



United States Department of Agriculture

Louisiana Conservation Update

May 2021

Recovery in the Lower 9th Ward

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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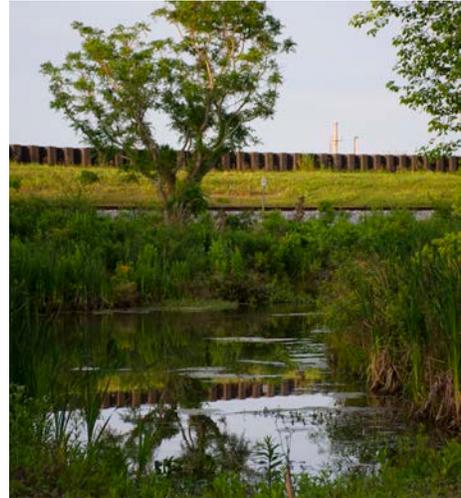
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On the Cover



Learn more about how Sankofa Community Development Corporation is a key player in the recovery in the Lower Ninth Ward with the assistance of NRCS on pages 4 and 5.

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

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Notes from the State Conservationist

As we approach Memorial Day and the unofficial “first day” of summer, I’m reminded of how far we’ve come, as a state, over the past year. I give ultimate credit for our successes to the hard work and determination of Louisiana NRCS employees and the grit and resilience of Louisiana producers who they serve. From large commodity crop operations to beginning farmers and those working in urban settings, collectively, we have all overcome obstacles during the past several months.

From last summer’s hurricanes and tropical storms, to the snow and ice destruction we experienced in February, not to mention a world-wide pandemic; our 44 offices have worked hard and continued to provide customer service together with our agency’s well-known and regarded technical expertise. My hope is soon we will be able to gather and meet like we’ve done in the past with field days, tours, conferences, and other outreach events.



Speaking of outreach, in this issue of the Conservation Update, we visit New Orleans and the Sankofa Community Development Corporation (CDC). Sankofa has been a vital partner with NRCS for several years. They’ve worked to provide fresh produce to the residents of the lower Ninth Ward through a farmer’s market, community gardens and constructed high tunnels to extend their growing season. In addition to providing fresh produce, over the years, Sankofa has branched out and offered educational classes for children and adults on healthy eating and food preparation. The newest outreach effort for Sankofa is the development of a 42-acre baldcypress-water tupelo wetland habitat that provides wetland education and, also, a walking trail in the heart of an urban New Orleans setting. The next time you visit New Orleans, be sure to plan a stop by the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail, you won’t be disappointed.

Also, in this issue, we highlight the outreach work of one of our District Conservationists in north Louisiana, Glenn Austin. Working with the Central Louisiana Technical Community College as a guest lecturer, Glenn spent time in the field with students, sharing information about forestry and the process of working with landowners and guiding students through the transition from student to an employee. Like Glenn, all of our employees have expansive technical knowledge to share with the next generation of conservationists. Reach out to your local NRCS field office to learn more about outreach and programs for students and landowners alike!

Chad Kacir
State Conservationist

The following vacancies are currently on usajobs.gov and are open to the public!

Civil/Agricultural Engineer (3 vacancies)

Open & Closing Date: 5/17/2021 to 7/15/2021
Salary: \$39,540 to \$73,731
Pay Scale & grade: GS-5 - 9
Series: GS-0810/0890
Appointment Type: Permanent
Work Schedule: Full-Time
Announcement Number: NRCS-21-11087724-DHA-LA-JB
Location: Abbeville, Alexandria, Ruston

Rangeland Management Specialist (1 vacancy)

Open & Closing Date: 5/17/2021 to 7/15/2021
Salary: \$35,265 to \$69,462
Pay scale & grade: GS-5/7/9
Series: GS-0454
Appointment Type: Permanent
Work Schedule: Full-Time
Announcement Number: NRCS-21-11090499-DHA-LA-JB
Location: Ruston

Soil Scientist (1 vacancy)

Open & Closing Date: 5/17/2021 to 7/15/2021
Salary: \$35,265 to \$69,462
Pay scale & grade: GS-5/7/9
Series: GS-0470
Appointment Type: Permanent
Work Schedule: Full-Time
Announcement Number: NRCS-21-11089250-DHA-LA-SC
Location: Opelousas

 <https://www.youtube.com/user/LouisianaNRCS>

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www.la.nrcs.usda.gov



Recovery in the Lower Ninth Ward

Located just five short miles from downtown, the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans was constructed on a remnant Mississippi River Delta cypress swamp, according to restorethebayou.org. During Hurricane Katrina, this area of the city gained national notoriety when it experienced intense flooding that leveled homes and sent life-long residents scrambling for dry ground and, in some cases, a new zip code, sometimes states away from the only place they had ever known.

Thanks in part to groups like the Sankofa Community Development Corporation (CDC), this area of New Orleans is recovering. Housing is being constructed where there were only bare slabs, residents are once again living in the area, there is better access to fresh food, and educational and recreational opportunities like the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail are becoming available.

According to their website, Sankofa CDC's first project was a monthly marketplace for local growers, musicians, chefs, merchants and artists. In 2010, that project transitioned into a weekly farmers market. Labeled as a food desert by USDA, having a farmer's market in the area provided residents with an opportunity to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables within walking distance, which was something they had not had access to before. A food desert is a geographic area where access to affordable, healthy food options is limited or nonexistent because grocery stores are too far away.

In 2012, they started a mobile market to further increase access to fresh foods for community members, more specifically senior citizens. In 2014, Sankofa CDC won the **Lots of Progress** contest and obtained seeding funds and land to open the Fresh Stop Market, which is where the partnership with NRCS first began.

With funding for the Fresh Stop Market provided by the USDA Office of the Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights, NRCS entered into an agreement with Sankofa to establish a green market on the corner of Forstall and St. Claude Avenue. The partnership began with a connection made between Rashida Ferdinand, Founder and Executive Director for Sankofa Community Development Corporation and Dr. Joe Leonard, former Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at USDA. Sankofa's Fresh Stop Market sells fresh fruits and vegetables to area residents and provides educational opportunities the value of fresh produce for a healthy lifestyle.

Ferdinand is the driving force behind recovery and improvement projects for the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward. Dexter Sapp, former NRCS StrikeForce Coordinator and current Rapides Soil and Water Conservation District Program Specialist stated, "From the first time I met Rashida, I knew she was a force to be reckoned with. The way she can garner support from all walks of life for projects to improve the lives of the citizens of the Lower Ninth Ward is remarkable."

NRCS then entered into a second agreement with Sankofa CDC to install a seasonal high tunnel on a vacant lot where houses stood prior to Hurricane Katrina. Sankofa was also able to receive financial assistance from NRCS through the NRCS New Orleans High Tunnel Initiative to install a second high tunnel. Seasonal high tunnels extend the growing season for fruits and vegetables. Sankofa CDC's high tunnels are used for educational opportunities for area groups to learn more about agriculture and where food comes from, as well as learn gardening skills to use in their own yard like composting, pollination, and healthy soils. Sankofa hosted 12 gardening workshops with a

goal of targeting 120 school age children to visit and learn at the gardens. Ferdinand's mother, Dr. Daphne Ferdinand, is a LSU Certified Advanced Master Gardener and was very active in this activity. Sankofa CDC also hosted cooking classes after harvest to show community members how to properly prepare fresh vegetables for consumption.

The most recent amended outreach agreement helped Sankofa CDC and other partners including Wetland Resources LLC, Comite Resources LLC, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans, National Park Service - Rivers, Trails and Conservation Program, Entergy Services LLC and the City of New Orleans to plan and construct the Wetland Park and Nature Trail.

The ecological plans for the project were developed in consultation with chief scientists, Dr. Gary Shaffer and Dr. John Day to restore 42 acres of a deteriorated natural area adjacent to the Bayou Bienvenue Triangle into a baldcypress - water tupelo wetland habitat, complete with walking trails and plenty of native vegetation. So far, 2,200 invasive tallow trees have been removed and replaced with 500 native trees including baldcypress, water tupelo, sweetbay magnolia and red mulberry. In addition, 400 blue irises have been planted along with other native vegetation providing shelter and food for various wildlife species, including pollinators. They have already identified 10 different bat species within the park and 152 species of birds.

Ferdinand adds, "The Wetland Park is a place of cultural memory of health, wellness, recreation and study for past generations. We have restored this space to its natural environment and created an opportunity to develop it into a place of beauty."

The Wetland Park provides educational opportunities and exposure to nature for area students, as well as the area residents. It also provides these urban residents with access to green space so that they can increase physical activity by utilizing the walking trails, which helps improve both mental and physical health.

In addition, the Wetland Park creates economic benefits including flood damage reduction. Wetland areas help increase hurricane protection and floodwater mitigation, by storing storm water and reducing wind damage. According to Ferdinand, the Wetland Park can store up to 8-million gallons of water, changing a 5.37-inch rain event into a 1.58-inch event. This is monumental in an area of the state that sits right at or below sea-level and uses a system of pumps to keep the city dry.

"NRCS has provided us with significant resources to help us envision and implement projects to support our natural environment and highlight ecological resources to educate and sustain our land," stated Ferdinand. "Dexter Sapp has been wonderful to work with over the years. He has proven to be a solid supporter of our work - kind, caring, experienced, resourceful and he truly believes in our mission."

With community support and partnerships with outside entities, like the one with NRCS, Sankofa has expanded their operation and has even bigger plans for the future.

Ferdinand proudly explains, "Our plans are to develop a model for green infrastructure projects in one's neighborhood - and other health-centered development projects. We hope that through our work, the Lower Ninth Ward is developed and sustained as a thriving neighborhood with equitable and just resources for all to live."

Outreach Corner

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, Rapides SWCD

For retired (retired in 2002 after a 35-year stint with the agency) NRCS District Conservationist Don Parkman and his wife Ancie Parkman, the love for Hummingbirds has evolved into a world of enjoyment. Through an Outreach Agreement that NRCS has with Trailblazer RC&D, Trailblazer has been sponsoring a series of "All About Hummingbirds" Workshops in Claiborne, Union, and Lincoln Parishes. The featured speaker for these events has been Ancie Parkman. Hummingbirds play a key role in pollination and hummingbirds pollinate individual flowers, flowering shrubs, and blooming trees in different ways.



The Parkman's home in Lincoln Parish is a hummingbird haven. When asked if the love of hummingbirds was something that she took up as a hobby, Ancie stated that, "I just love to watch them." Trailblazer's CEO Ellzey Simmons recognizes the emphasis that NRCS places on pollinators and so he chose to conduct hummingbird and pollinator workshops and who better to talk hummingbirds but Ancie Parkman.

The Parkman duo make their own nectar for the numerous hummingbird feeders that they have at their home. Their homebrew recipe consists of 1 cup of sugar to 4 cups of boiling

water. They change out their nectar every three days. However, during peak summer seasons when the hummingbirds are on a feeding frenzy, they have had to fill their feeders 3 times per day. Ancie states that she likes to place her feeders in a shady spot and far enough apart to keep the birds from fighting.

During Ancie's presentations she has shared some of the following facts about hummingbirds:

- They like bright colors and can spot a feeder from $\frac{3}{4}$ miles away.
- They can fly backwards.
- They eat 50 times per day.
- While the hummingbird family has more than 330 species, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird is Louisiana's only breeding species.
- Hummingbirds usually show up in Louisiana around the middle of March from their wintering grounds in southern Mexico and Central America.
- A hummingbird egg is about the size of a pea.
- They do not flap their wings but instead rotate them in a figure 8 up to 55 times per second.
- Hummingbirds also eat small insects, larvae, insect eggs and spiders

At the Hummingbird workshops Don has shared a couple of Hummingbird stories with the group. His favorite story is when he was working in Covington, Louisiana, with the Rolling Hills Ministry. Where he was working, a hummingbird had gotten trapped under a ceiling and the bird eventually collapsed from sheer exhaustion. Don, who was drinking some Gatorade at the time, picked up the distressed hummingbird, brought it outside, gave it a sip of Gatorade, and the bird regained consciousness and flew on its merry way. Don has also liberated a distressed hummingbird whose beak was encased by a beetle.

For those SCS/NRCS retirees that would like to reach out to the Hummingbird whisperer (Ellzey Simmons words) Don Parkman, Don wants you to know that you can reach him at 318-497-0606.

Copies of "Louisiana Hummingbirds" produced by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program can be obtained by e-mailing ceo@trailblazer.org.

Story from the Field

NRCS: Investing in the Future of Conservation

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) believes in giving back to local communities. All 44 local USDA-NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) offices invest in their communities by reaching out to schools, traditional colleges and universities, and technical colleges. Institutions of higher education play an integral role in preparing the next generation of land managers and conservationists.

The ancient proverb, "Give a man a fish, and he eats for one day. Teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime," is not just a pithy adage. This belief runs deep for Glenn Austin, District Conservationist for the NRCS in Natchitoches, Louisiana. "Getting students out in the field provides them detailed training on what NRCS does in forestry related conservation." He continues, "It also gives them the opportunity to discuss future careers with NRCS staff and it provides us an opportunity to discuss the NRCS Earth Team volunteer program."



Earth Team is the official NRCS volunteer organization that gives students, and others, the opportunity to work alongside NRCS employees in a wide variety of work, including field and technical work. Although 2020 proved to be a difficult year recruiting volunteers to work with NRCS employees, it appears that 2021 will allow for more outside field work volunteerism.

Glenn believes working with schools like the Central Louisiana Technical Community College (CLTCC) will give those students countless opportunities to volunteer with Earth Team and assist NRCS employees with technical "hands-on" field work. This "hands-on" experience provides invaluable, practical, on-the-job technical training and general work experience.

Jordan Franks, Forestry Technology Instructor, for the Winnfield CLTCC campus completely agrees with Glenn. Jordan explains the important role of practical field tours with local NRCS employees participating as guest lecturers for classes. "During the recent

field tour with Glenn, students learned the responsibilities of conservation technicians and the important role they play in working with landowners and conserving natural resources."



Jordan explained further, "By relaying the information of NRCS' reforestation objectives during class, students can then apply their knowledge during the field tour." The field tour gave students the opportunity to discuss seedling counts, seedling survival counts, and how many seedlings are typically planted for different species such as longleaf pine, loblolly pine and shortleaf pine. "We learned how NRCS assists private landowners in managing their property to meet their objectives by using different silvicultural management strategies," said Jordan.

Glenn sums up the importance of NRCS participating with local schools, "It is a recruitment tool for NRCS just like working a career fair. We are making the Technical College staff and students aware of the jobs available at NRCS. We're also making them aware, as future natural resource professionals in the forestry field, of what programs NRCS offers to private landowners," explained Glenn.

Both Jordan and Glenn believe the practical knowledge and experience the students take away from field tours will benefit them as they pursue various careers in forestry and other conservation work with landowners. Much like the ancient saying of teaching a man to fish, the concepts students learn will contribute to their success for a lifetime.

Contact your local NRCS and SWCD office to learn how NRCS technical staff can participate with schools and institutions of higher education.

Upcoming Events

June 2 -4, 2021 State of the Coast Conference

The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana is hosting the biennial "State of the Coast" (SOC) conference virtually on June 2 - 4, 2021. SOC is the largest statewide conference of its kind, providing an interdisciplinary forum to exchange timely and relevant information on the dynamic conditions of Louisiana's coastal communities, environment and economy. For more information, or to register, visit <https://www.stateofthecoast.org/>.

June 24, 2021 Implementation and Demonstration of Best Management Practices on Model Farms in Louisiana

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting "Implementation and Demonstration of Best Management Practices on Model Farms in Louisiana" workshop on June 24, 2021, at 183 Louisiana Highway 898 in Newellton, Louisiana beginning at 8:30 am. Along with the presentation of the Outstanding Master Farmer Award, attendees will have the opportunity to participate in interactive hands-on field tours and in-depth demonstrations of best management practices. This is an opportunity for Phase 2 and CEC for the Louisiana Master Farmer Program.

June 24, 2021 Livestock Field Day

Trailblazer RC&D is hosting a Livestock Field Day on June 24, 2021, at the Roy McIntyre Farm located at 1679 Highway 858 in Delhi, Louisiana from 5:00 pm to 7:30 pm. Topics to be covered include hay testing and quality, taming the terrible 2s, forage management, along with technical and financial opportunities. Please pre-register at 318-435-9424, ext. 3.

June 29, 2021 Louisiana Master Farmer Program Phase 1 Training

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting Phase 1 Training for the Louisiana Master Farmer Program on June 29, 2021, at the LSU AgCenter Rice Research State in Rayne, Louisiana, from 9:00 am - 3:00 pm. For more information, or to register contact Donna Gentry at 318-613-9278.

June 30, 2021 Rice Research Station Field Day

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting the H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station Field Day on June 30, 2021, from 7:00 am - 12:30 pm at the H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station located at 1373 Caffey Road in Rayne, Louisiana. For more information, contact Dr. Dustin Harrell or Dr. Kurt Guidry at 337-788-7531.

New Employees



Adam Munoz was recently hired as a Rangeland Management Specialist in the Jennings Field Office. Adam graduated from Texas A&M with a degree in Rangeland Ecology and Management. Prior to working for NRCS, Adam spent time in game and cattle ranch management and commercial project management.



Courtney Wyatt was recently hired as the Soil Conservationist in the Natchitoches Field Office. She graduated from Louisiana Tech University with a degree in Forestry with a concentration in Wildlife Management. After graduation, she interned as a bear technician with LDWF before becoming a WRE Technician with the Natchitoches SWCD.



Breese Barnes was recently hired as a Civil Engineer on the Water Resources Planning Staff at the Alexandria State Office. Breese graduated from Oregon State University with a degree in Ecological Engineering. Prior to working for NRCS, he interned at Quantum Spatial, where he used GIS data to track land-use change and predict future water demands.



Kyle Cappotto was recently hired as a Civil Engineer on the Water Resources Planning Staff at the Alexandria State Office. Kyle graduated from the University of Connecticut with a degree in Environmental Engineering. Prior to working for NRCS, Kyle worked for the Geauga County Water Resources Department in Ohio.

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