



United States Department of Agriculture

# Louisiana Conservation Update

August 2020



**Listening to the Land**

***See Important Editor's Note on Inside Cover***

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



## Table of Contents

**Notes from the State Conservationist.....3**

**Listening to the Land.....4**

**Outreach Corner.....6**

**National NRCS News.....6**

**Employee Update.....7**

**New Video Series.....8**

**Farmers.gov New Features.....8**

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:

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
3737 Government Street  
Alexandria, Louisiana 71302

**Attention:**  
Amy Robertson  
State Public Affairs Specialist  
amy.robertson@la.usda.gov  
or  
Adele Swearingen  
Public Affairs Specialist  
adele.swearingen@la.usda.gov

USDA  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
3737 Government Street  
Alexandria, Louisiana 71302  
(318) 473-7751

## On the Cover



Learn more about how Marty Bienvenu is listening to the land he has enrolled in a permanent wetland reserve easement, on pages 4 and 5.

## Editor's Note:

**This issue was completed prior to the landfall of Hurricane Laura in Louisiana. The next issue of the Louisiana Conservation Update will have more information regarding NRCS's role in the recovery of the storm.**



Follow us on Twitter: [http://twitter.com/NRCS\\_Louisiana](http://twitter.com/NRCS_Louisiana)

## Notes from the State Conservationist

We were ready to go to print with the August issue of the Conservation Update when Hurricane Laura barreled into the southwest coast of our state. No one really knew what would unfold but, we all knew at a category four, it was serious. As I'm writing this, 14 days later, the hardest hit areas of our state are working to remove trees and debris, repair damage to homes, and help fellow producers, neighbors and friends get back to business.

Please know that NRCS and our sister USDA agencies are poised and ready to assist you after this historic storm. For NRCS the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program is designed to assist local governments/communities after natural disaster strikes. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) has many programs designed to help you recover after storms, like Laura.

Our next issue of the Conservation Update will be dedicated to covering the aftermath of Hurricane Laura. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me, or your local NRCS field office for information. If there is one thing I've learned since my time in Louisiana, it is that you are strong and resilient, we will get through this time together!

In this issue of the Conservation Update we meet Mr. Marty Bienvenu from Opelousas, Louisiana. Mr. Marty a self-proclaimed avid hunter and fisherman and conservationist at heart, and he has seen first-hand the improvements that the Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) program has made on his land. There are multiple benefits to enrolling in WRE and enhancing wildlife habitat is just one. But, for Mr. Marty it is one of the main reasons. It reminds me of a quote by former President and enthusiastic conservationist, Theodore Roosevelt when he said, "The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased; and not impaired in value." I absolutely agree!

As always, my door is open to you, our partners and customers. Please feel free to call or e-mail me with any questions or concerns. **Don't forget that registration for the WRE sign-up period ends on September 25th be sure to reach out to a local NRCS Field Office to learn more.**

Chad Kacir  
State Conservationist



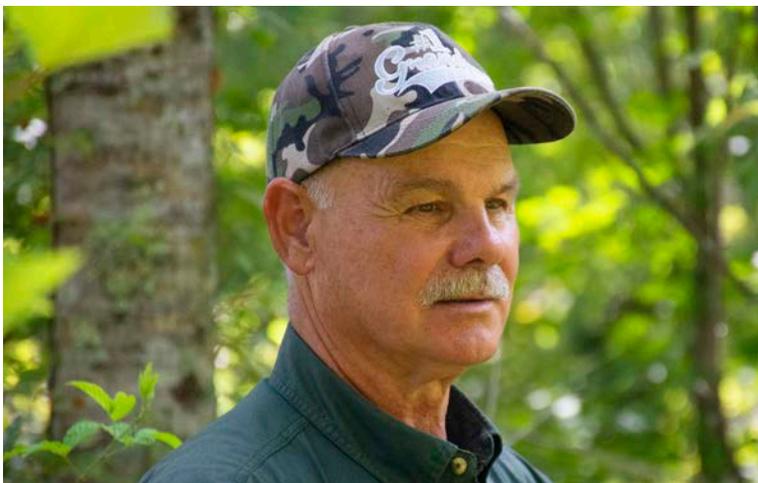
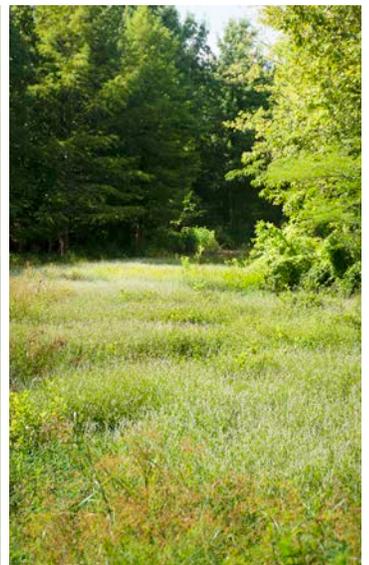
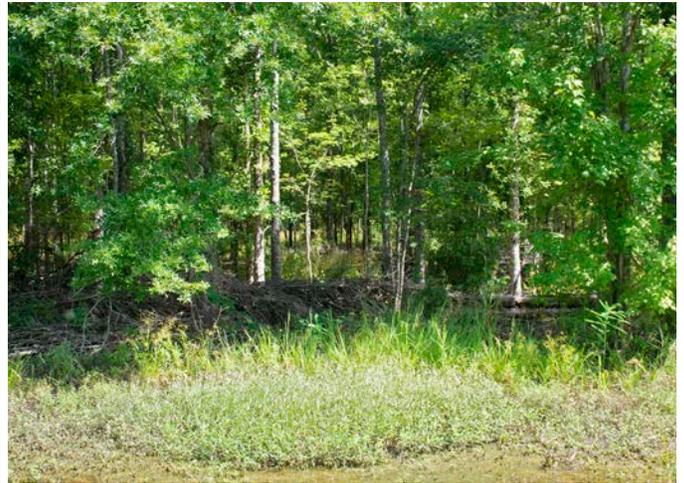
### USDA Service Centers are Open for Business by Phone Appointment Only

*Program Delivery Continues while taking Safety Measures Related to Coronavirus*

USDA is open for business. Our team is continuing to provide the best customer service we can while also prioritizing the health of our employees, the health of our customers, and the health of our partners. USDA's Service Centers are open in Louisiana by phone appointment only. While our program delivery staff will continue to come into to the office, they will be working with our customers by phone, by email, and using other online tools whenever possible.

To learn more about USDA programs and the Department's response to the Coronavirus visit [farmers.gov/coronavirus](https://farmers.gov/coronavirus)

# Listening to the Land



---

Come close and listen... can you hear the call? Could it be the sound of a gentle breeze flowing through the leaves on the trees or perhaps the faint song of birds flying overhead? To hear the call, you must be attuned to the land, aware that there is knowledge it wants to share.

A call can be heard in Palmetto, Louisiana, just a stone's throw from I-49 (as the crow flies); that is where you will find Marty Bienvenu's 773-acre property. When Marty purchased this land over 11 years ago, it was already enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), now known as the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) - Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as a perpetual easement. The fact that the land was already enrolled in WRE was one of the greatest selling points for Marty.

The beauty of this land was appealing, but also, the idea of conserving and managing the land to optimize wildlife habitat was a huge incentive for Marty. "I'm an avid outdoorsman, primarily a deer hunter, but I also love hunting ducks, too," explained Marty. In fact, Marty's entire family loves to hunt and fish, making this hidden gem in St. Landry Parish a perfect fit for his entire family.

Why would enrolling land a permanent WRE be a major selling point? Dustin Farmer, Easement Program Specialist with NRCS explains, "This program is designed to restore and protect wetlands through voluntary enrollment by private landowners and the purchase of a conservation easement." Farmer goes on to say that WRE enrollment targets marginal, low producing agricultural lands that were previously converted or degraded wetlands and restores them to their historic state. "There are many eligible lands throughout Louisiana, where farmers are struggling to farm frequently flooded and previously converted wetland areas." Farmer continues, "There are multiple benefits for private landowners to enroll in WRE including enhancing and protecting critical habitat for wildlife (including threatened and endangered species), improving water quality, reducing flooding, re-charging groundwater and providing opportunities for recreational and educational activities, while retaining private ownership and control of access."

On Marty's land, since the WRE trees were planted (a combination of various oaks, green ash and cypress), they grew so well that eventually the canopy started to shade out the understory. Marty recalls, "I reached out to the St. Landry Soil and Water Conservation District and Opelousas NRCS Field Office and asked if there was anything available for me to enhance the habitat."

The answer was a resounding, yes! Through the WRE program, with the help of the NRCS easement team, Marty worked with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) foresters and came up with a management plan that identified areas to thin timber. The enhancements made through WRE opened the forested area to greater biodiversity. Marty is quick to point out, "After the thinning I could see sunlight reaching the forest floor. That open area leads to more abundant wildlife and also healthier, stronger trees."

"NRCS has always considered the WRE program as a partnership." Farmer said. "A partnership between NRCS and a host of other conservation agencies. Farmer continues, "Through the WRE

program, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to restore the wetland habitat, but we also encourage landowners to manage and enhance the easement through activities that are compatible with the wetland functions and authorized by NRCS." Although a wetland can be left alone to provide quality habitat, management and enhancements often expand and help to maximize habitat diversity and benefits for wetland dependent wildlife species. "With assistance from NRCS and our conservation partners, the landowner can have the ingredients for a great WRE," Farmer said. "It takes a thoughtful and committed landowner, like Marty, to manage a property this successful," smiled Farmer.

Marty has noticed the improvements, "The capacity of the land to hold wildlife has grown and expanded he explained, "When I purchased the land, I bought it for recreational purposes, to enjoy time outdoors with my family," recalls Marty. In fact, this past year Marty's oldest granddaughter shot her first deer and almost every weekend you can find Marty's mom (85 years old) and his dad (86 years old) hunting and fishing right along side him. "It makes me feel good to know that after I'm gone, this land will be here for my children and grandchildren to enjoy and I know they will continue to keep it maintained," said Marty.

"I've learned so much from Dustin, the WRE team and the local NRCS field office, explained Marty. "The technical assistance I've received, teaching me about the importance of diversity on a landscape and working with me along the way, I can't say enough good about the WRE program and all of the folks with NRCS." Marty pauses and smiles big, "I tell all my hunting buddies, they need to check out WRE!"

Farmer agrees "I would encourage anyone who has property that might qualify for this program to apply." Landowners who are enrolled into WRE retain five rights: Fee title ownership, control of public access (NRCS also has access to perform easement monitoring and restoration), underdeveloped recreational uses, quiet enjoyment and subsurface minerals.

Currently there are three options for WRE: Permanent easement where the landowner receives 100 percent of the easement rate and NRCS pays for 100 percent of the restoration cost; a 30-year easement where the landowner receives 75 percent of the easement rate and the landowner must pay for 25 percent of the restoration cost; and a 30-year contract for Native American tribal lands.

Louisiana leads the nation with over 320,000 acres enrolled in WRE on over 1,000 easements located across the state. "Marty is a part of that success," explained Dustin. The public benefits of the WRE program to residents of Louisiana are all around us; including improved water quality, flood water attenuation and restoration of habitat for many threatened and endangered species." Farmer proudly beams, "Part of the success attributed to the delisting of the Louisiana Black Bear, is voluntary enrollment in WRE by private landowners to restore critical habitat and establish forested corridors."

Landowners are encouraged to apply for WRE before September 25, 2020, to be considered for the first round of applications in 2021.

# Outreach Corner

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, Project Specialist, Rapides SWCD

For the second time this year, Minden Farm & Garden in Minden, Louisiana, was host to an Outreach Meeting coordinated by Trailblazer RC&D. The focus of the meeting was on Feral Hogs, however Andrea Bridgewater, NRCS District Conservationist, gave a presentation on the technical and financial assistance that is available to individuals from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).



Jeff Sibley with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries spoke briefly and passed out a press release regarding the

new State Regulation on Nighttime Take of Outlaw Quadrupeds, Nutria and Beavers. The new law goes into effect on August 1, 2020. Jeff's presentation was pertinent to the meeting because the new law that he quoted stated that a properly licensed Louisiana and non-resident hunters may take outlaw quadrupeds (feral hogs, coyotes and armadillos), nutria and beaver at night on private property the entire year with the landowner's permission.

Invited by Trailblazer RC&D, Kyle Towns with Circle T Trailers gave a presentation on feral hog control. In his presentation he showed some photos of damages that can occur from feral hogs. Kyle said that a feral hog is one of the smartest animals and that they never forget. Because of the hog's rapid rate of reproduction, 77% of the hog population would have to be trapped on an annual basis in order to put a dent in the population. This high percentage is due to the female feral hogs' ability to produce multiple litters of piglets each year.

Circle T Trailers gave a demonstration of the Boar Buster Hog Trap during the workshop. The Boar Buster is a remote-controlled aerial trap. The representative demonstrating the trap stated that hogs

do not have an aerial predator, so they do not look up. According to the company, the Boar Buster system's design enables feral hogs to enter the trap from any direction without crossing a trap threshold or navigating around the perimeter panel associated with traditional corral traps. This design reduces, if not eliminates, an animal's trap-shy behavior commonly found with traditional traps. Company research has found that the aerial system has demonstrated an ability to capture 88% of the identifiable hog population in a given area compared to a capture rate of approximately 49% for conventional trapping methods. A camera system and the use of a smartphone or computer deploys the trap with a touch of a button.



# National NRCS News

NRCS Chief Matthew Lohr stepped down from his role as Chief effective on August 15, 2020. As you know, Chief Lohr was a full time farmer before his appointment as Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. When he took the role as Chief, his part-time farm employee stepped in to manage the farm full-time. After two years, his manager is retiring and moving out of the area. Unfortunately, the Chief was unable to find a replacement, and he has made the difficult decision to leave a job that he described as an "opportunity of a lifetime" and return back to his farm in Broadway, Virginia.

The Chief joined NRCS in December 2018. Under his leadership, NRCS made significant progress on:

- Implementing the 2018 Farm Bill, from program rules to urban agriculture.
- Streamlining processes and program delivery to best serve our customers, and better understand customers' needs.
- Increasing internal mentoring, training opportunities, and experiences that collectively involve staff, customers and partners, including the new Conservation Agricultural Mentoring Program.
- Expanding focused outreach efforts to increase agency awareness among populations of young, beginning, small, veteran and historically underserved farmers and ranchers.
- Elevating the importance of soil health to further enhance and promote the delivery of soil health

principles to staff, customers and partners.

NRCS Associate Chief Kevin Norton will serve as Acting Chief. Prior to being selected as the Associate Chief, Kevin spent 12 years in Louisiana as the State Conservationist.



# Employee Update



Madalyn Cheatwood was recently hired as the Soil Conservationist in the Ruston Field Office. Madalyn graduated from Northwestern State University with a Bachelor of Science in Resource Management, a Minor in Biology, and concentration in Environmental Science. She spent three years as a Pathways student before transitioning to her new full-time role.



Ian David was recently hired as the Soil Conservationist in the Ville Platte Field Office. He has a Bachelor of Science in Natural Resources Conservation Management and a Master's in Environmental and Chemical Sciences from McNeese State University. Prior to coming to work for NRCS, Ian spent four years with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality.



Ryan David was recently hired as the Soil Conservationist in the Amite Field Office. Ryan is originally from Plaquemine, Louisiana, and earned a Bachelor of Science in Forest Management from Louisiana State University. Prior to coming to work at NRCS, he spent 14 years at the U.S. Forest Service as a Quality Assurance Forester.



Bridget Duba was recently hired as the Soil Conservation Technician in the Addis Field Office. She moved to Louisiana following graduation from the University of Kentucky with a Bachelor of Science in Animal Sciences and Wildlife Biology and Management. Bridget grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan loving all aspects of the outdoors. She is very excited to have the opportunity to work on conservation projects in the field.



Bevel Parker was recently hired as the Soil Conservationist in the Jonesville Field Office. Bevel is a recent graduate of Louisiana Tech University with a Bachelor of Science in AgBusiness with a Plant Science Concentration. Bevel grew up in Belcher, Louisiana where he spent most of his time on the farm working and learning about row crop production, which ultimately led him to pursue a career in agriculture.



Sophia Trafford was recently hired as the Soil Conservationist in the Rayville Field Office. She graduated from Louisiana Tech University in 2018 with a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science with a concentration in Equine Science. She is excited to work with agricultural producers and enjoys learning new things every day.



Sarah Trichel was recently selected as the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs in Alexandria, Louisiana. Sarah was raised on a small farm in Natchitoches Parish and from a young age she was immersed in various aspects of agriculture, from cattle and crops to forestry. Sarah was introduced to the NRCS as an Earth Team Volunteer, which gave her the opportunity to see firsthand the rewarding work of the agency. Sarah graduated from Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana with a B.S. in Biology with emphasis in Natural Science. While attending college, Sarah worked as a student intern for 2 years and after graduating, she became a Soil Conservationist in the Lake Charles Field Office. Sarah continued to serve as a Soil Conservationist in various field offices across the state of Louisiana. Sarah has served as the District Conservationist (DC) in the Mansfield Field Office and the Minden Field Office before joining the State Programs Staff in 2017. She then spent 3 years as the State Program Specialist focusing on the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

## New Video Series

Earlier this year, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) unveiled a new video series, Conservation at Work, which consists of short videos that highlight 30 common conservation practices.

Housed on YouTube and featured on farmers.gov, the series was designed with the concept of "show, don't tell." These videos shine the spotlight on

farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners from across the country who tell us their conservation stories, and how practices are helping them protect and improve resources and save time and money.

"By sharing the conservation successes of our customers, we hope the videos will help educate our customers and the general public and motivate more farmers and landowners to consider conservation," said Chad Kacir, State Conservationist

for NRCS in Louisiana. Current videos highlight practices such as high tunnels, micro irrigation, waste storage, nutrient management, rotational grazing, cover crops, wetland restoration and many others.



## Farmers.gov New Features

Farmers.gov has new conservation features that enable you to:

- login to view, download and e-sign documents
- request conservation assistance
- view technical references and submit questions
- access information on current and past conservation practices
- view detailed information on all previous and ongoing contracts, including the amount of planned and received cost-share assistance

These conservation features join several others already available through the authenticated farmers.gov portal. NRCS has several how-to videos which walk you through how to use these features and can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4J8Pxp0rpGZ-GWjObKFQ6-ur121RKiGC>.



Visit our web site at:  
[www.la.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.la.nrcs.usda.gov)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against its customers. If you believe you experienced discrimination when obtaining services from USDA, participating in a USDA program, or participating in a program that receives financial assistance from USDA, you may file a complaint with USDA. Information about how to file a discrimination complaint is available from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. USDA prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex (including gender identity and expression), marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) To file a complaint of discrimination, complete, sign, and mail a program discrimination complaint form, available at any USDA office location or online at [www.ascr.usda.gov](http://www.ascr.usda.gov), or write to: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-9410. Or call toll free at (866) 632-9992 (voice) to obtain additional information, the appropriate office or to request documents. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay service at (800) 877-8339 or (800) 845-6136 (in Spanish). USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.