conference with such people as A.J. Sabine who served as the conference moderator, Harvey Reed, III, Founder and CEO of the Louisiana Association of Cooperatives, Dr. Billy Leonard, Associate Vice President, LSU AgCenter, Angela and June Provost of Provost Farm, LLC, and a contingency of the Morehouse Black Farmers and Landowners Association were in attendance as well.

Former Mississippi Congressman and former Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Espy, was the keynote speaker for the NBGC Luncheon. Mr. Espy talked about Intergenerational Farming and how we needed to get more people especially youth, involved in agriculture. He also spoke about markets and how crop yields are getting better. He also stated that by the year 2050 the world population was expected to double and that farms must get larger and not smaller. Mr. Espy concluded his speech by giving congratulations to the



bipartisan passage of the Farm Bill and he highlighted some of the provisions of the new bill.

Leonard Jordan, former Acting Chief for NRCS received the Pearlle S. Reed Black Farmers Advocacy Award during the NBGC Awards Gala.

## Upcoming Events

### January 30 - February 1, 2019 National Cattleman's Beef Association Convention and Trade Show

The National Cattleman's Beef Association will be holding their Annual Convention and Trade Show from January 30 - February 1, 2019, at the Ernest Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, Louisiana. For more information, or to register, visit <https://convention/beefusa.org>.

### February 6 - 7, 2019 PSA Grower Training

The LSU AgCenter is hosting PSA Grower Training + optional GAPs Food Safety Plan Writing Workshop on February 6 - 7, 2019, in Amite, Louisiana. There is a \$20 fee for the class. For more information contact

Achyut Adhikari at [ACAdhikari@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:ACAdhikari@agcenter.lsu.edu) or by phone at 225-578-2529.

### February 7, 2019 Northeast Louisiana Crops Forum

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting the Northeast Louisiana Crops Forum on Thursday, February 7, 2019, from 9:00 am - noon at the Delhi Civic Center. For more information, contact Bruce Garner at 318-331-9481.

### February 13 - 14, 2019 PSA Grower Training

The LSU AgCenter is hosting PSA Grower Training + optional GAPs Food Safety Plan Writing Workshop on February 13 - 14, 2019, in Crowley, Louisiana. There is a \$20 fee for the class. For more information contact Achyut Adhikari at [ACAdhikari@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:ACAdhikari@agcenter.lsu.edu) or by phone at 225-578-2529.

### February 14, 2019 Northeast Louisiana Rice Forum

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting the Northeast Louisiana Rice Forum on Thursday, February 14, 2019, from 9:00 - noon at the Iona Golf Course in Rayville, Louisiana. For more information, contact Keith Collins at 318-355-0703.

### February 20 - 21, 2019 PSA Grower Training

The LSU AgCenter is hosting PSA Grower Training + optional GAPs Food Safety Plan Writing Workshop on February 20 - 21, 2019, in Bossier City, Louisiana. There is a \$20 fee for the class. For more information contact Achyut Adhikari at [ACAdhikari@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:ACAdhikari@agcenter.lsu.edu) or by phone at 225-578-2529.

Visit our web site at:  
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the Date



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FRIDAY MORNING AND AFTERNOON SPEAKERS & WORKSHOPS  
**2019 KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:**

<p><b>Jane Jenkins Herlong,</b> Motivational Humorist, SiriusXM Comedian, Professional Singer and Best-Selling/ Award-Winning Author Edgefield County, SC</p>			<p><b>Marji Guyler-Alaniz,</b> Owner and Founder of <b>FARMHER.</b> Urbandale, IA</p>
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**REGISTRATION: \$50**  
(THURSDAY TOURS & EVENING RECEPTION, FRIDAY BREAKFAST & LUNCH, T-SHIRT AND GOODY BAG INCLUDED)  
HOLIDAY INN IN DOWNTOWN ALEXANDRIA - SPECIAL ROOM RATE CODE: LWA

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