

NRCS State Technical Committee
9:30am Wednesday, May 15, 2024
UACES State Office, Little Rock, AR

Agenda attached

Members present: (Sign In sheets attached)

Zoom Members: (provide by Rita Watson after the meeting)

Welcome and Introductions – Mike Sullivan, State Conservationist

- Spoke about successes of the ACP
- Recognized the hard work of the staff
- Announced his retirement June 28, 2024
- Ask the group to continue to provide input on resource concerns

Grassland Subcommittee – Jeremy Huff (slides attached)

- Provided an update on successes
- Technical documents were discussed
- 1. Technical Documents
 - Fence specifications with graphics developed
 - Demonstrated the graphics of fencing
 - Should improve our implementation rate and reduce problems
- 2. Technical Training
 - Spring 2023 – 3 weeks of training
 - Hope, Heber Springs, etc. site of training
 - Pasture Ecology 1.0, 2.0 and Working Effectively with Producers
 - Showed photos of trainings
- 3. Paul Shepherd, Drew County, brought the following concern:
 - Would like to see a payment scenario for 466 land smoothing for water use efficiency for pastures that have been damaged due to feral hog and need to be addressed. Jeremy will review the practice with Engineering staff to determine its applicability in pasture settings.

Water Quality – Mary Clayton (slides attached)

- National Water Quality Initiative Update
 - Lower Bayou Bartholemew – originally targeting sediment but now looks at water quality
 - Boone County & Marion County– NWQI requesting a project
 - Sponsors – Boone County Conservation District, Farm Service Agency, Farm Bureau, Farm Credit Service, Boone County Cattlemen’s Association.
 - ***Lower Bull Shoals Lake NWQI was recommended as a Planning Phase project in FY25.***
- Source Water Protection
 - High Priority Practices: 391, 646, 420, 449-only scenario 10, 643, 390, 441
 - Stormwater Runoffs
 - *Recommended that rain gardens be added to EQIP practices – a meeting will be held to discuss more*

Soil Health Subcommittee – Jeremy Huff for Keith Scoggins

- Update to the conservation catalog underway
- Fall Soil Conference at ASU being planned
- Field Day at Adam Chappell’s farm – May 29th

Alternative Crops Subcommittee – Amanda Mathis for Troyce Barnett

- Committee discussed concerns over metal gauge requirements for hoop house standard/specification. More dialog is needed to prepare a recommendation.

Water Quantity Subcommittee – Rodney Wright (slides attached)

- Reports were given by the conservation partners
 - Mike Hamilton – Irrigation
 - Mike Daniels – Discovery Farms
 - Michele Reba – ARS/USGS AGWI Report
 - UA – Most Crop per Drop - Dr. Chris Henry
 - Arkansas Tax Credits- Blake Forrest
 - Bayou Meto Irrigation Project – Ed Swaim
 - USA Rice Climate Smart Project- Josh Hankins
 - Arkansas Water Plan Update – Ryan Benefield
- Reviewed the NRCS EQIP Guide
 - Code 464
 - Code 462

- Pump automation scenarios
- Code 449 – Scenario 10 added irrigation management for rice irrigation AW&D and furrow irrigated rice or row rice
- Dr. Henry talked about the Tailwater Recovery System
 - Contract as CSAF if row rice
 - 2024 Applications to prepare a design and checkout guide
- AGWI Tier/Ranking Update
 - Tiers have been removed from ranking
- High Priority Practices
 - Subcommittee recommends submitting the same list for FY25 as posed for FY24
 - Same practices for 2025
- Question and discussion on metrics used to gauge the water usage especially in the critical ground water area via flow meters

Energy Subcommittee – Britt Hill

Insulation payment was discussed due to fire retardant and the need to increase the rate, but the cost of the insulation has dropped so there is actually a need to reduce the payment rate. Code 672

- It is a big energy saving so further information needs to be determined before a reduction is decided.
- Number of TSPs available is decreasing especially for audits from diesel to electric conversions.

Wildlife Subcommittee – Canton Ford (slides attached)

- FY24 Fund Allocations presented compared to 2023 allocations
- Bobwhite initiative – expand to 65 counties but primarily in the western side of the state
- Working Lands for Wildlife priority areas
- WLFW – Aquatic Connectivity Initiative Proposed (see map)
 - Presented to HQ with a budget of \$1.5 million
 - No response at this time
 - Improve delivery of floodplain, riparian, streambank, and instream channel restoration efforts in Arkansas
- Code 420 – Wildlife Habitat Planting Job Sheets
 - FY25 Adoption

- Practice specification
- Implementation Requirements
- Operation and Maintenance
- Need to create seed mix requirements for scenarios
- Forest Stand Improvement
 - Need more vendors in north Arkansas

Forestry Subcommittee – Doug Akin (slides attached)

- North Arkansas Conservation Delivery Network (potential new CDN)
- Open Pine RCPP Report (Bill Bartush)
- Contract info (5 year data)
- Update on Code 612 spacing discussion
 - *Add language to the Code 612 Tree/Shrub Establishment specification*
 - *New language Shrub and tree planning densities for wildlife purposes are highly variable and will be planned to meet landowner objectives. If planning for below 436 pine per acre, plans should have approval.*
 - *Code 666 – Forest Stand Improvement Provides an opportunity to move trees with low value and options*
 - New form displayed.

Small Farm and Urban Conservation – Katy Brantley (slides attached)

- 27 attended
- High Priority Practice Recommendation
 - Micro irrigation
 - Pest Management
 - Mulching
 - Cover Crops
 - Nutrient Management
 - Composting
 - High tunnel
- Shrubs and Small Trees
 - Support discussing this list with Baucum Nurse3ry for them to consider growing due to lack of local availability
 - Suggestion for edible bundle which would include Paw Paw, blueberry, etc.
- Raised Beds

- Discussion about how elevated beds enable physically challenged producers to use high tunnels. There was a concern that having to submit a variance to request elevated beds could result in discrimination
 - There was a suggestion to recommend a blanket allowance
 - Need to explore other options
- Question and Discussion on definition of “urban conservation” modifier- is being used for residential, industrial, transportation, etc.
 - More discussion will be needed to ensure all areas are covered regardless of location and size
 - Dr. King, Arkansas Land and Farm, asked if the size of the farm could be a potential issue or reduce accessibility
 - NRCS is adding additional staff for the new Urban County Committee which will be in Pulaski County, AR
 - 17 Urban County Committee in first round and second round will include 12 new county committees
 - Producer needs a farm and tract number for eligibility
 - USDA-NRCS has a national urban office but will be tied to FSA for programing, location, etc.
- Question was asked about time frame for hydroponics to be included as a practice, etc.
 - Technical standards have to be developed then payment schedules will be developed

Outreach, Equity, and Inclusion Subcommittee – Alvin Peer

- Largest discussion around water wells, small farms often require several additional expenses such as power poles and etc.
- Additional discussion around micro irrigation, irrigation history, access road applicability and lithium mining (NRCS is not involved, informational only)
- Question and Discussion on- disparities that might exist within the communities
 - Identified areas which the gap appears to exist.
 - Funds were set aside to provide support to limited resource producers
 - Ranking may be an issue and the need for waivers, especially on irrigation history for high tunnels.
- NRCS recognizes that in past efforts were not implemented at the same rate for HU producers but significant improvements have been made to support HU producers.

Locally Led Workgroup Training – Clyde Williams (slides attached)

- Trying to change the perception that it is an NRCS meeting instead of the local district led meeting.
- Focus on building relationships with stakeholders to increase input
- FY25 Updated Guidance
 - Clarity on role of Conservation Districts and NRCS employees
 - Reduced NRCS questions
 - Include meeting agenda template
- Conservation District's Role in LLWG
 - To convene the meeting, setting the agenda, conduct the meeting and sharing information
- NRCS Role in LLWG
 - Encourage and assist other USDA agencies
 - Assist with identifying stakeholders
 - Example of agenda template
 - Templates and questions
- Ongoing training efforts
 - Video is being developed
 - Virtual training

Inflation Reduction Act Practices – Stephen Smedley

- Reviewed process to get new CSAF practices approved for designation as “primary” CSAF practices and allow for use of IRA funding
- AR submitted Irrigation Reservoirs and Tailwater Pits for consideration for FY24, neither were approved.
- Re-submitted with additional data for consideration for FY25- pending decision
- Question and Discussion around whether water for livestock can qualify for IRA funds, forestry practices

FY24 Act Now – Clyde Williams (slides attached)

- Provided an overview of the first Act Now program
- FY25 Act Now Planning
 - Future ACT Now opportunities
 - Evaluating past and present signups
 - Seeking technical assistance and partner input

- Some producers expressed some concerns with the program and the first come first serve approach
- Questions and Discussion about use of ACT NOW for High Tunnel opportunity
 - A roundtable session will be coordinated to learn more and address concerns.

Program Updates

- **EQIP** – Corey Cornelious (slides attached)
 - \$70 million obligated (1,500 contracts funded but 6,000 applications)
 - \$45 million in FY24 with IRA funding and \$52 million on general EQIP
 - Soil Health
 - On Farm Energy
 - Forest/Wildlife
 - Rice category (AWD Row Rice)
 - Can fund practices that are not on the IRA list as long as they facilitate IRA practices
 - Migratory Bird Initiative sign up ends on May 17, 2024
- **Conservation Innovation Grant** – Corey for Lori Barker
 - Five Oaks Research – set aside practices for soil health
 - U of A DOA – CES – project focused on financial training for cost benefits for cover crops
 - Delta Conservation – Mississippi Delta region focus on rice
 - Waiting to announce the 2024 Guidelines
- **CSP** – Chris Stowers, Acting (slides attached)
 - Updated Existing Payment Rates (EAP1 & EAP2)
 - EAP1 – tiered payment rate
 - EAP2 – flat rate on land use type
- **CSP Urban (ACT NOW)**
 - Signup April 12 – May 12
 - Preapproval made in weekly batches based on threshold and ranking score
 - Ranking score – 60
 - Land Uses: Cropland, Pasture, Forest, Farmstead, and Associated Ag
- **New CSP Minimum Payment**
 - Minimum Payment increased from \$1,500 to \$4,000
 - Guarantees a CSP participant will receive at least \$4,000 annually in all CSP Contracts in 2024

- Frequently Planned Activities
 - E345A
 - E590A
 - E590B
 - E595A
 - E595B
- New or Updated Activities Process
 - FY25 – Process for working with technical specialist and/or subcommittee for requesting new activities
 - Integrating with LLWG
 - Feedback from partners
- **Partnership Programs (RCPP/MRBI)** – Dianne Schlenker (slides attached)
 - MRBI
 - Priority Watersheds FY24
 - Two Phase Process – Watershed Assessments for FY24
 - Readiness Phase
 - Implementation Phase
 - Multiyear managing program
 - 14 projects for FY24
 - MRBI projects budgets were cut 21.9%
- New NFO for RCPP – Proposals due July 2, 2024
 - Webinars available
- FY24 RCPP Projects Receiving FA
- FY24 AR RCPP Project Funding – information available if interested

Agriculture Conservation Easements Program – Alexis Cook (slides attached)

- ACEP-WRE
 - 278,000+ acres of easement
- Restoration and reforestation activities
- Looking for a couple of land trusts and hope to have some ALE.
- Easements in process in the next FY
- IRA – WRE
 - 12 Easements
 - 2,211 Acres
 - 2 HU

- \$8.8 million

Watershed Programs – Randy Childress (slides attached)

- PL566 Flood Prevention
 - Arkansas Black Mayors Association, East Arkansas Enterprise Community, conservation districts and others on these projects.
 - Planning efforts 50% completed
- PL 566 Ag Water Supply/Irrigation Projects
 - Bayou Meto and Grand Prairie
 - PL 566 Projects
 - Water Quality, Water Quantity, etc.

Open Discussion – Amanda Mathis

Closing Remarks – Mike Sullivan, State Conservationist

- Reinforced the best way for NRCS to improve is by hearing directly from stakeholder, such as observed here today
- 43 years with USDA
 - Thanked the partners, stakeholders, and others for their support and provided some facts on growth over last several years.
 - 2009 – money for producers \$50 million
 - 2024 – money for producers \$180 - \$200 million

Meeting adjourned at 1:30pm.



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FY24 Spring Water Quality State Technical Committee Meeting

ARKANSAS

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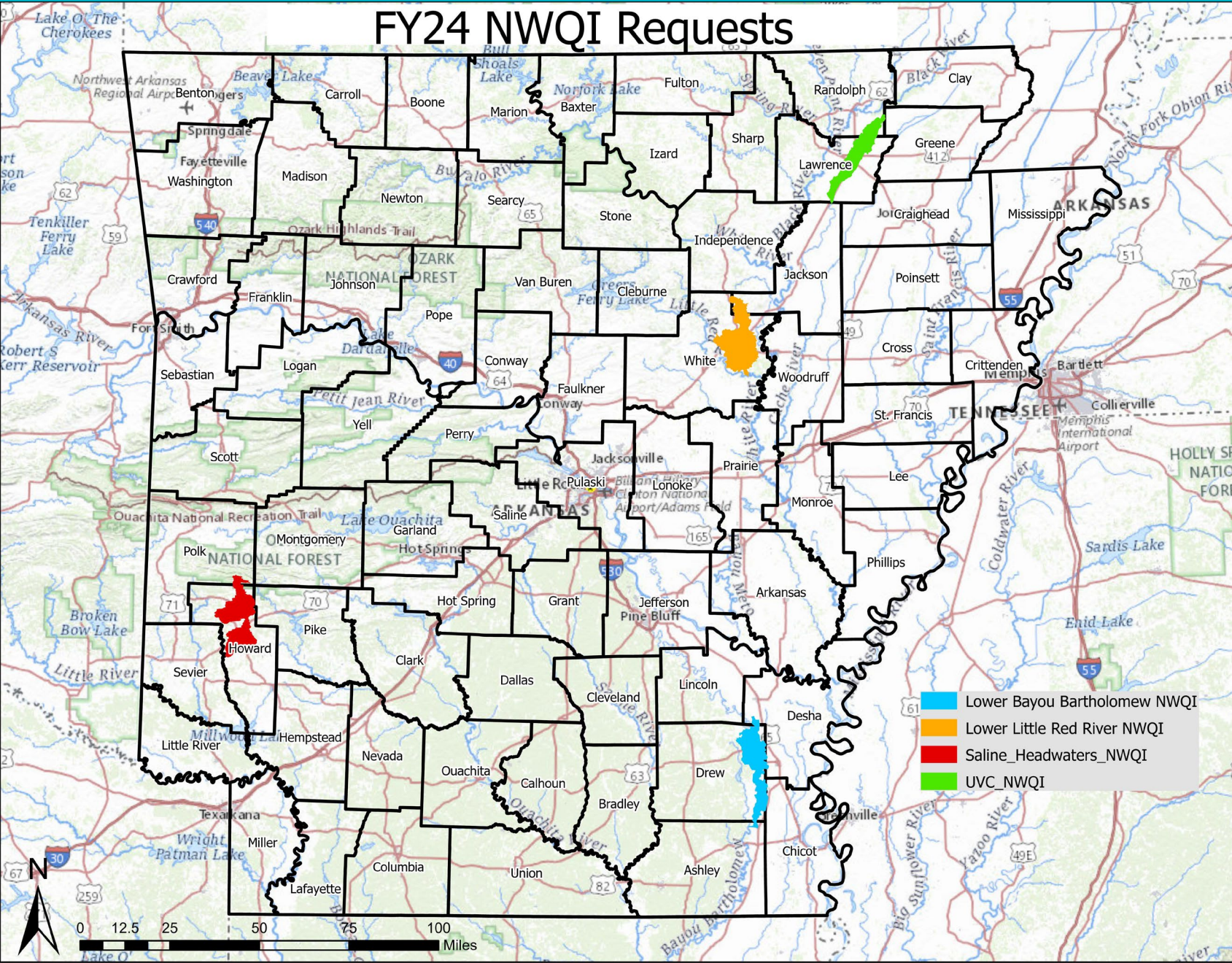
Mary Clayton, Acting Water Quality Specialist
5/15/2024

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FY24 NWQI Requests



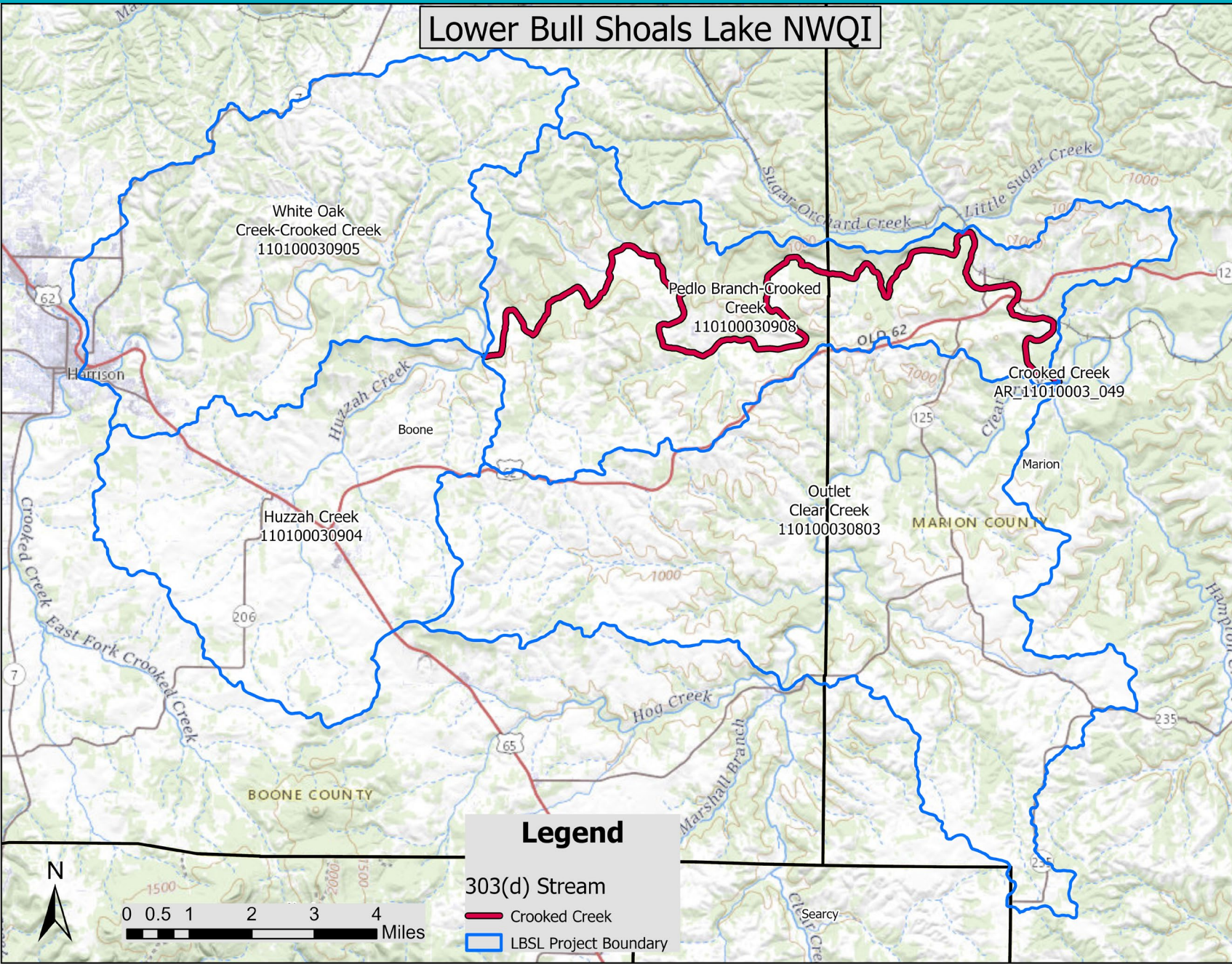
NWQI Project	Project Lifespan
Upper Village Creek	FY2023-FY2026
Saline Headwater	FY2023-FY2026
Little Red	FY2024-FY2027
Lower Bayou Bartholomew	FY2024-FY2027

NWQI Project	Annual Fund Request
Upper Village Creek	\$ 600,139.85
Saline Headwater	\$ 400,000.00
Little Red	\$ 519,430.00
Lower Bayou Bartholomew	\$ 1,183,094.95
FY24 Total	\$ 2,702,664.80

NWQI Project	FY24 Allocation Amount
Upper Village Creek	\$ 521,449.29
Saline Headwater	\$ 348,000.00
Little Red	\$ 451,904.00
Lower Bayou Bartholomew	\$ 1,093,237.65
FY24 Total	\$ 2,414,590.94

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Lower Bull Shoals Lake NWQI

- A. Location
 - a) Boone County
 - b) Marion County
- B. Sponsors
 - a) Boone County Conservation District
 - b) Farm Service Agency
 - c) Farm Bureau
 - d) Farm Credit Service
 - e) Boone County Cattlemen's Association
- C. Project will be in Planning Phase in FY25

FY24 Source Water & High Priority Practices

Source Water

- 328 Conservation Crop Rotation
- 329 Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till
- 340 Cover Crop
- 390 Riparian Herbaceous Cover
- 391 Riparian Forest Buffer
- 393 Filter Strip
- 590 Nutrient Management

High Priority

- 391 - Riparian Forest Buffer
- 646 - Shallow Water Development and Management
- 420 - Wildlife Habitat Planting
- 449 - 449 Irrigation Water Management (*Only the Scenario 10, Rice Intermittent Flood All Season AWD & Row Rice*)
- 643 - Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities
- 390 - Riparian Herbaceous Cover
- 441 – Irrigation System, Micro-Irrigation (*Only receive the higher rate in High Tunnel and Urban Ag ranking pools*)



Source Water & High Priority Practices Requested for FY25

- **449 Irrigation Water Management-**

Requested by subcommittee to be added for FY25 as it is necessary for good water quality

- **580 Streambank & Shoreline Protection-**

Requested by subcommittee to be added for FY25 due to the high cost to implement practice properly



Meeting Discussion



- **Edge of Field Monitoring – FY25**

Current bulletin was emailed to group on 5/3/2024 and a meeting has occurred in Phillips county for a possible project and another meeting will take place in Jefferson county

- **570 Stormwater Runoff – FY25**

There was interest in this practice being added, particularly the Rain Garden scenarios. Meeting scheduled for 5/16/2024 to further discuss

- **355 Groundwater Testing**

Met with the National WQ staff on 5/13/2024 to begin discussion of how to better utilize this practice with alternative/urban cropping systems





Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

SPRING 2024

**STATE TECHNICAL
COMMITTEE MEETING**

(WATER QUANTITY REPORT)



Rodney Wright, Ph.D.
Water Management Engineer, Arkansas
Natural Resources Conservation Service
rodney.wright@usda.gov 870-206-5688

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

Spring 2024 Water Quantity Subcommittee

Thursday, March 28, 2024

Rural Water Association Facility

Lonoke, AR



- ☐ Partnership Reports
- ☐ Old & New Business
- ☐ High Priority Practices

- A. IWM Technicians / Irrigation Water Resources – **Mike Hamilton**
- B. Discovery Farms – **Dr. Mike Daniels**
- C. ARS/USGS AGWI Report – **Dr. Michele Reba**
- D. UA-Most Crop Per Drop, Pitless Tailwater, App – **Dr. Chris Henry**
- E. Arkansas Tax Credits Update / Groundwater Report – **Blake Forrest**
- F. USA Rice Update – **Josh Hankins**
- ~~G. Grand Prairie Irrigation Project – **Dennis Carman**~~
- H. Bayou Meto Irrigation Project – **Ed Swaim**
- I. Arkansas Water Plan Update – **Ryan Benefield**

From NRCS Arkansas EQIP Guide – **FINAL UPDATE**

464 - Irrigation Land Leveling...payment schedule is for irrigated land...
...The yardage...> **60 cy/ac** and < **600 cy/ac**. (\$2.13 / yd)



462 - Precision Land Forming and Smoothing - Low Shaping
This practice payment schedule is for land that will not be irrigated. Its purpose is to improve surface drainage, reduce erosion, and improve equipment operation/efficiency. ...**60 - 124 cy/ac** (\$250.87 / acre)

Timeframe related to Pump Automation Equipment

– **FINAL UPDATE**

- The contract ends once it passes the expiration date and neither the participant nor NRCS has any further responsibilities under the contract...”.
- If the practice fails beyond the participant’s control, then they can reapply for the same practice on the same acres.



Working Lands Conservation Programs Manual

Furrow Irrigated Rice Scenario in EQIP – **added to 449 #10**

449 – Scenario 10

Typical irrigation water management will include **two methods of rice irrigation.**



One: ... referred to in university/extension documentation as alternate/wetting and drying (AWD) flood management.

Two: ...referred to in university/extension documentation as furrow-irrigated rice (FIR) or row rice.

CSAF MITIGATION ACTIVITIES LIST FOR FY2024
(Funding available thru IRA)

Pitless Tailwater Recovery System (Dr. Chris Henry)

Update

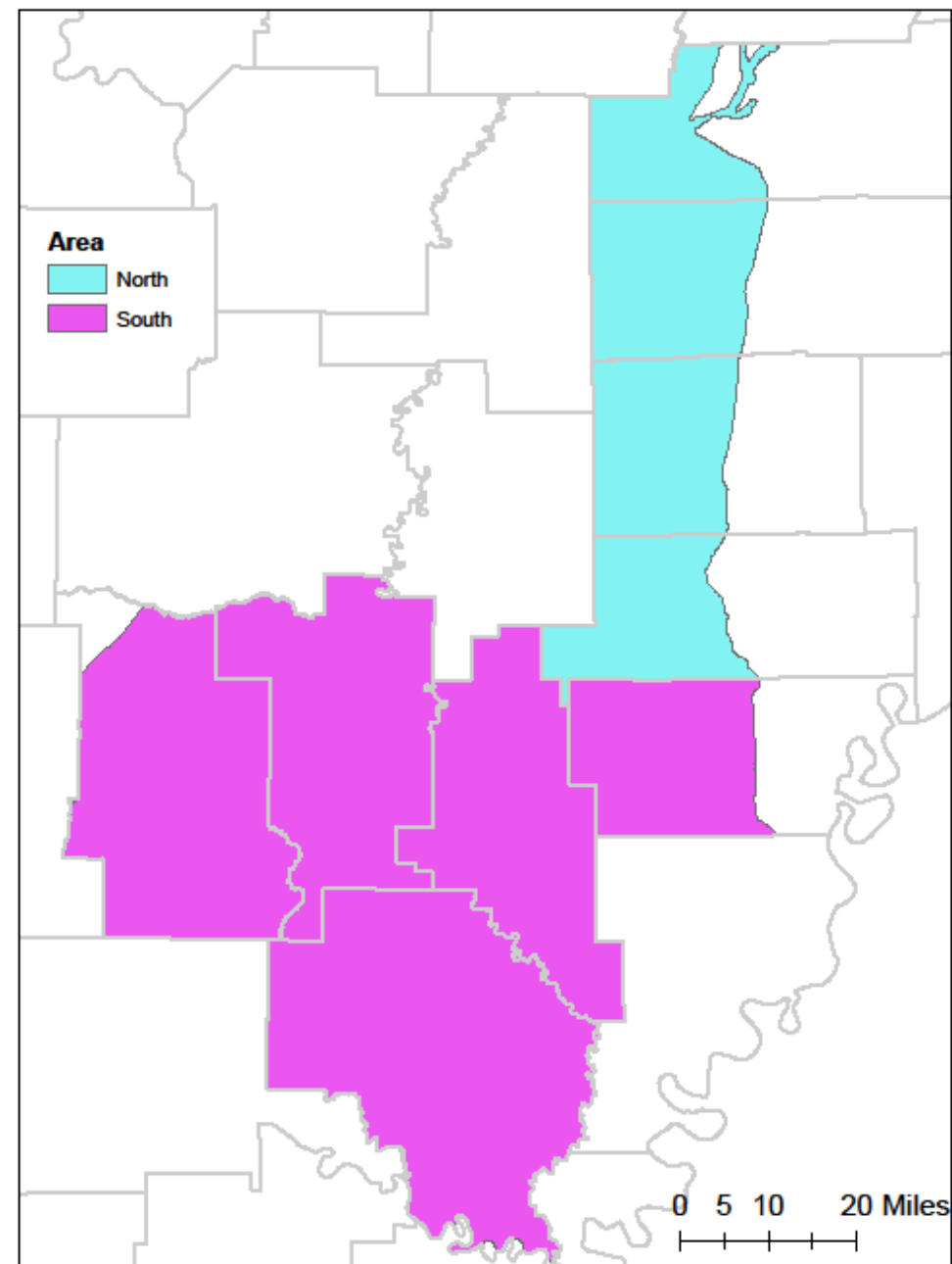
- 2024 Applications
- Contract as CSAF – Rice (producer uses row rice)
Install pump as facilitating practice
- Using the 2024 Applications to prepare a design and checkout guide



AGWI Tier / Ranking Update

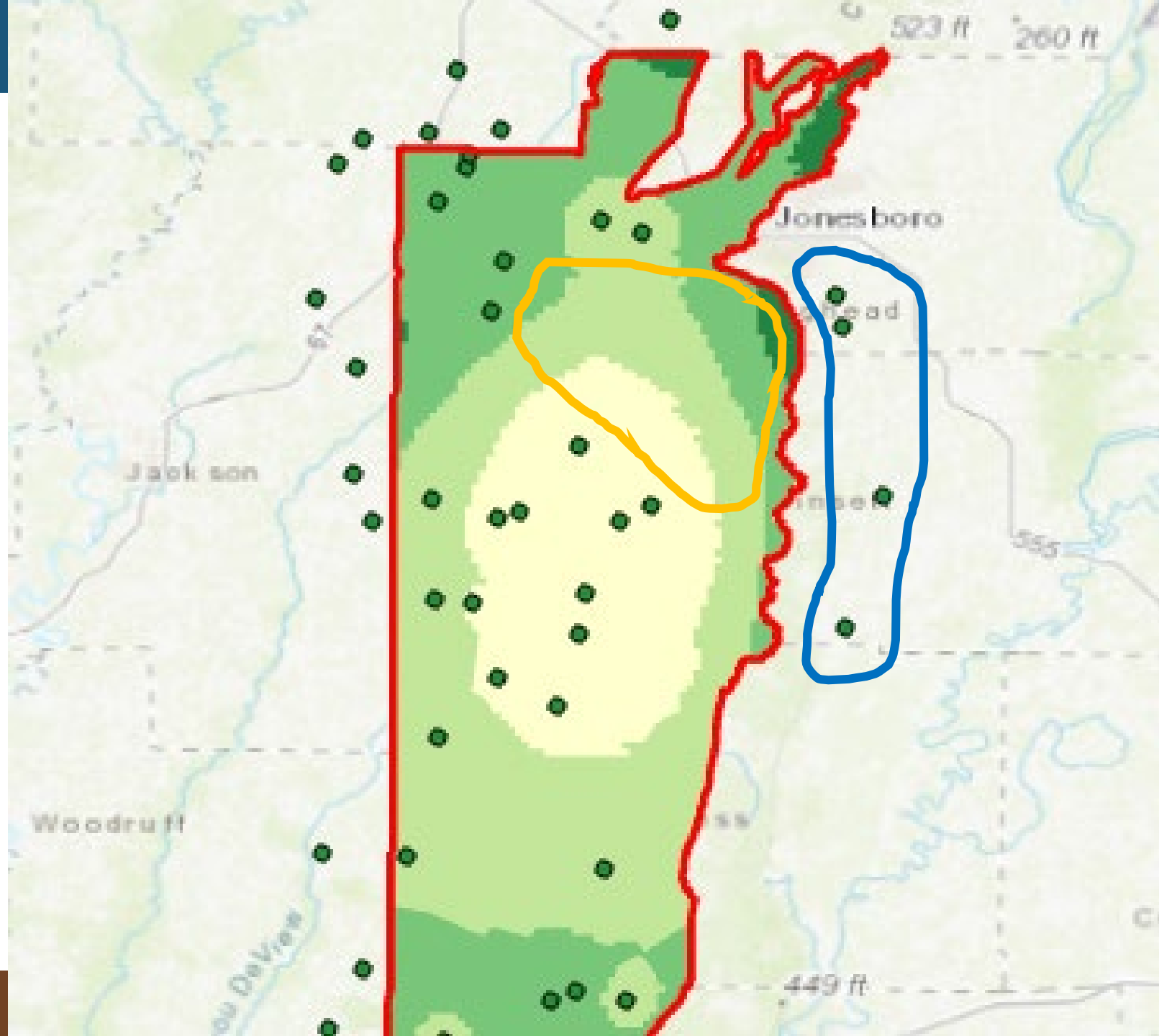
No More Tiers
Ranking Adjustments
North / South Areas Retained

2024 AGWI - North and South Areas



Depth to Water

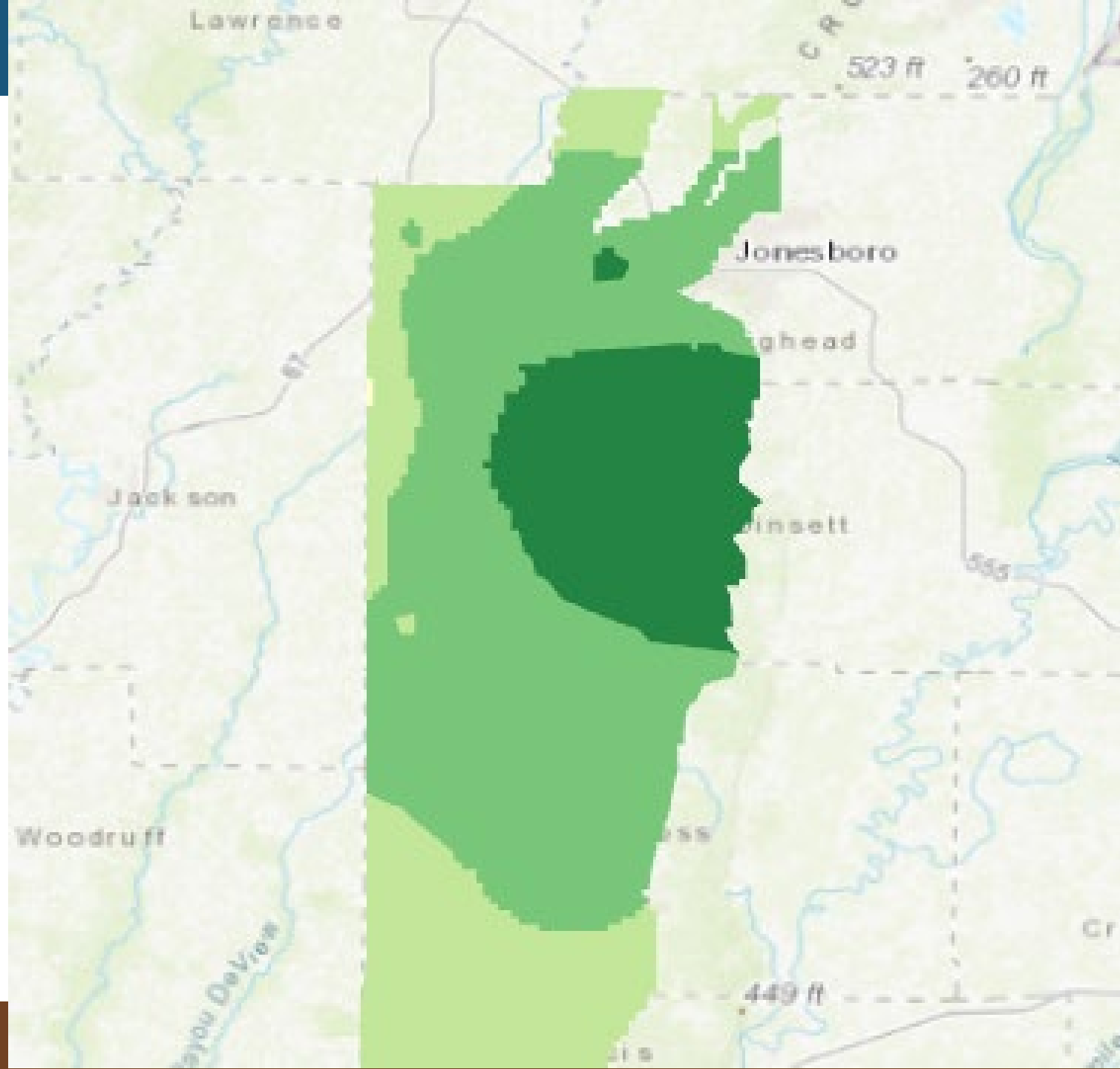
2024 Original Ranking Layer



Depth to Water

2024 Corrected Ranking Layer

Pending 2024 Ranking Results



High Priority Practices (HPP)

practices that “Address the conservation of water and declining aquifers and mitigate drought”.

Submitting:

- 449 - Irrigation Water Management, Scenario 10, Rice Intermittent Flood All Season (AWD & Row Rice)
- 464 - Irrigation Land Leveling
- 447 - Irrigation and Drainage Tailwater Recovery
- 436 - Irrigation Reservoir
- 430 - Irrigation Pipeline

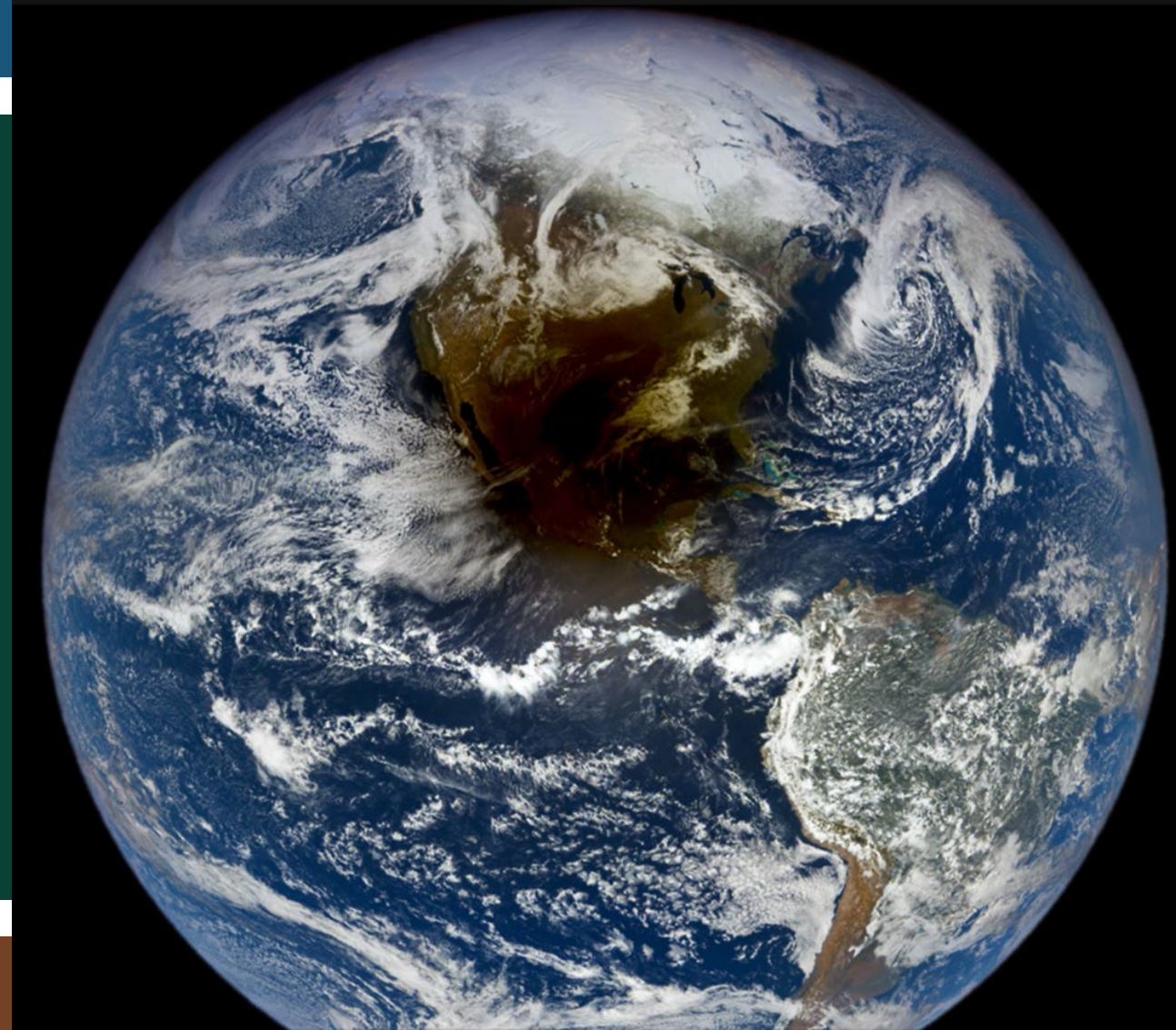


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SPRING 2024 STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

- ✓ Partnership Reports
- ✓ Old & New Business
- ✓ High Priority Practices

WATER QUANTITY



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Wildlife Subcommittee Presentation

Spring 2024 State Technical

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FY 24 Fund Allocations



Fund Pool	FY24 Allocation	FY23 Obligation	FY23 Contracts	FY23 Acres
AR FY24 Wildlife	\$ 1,098,569.00	\$ 1,390,602.88	49	5,810.60
AR FY24 Working Lands for Wildlife (Bobwhite Initiative)	\$ 1,758,169.00	\$ 402,261.90	15	2,237.60
Migratory Bird Resurgence Initiative - MBRI	\$ *4,000,000.00	\$ 6,975,644.00	42	30,212.50
EQIP IRA Forest/Wildlife	\$ 6,500,000.00	\$ -	0	-

*Press Release states up to \$4,000,000

Ranking Pool Name	Submitted	Pre-Approved	Pre-Approved Cost Estimate	Approved
AR FY24 Wildlife (Revised)	243	78	\$ 2,659,059.32	1
AR FY24 Working Lands for Wildlife	118	49	\$ 1,816,795.76	0
Migratory Bird Resurgence Initiative - MBRI	0	0	\$ -	0
AR FY24 IRA Forest/Wildlife	419	210	\$ 7,133,004.49	7

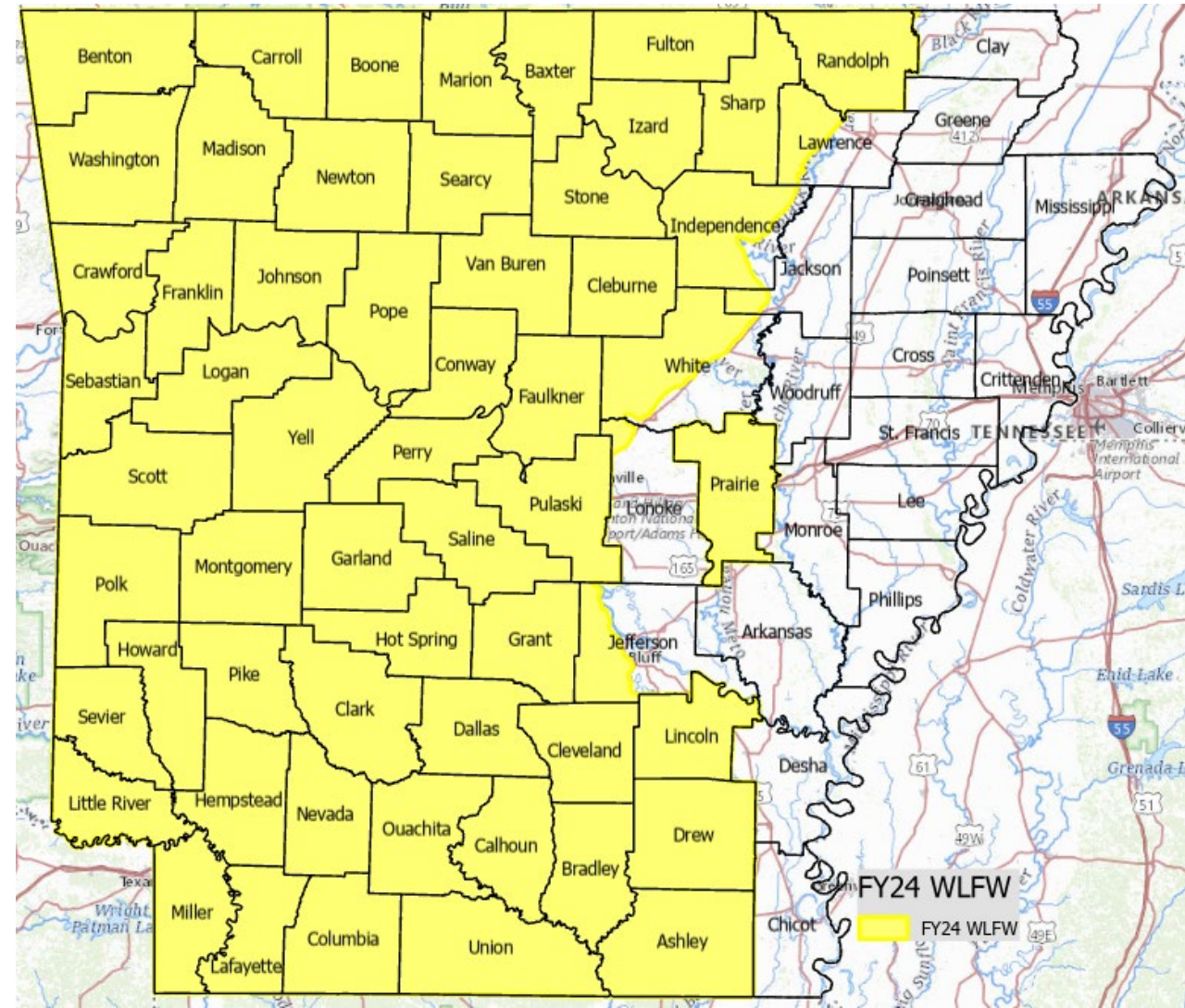
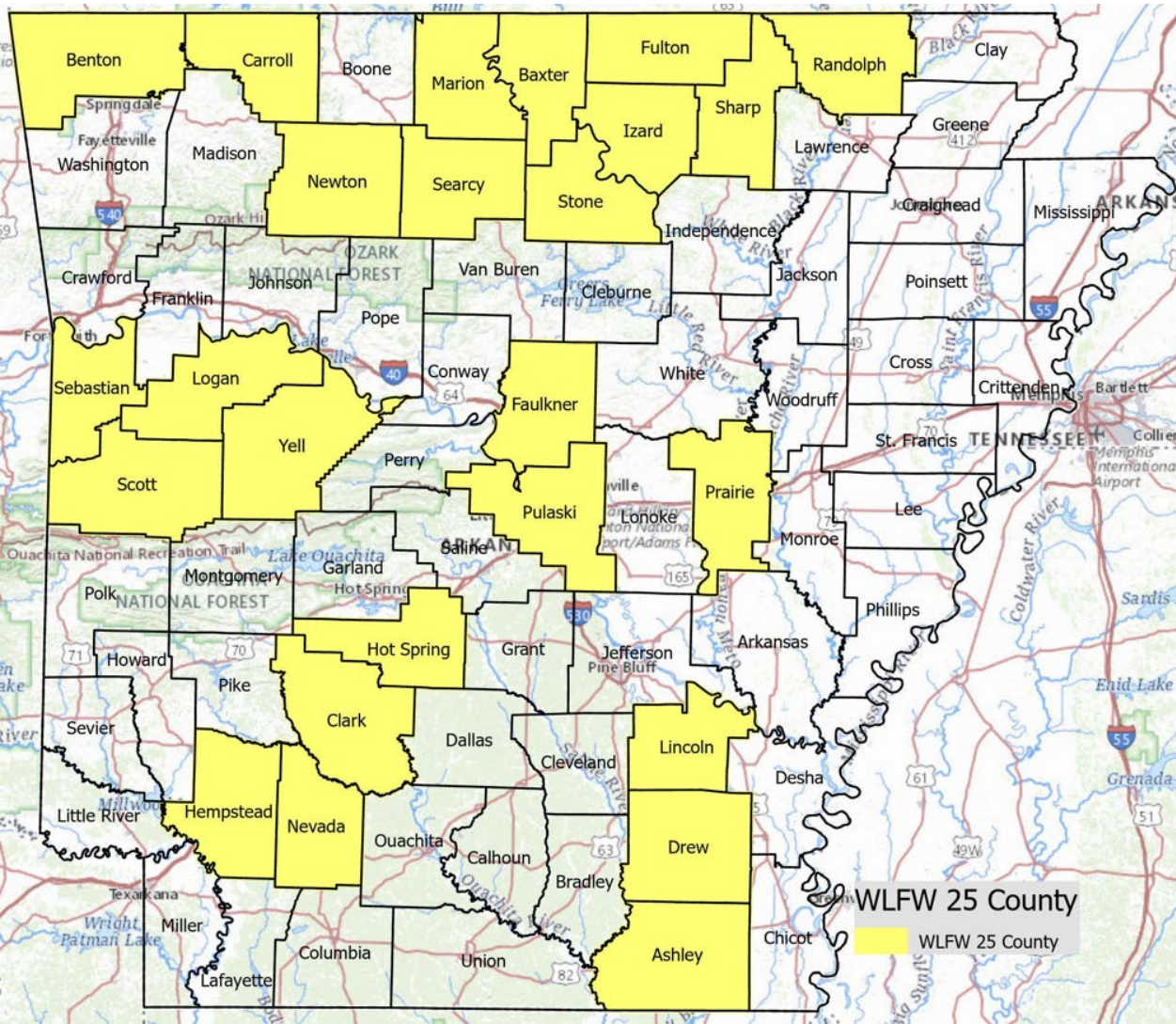


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Working Lands For Wildlife Bobwhite Initiative

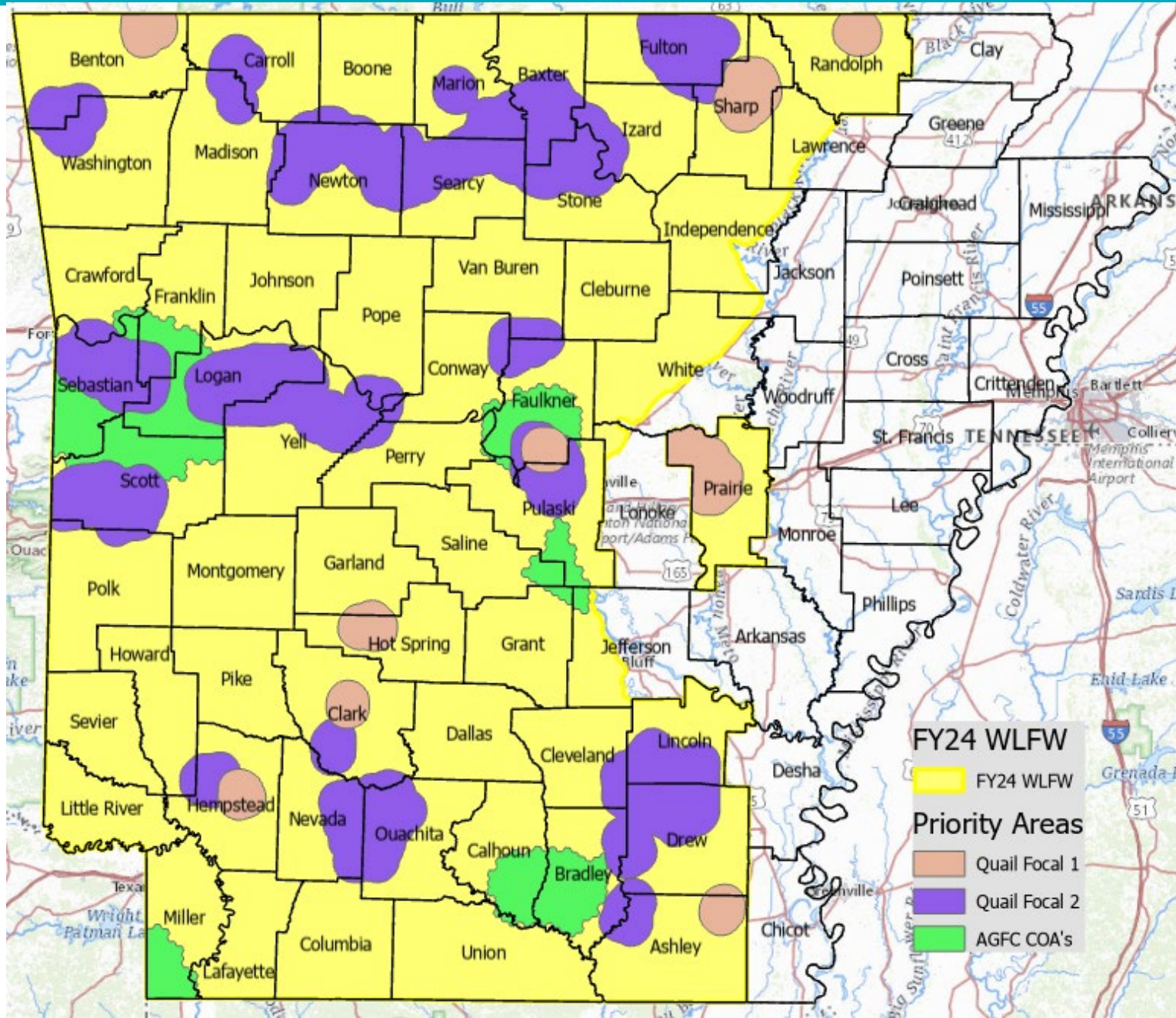
Expands from 25 Counties to 61 Counties





Eligible Practices

314, 315, 327,
338, 382, 390,
394, 420, 422,
490, 512, 516,
528, 561, 612,
614, 643, 645,
647, 649, 666

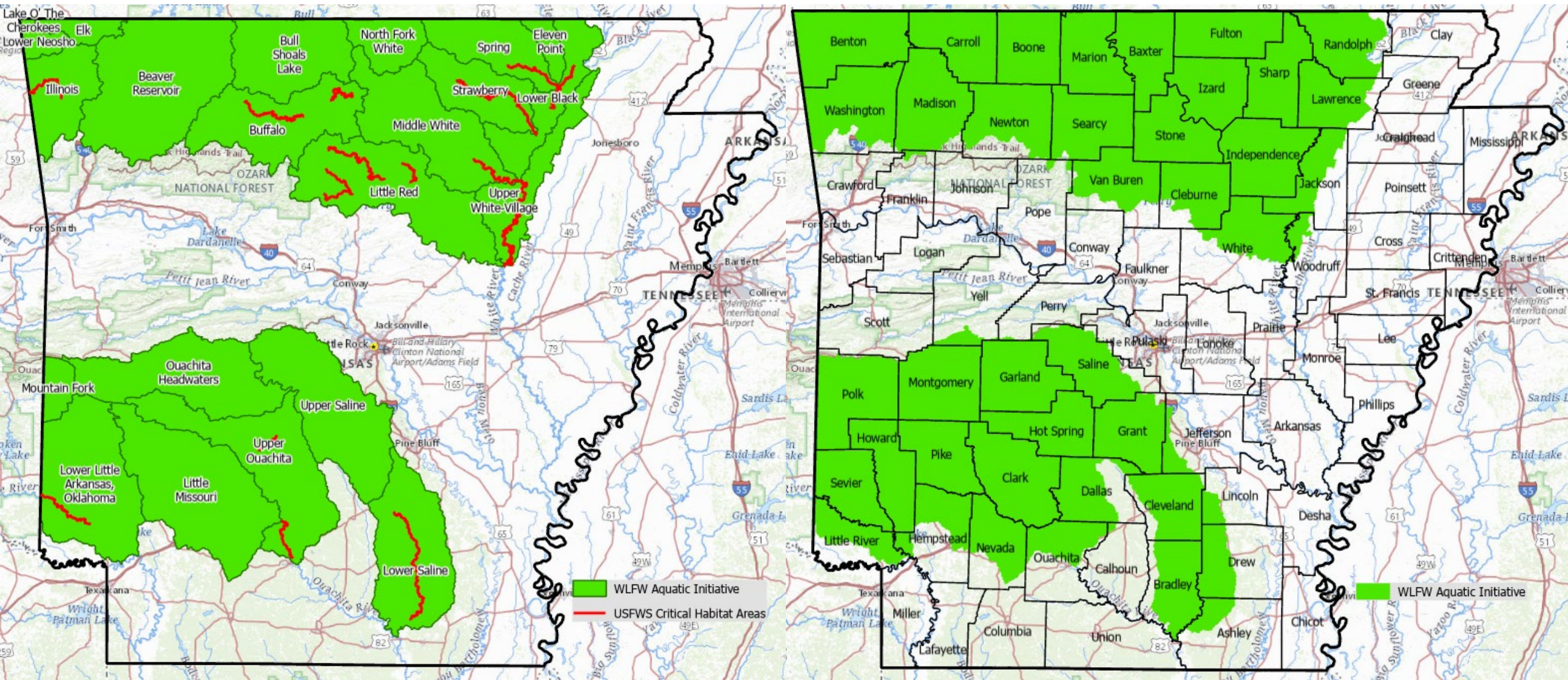


WLFW Priority Areas

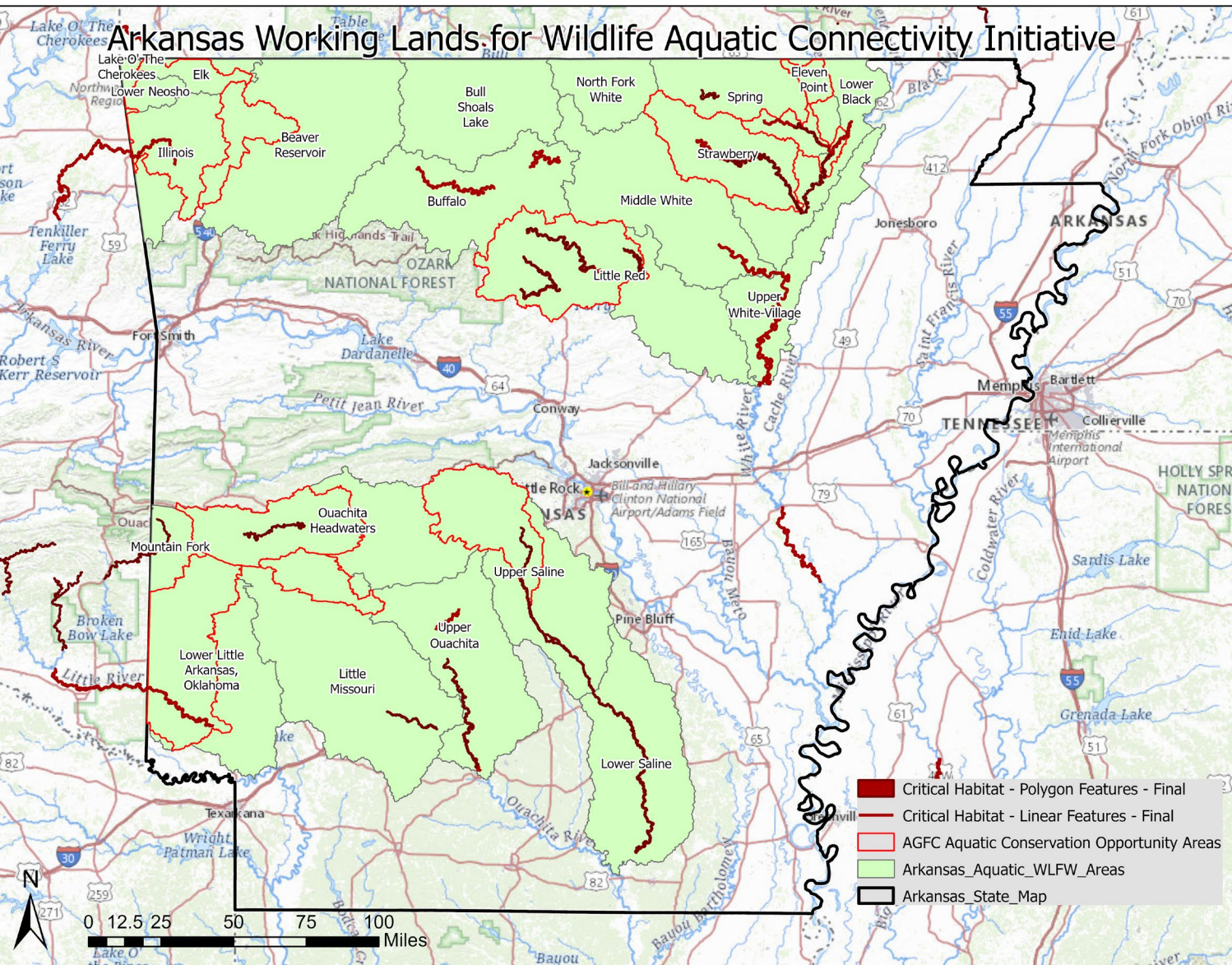
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WLFW Aquatic Connectivity - Proposed Areas



Selection Criteria



1. Aquatic Habitat Connectivity
2. Threatened and Endangered Species
3. Arkansas Species of Conservation Concern
4. Critical Habitat
5. Water Quality Improvement

WLFW Aquatic Connectivity RoadMap



Purpose: Improve delivery of floodplain, riparian, streambank, and instream channel restoration efforts in Arkansas.

Framework:

1. Review and align practices and installation techniques
2. Training – who needs what to make us better conservation planners and practitioners?
3. Site and project inventory – how should we organize identified sites for projects?
4. Collaboration – what are the best ways to combine our resources?
5. Outreach and Education – what do we need to communicate to the public and other professionals?



420 – Wildlife Habitat Planting Job Sheets

FY25 Adoption

- Practice Specification
- Implementation Requirements
- Operation and Maintenance
- Need to create seed mix requirements for scenarios



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Arkansas Conservation Practice Specification Wildlife Habitat Planting (Code 420)

Definition

Land should be treated to meet land resource objectives and associated resource concerns according to the Wildlife Habitat Planting (420) standard.

Purpose

In Arkansas, Wildlife Habitat Planting (Code 420) is used to create herbaceous or shrubby wildlife habitat in areas that are currently being used for other purposes (e.g., crops or pasture).

Where Applicable

This practice applies to all lands where inadequate wildlife habitat is identified as a primary resource concern, and a plant community inventory or wildlife habitat evaluation indicates a benefit in altering the current vegetative conditions (species diversity, richness, structure, and pattern) by establishing herbaceous plants or shrubs. This Practice Specification (PS) provides information to successfully establish native herbaceous and shrubby wildlife habitat in Arkansas. Use the Implementation Requirement job sheet for cropland (IR-AR420-C) or non-cropland (IR-AR420-NC) to document the practice implementation requirements for a specific plan.

Site Preparation

Site preparation is necessary to address competition from undesirable species on the management site. Inadequate site preparation can result in establishment failure. Follow the guidance below and document the Site Preparation needs for a specific plan in the proper Implementation Requirement job sheet. Reevaluate planting date if site preparations do not meet plan goals.

Timing

Site preparations must begin a minimum of 1 year prior to planting date. Different site preparation methods may be selected depending upon the purpose and special considerations for the season that treatment is applied:

1. Dormant Season, November through February:

Purpose:

- a. To remove dead thatch or dormant vegetation.
- b. To begin site preparation for planting during the next dormant season.

Special Considerations:

- a. Further site preparation may be necessary, refer to Frequency section for additional information.



Forestry Subcommittee April 30, 2024

1. North Arkansas Conservation Delivery Network (Potential new CDN)
2. Open Pine RCPP Report (Bill Bartush)
3. Contract info (5 year data)
4. Update on 612 spacing discussion
5. Forest Stand Improvement new Scenario

Recommendation 1: add language to the 612 Tree/Shrub Establishment specifications.

Current Specifications: Shrub planting densities are highly variable and will be planned to meet landowner objectives.

Suggested edit/addition: Shrub **and tree planting densities for wildlife purposes** are highly variable and will be planned to meet landowner objectives. **If planning for below 436 pine per acre, plans should have approval from an NRCS forester.**

Recommendation 2: Add scenario to Forest Stand Improvement



FOREST STAND IMPROVEMENT Thinning for Wildlife or Forest Health

Implementation Requirements

666

Farm Bill

Program

Participant: _____

Farm Bill

Program

Contract No. _____

Tract No(s): _____

Field(s) Number(s): _____

Acres: _____

Purpose: To improve the forest and wildlife habitat by adjusting the number of trees per acre and the understory vegetation. The goal of this scenario is to reduce the stocking of trees to a level to allow for herbaceous plants to grow in the understory.

☐ Improve and sustain forest health and productivity by reducing the number of trees per acre or by using basal area as the guide for removing trees from the site.	☐ Remove woody understory vegetation to favor desirable herbaceous plants beneficial to wildlife to improve wildlife or pollinator habitat.
☐ Reduce or remove undesirable vegetation including non-native and invasive plants, restore or maintain natural plant communities	
☐ Note: This practice has two components that must be completed prior to certification. 1. The basal area of the stand must be reduced and the woody understory must be treated.	

Current Stand Conditions:

Estimated trees per acre or basal area per acre:
Predominate tree species:
Stocking Level:*
Stand condition:**
Amount of understory vegetation***

* Stocking Level = **Overstocked** (too many trees per acre), **Fully stocked** (enough trees to fully occupy the site), or **Understocked** (not enough trees to fully occupy the site) based on the stocking chart for average stem diameter and basal area.

Stand condition = **Good (healthy trees with good crowns), **Fair** (trees crowded on the site, smaller crowns), **Poor** (trees crowded, small crowns, dying trees)

***Understory vegetation = **Heavy** (hard to walk through), **Medium** (visually blocked and mobility is only average), **Slight** (fairly easy to walk through)

***If the current basal area is 110 square ft./ac. or less, 40 square feet of basal area per acre must be removed or a residual basal area of 60 square feet per acre is reached. ***Do not take any forested stands basal area below 60 square feet per acre. You may be plus or minus 5 square feet of basal area from the target of 60 square feet of basal area per acre and meet this requirement. ***If the current basal area is greater than 110 square feet of basal area per acre, 50 square feet of basal area must be removed.

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Small Farm and Urban Agriculture Subcommittee

Recommendations for the State Technical Committee - May 15, 2024

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- **Based on discussions at the small farm and urban agriculture subcommittee meeting**
 - **April 10, 2024**
- **37 members in attendance in-person and virtually**



High Priority Practices

- **Microirrigation (441)**
- **Pest management (595)**
- **Mulching (484)**
- **Cover crops (340)**
- **Nutrient management (590)**
- **Composting facility (317)**
- **High tunnel (325)**



Shrubs and Small Trees



- **Supportive of discussing this list with Baucum Nursery for them to consider growing due to lack of local availability.**
- **Suggestion for an edible bundle, which could include Paw Paw, Blueberry, Elderberry, Serviceberry, and/or Mexican Plum.**
- Common Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* ssp. *canadensis*)
- Deciduous Holly (*Ilex decidua*)
- Fragrant Sumac (*Rhus aromatica*)
- Hazelnut (*Corylus americana*)
- Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)
- Hillside Blueberry (*Vaccinium pallidum*)
- Mexican Plum (*Prunus mexicana*)
- Paw Paw (*Asimina triloba*)
- Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*)
- Serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*)
- Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)
- Southern Crab Apple (*Malus angustifolia*)



Raised Beds

Discussion about how elevated beds enable physically challenged producers to use high tunnels. There was a concern that having to submit a variance to request elevated beds could result in discrimination.

- There was a suggestion to recommend a blanket allowance for elevated beds without having to disclose that you have an accessibility issue.
- There is a need to explore flexibilities around the use of elevated beds and make sure the current option and process for requesting a variance is clear.





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A photograph of a community garden. In the foreground, there are several tall sunflowers with large green leaves and bright yellow heads. Interspersed among them are numerous zinnias in various colors, including pink, purple, red, and orange. The garden is organized into rows, with some plants supported by wooden stakes. In the background, a grassy area with trees and a fence is visible under an overcast sky.

Thank you!

State Urban Conservationist
Katy Brantley Katy.Brantley@usda.gov

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- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
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AR Local Led Work Group

Training Efforts

Clyde Williams, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

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AR LLWG Training Efforts



- Local Led Work Groups make the connection between Districts, NRCS, State, local partners, and producers to work through an assessment of current natural resource concerns in a given area or region and to identify opportunities and challenges that NRCS and partners can address through their conservation programs
- LLWG input helps guide local decision making and can influence state, regional and national program, and policy development

FY25 Updated Guidance



- Clarity on the roles of Conservation District and NRCS employees relating to LLWG meetings
- Reduced NRCS input questions
- Included meeting agenda template
- Included meeting notes template
- Provided training at annual AACD meeting

Conservation District's Role in LLWG



- It is the responsibility of the Conservation District to convene the Local Work Group. This includes developing the conservation needs assessment, setting the agenda, conducting the meeting, and sharing the information with the designated conservationist or State Technical Committee.

NRCS's Role in LLWG

It is the NRCS designated conservationist's responsibility to participate in the USDA Local Work Group and to:

- Encourage and assist other USDA agencies to participate in the locally led conservation and Work group efforts, as feasible.
- Assist with identifying members for the Local Work Group.
- Help identify program priorities and resources available.
- Assist in the development of program priority area proposals.
- Support and advise the Local Work Group concerning technical issues, program policies and procedures, and other matters relating to conservation program delivery
- Analyze performance indicators and reports.
- Report the conservation programs' impacts on resources.

(County Name) Local Led Workgroup Meeting Agenda

(County Conservation District name) and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

Date:

Time:

Address:

Welcome and Introductions-----Conservation District

Purpose and Goals-----Conservation District

Conservation District Report-----Conservation District

- Previous year accomplishments
- Planned work for coming year

NRCS Report and Overview-----District Conservationist

- Previous year accomplishments
- Input for NRCS activities

Partner Reports and Updates-----

Impaired Watersheds-----

- Discuss impaired watersheds within county (if applicable)
- Discuss possible projects or other assistance that could be used to address the watershed concerns

Customer Service-----

- Discuss customer service barriers
- Discuss opportunities to increase outreach and resources needed to increase outreach

Next Steps-----Conservation District

Conclusion-----Conservation District

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(County Name) Local Led Workgroup Meeting Notes

(County Conservation District name) and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

Date:

Time:

Address:

Partner/Organization	
Updates/Suggestions/Comments/Recommendations	
Follow-up Needed	

- Opportunity for partners/organizations to provide and record input

LLWG Input

Local Input		
Questions for Consideration	Answer	Response
1. Provide any recommendations for new/revised practices needed, including adjustments to payment rates and caps. (clarifier - provide more specific clarification and/or data to support your answer)		<i>List practice recommendations</i>
2. Which conservation programs does your county have an unmet demand? (clarifier - # of applications in each program ACEP,EQIP,CSP,RCPP)		<i>If answering no, itemize your response by program.</i>

LLWG Input

Agreements

Each year, Arkansas NRCS announces competitive funding opportunities for partners and groups to assist with conservation technical/outreach assistance projects and identifying innovative approaches, through agreements and/or Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG). CIG is a component of the EQIP Program. It is a grant program used to apply or demonstrate previously proven technology. It does not fund research projects. CIG is an effort to address some of the state's most pressing natural resource conservation needs and in hopes to utilize these successful projects for new technology or innovative solutions for EQIP

Questions for Consideration	Answer	Response
3. Are there any areas of interest where we should focus to achieve higher levels of conservation? (clarifier- to utilize special projects such as CIG, Special Agreements or other initiatives)		<i>If yes, provide examples</i>
4. Describe ideas for special technical assistance or outreach projects that would benefit the county.		

LLWG Input

Conservation Stewardship Program		
Questions for Consideration	Answer	Response
5. What improvements are recommended to deliver the program more efficiently?		<i>Provide specific examples</i>
Environmental Quality Incentives Program		
Questions for Consideration	Answer	Response
6. What improvements are recommended to deliver the program more efficiently?		<i>Provide suggested improvements</i>

LLWG Input

Source Water Protection		
Questions for Consideration	Answer	Response
2018 Farm Bill included specific provisions to protect sources of drinking water by identifying practices that have a significant water quality or water quantity benefit and implementing those practices where source waters can be protected or improved.		
7. Identify priority areas for the protection of source waters for drinking water.		<i>List priority areas</i>
8. Is there local support for implementation of the voluntary adoption of conservation to protect source water when selecting priority areas?		

LLWG Input

Climate Smart Ag		
Questions for Consideration	Answer	Response
9. Is there additional interest in the county to address any of the following climate mitigation categories through Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry: Soil Health, Nitrogen Management, Livestock Partnership, Grazing and Pasture, Agroforestry/Forestry/Upland Wildlife Habitat, Energy Efficiency, or Rice?		<i>If yes, please list the Climate Mitigation Categories</i>

LLWG Input

Equity and Social Justice		
Questions for Consideration	Answer	Response
10. Does the program participation data reflect participation by women, minorities, and persons with disabilities?		

LLWG Input

Urban Agriculture		
Questions for Consideration	Answer	Response
11. With Urban Ag interest and demand growing in Arkansas, does your county have specific needs related to urban agriculture? (Clarifier: Is there an unmet demand in urban practices, training needs, etc.?)		<i>If yes, elaborate</i>

LLWG Input

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

Please review the *Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) Mitigation Activities List*^[1] FY2024 with the LLWG. The practices listed are the core practices that will be used nationally for IRA-EQIP and IRA-CSP for FY24.

Questions for Consideration	Answer	Response
12. Does the LLWG have any recommendations for additional practices, systems, and/or approaches to be considered for the FY25 implementation of IRA-EQIP?		
13. Does the LLWG have any recommendations for additional enhancements, systems, and/or approaches to be considered for the FY25 implementation of IRA-CSP?		

Ongoing Training Efforts



- Continue to work closely with Field Offices on involvement with LLWG meetings and roles
- LLWG video showing how a typical LLWG meeting should be conducted
- Virtual trainings for NRCS and CD employees



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AR NRCS FY24 ACT NOW

Clyde Williams, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

ACT NOW

- ACT NOW allows NRCS to approve and obligate ranked applications in a designated ranking pool when an eligible application meets or exceeds the state-determined minimum ranking score.
- ACT NOW will utilize minimum ranking score thresholds for each ranking pool. This means no longer having to wait for all applications to be reviewed and preapproved in a ranking pool.



ACT NOW Pointers

- The goal of Act Now is to quickly identify those applications that would otherwise be the highest ranking and allow preapproval to proceed earlier.
- Setting the ranking threshold too low, not anticipating the number of applications, or not allocating adequate funding may cause delays in the process that Act Now was established to avoid.
- The Act Now process has become an outreach tool that may highlight an opportunity that results in more applications than anticipated.





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AR NRCS ACT NOW Funding Opportunities FY2024



Arkansas FY 2024 ACT NOW Opportunities (EQIP)

High Tunnel

- Practice available: CPS 325 – Seasonal High Tunnel
- Ranking Threshold – 100 points





Arkansas FY 2024 ACT NOW Opportunities (EQIP)

IRA Soil Health

- Practices available : CPS - 340 Cover Crop, CPS 328 – Conservation Crop Rotation, CPS 590 - Nutrient Management, CPS 329 - Residue and Tillage Management (No-Till), CPS 345 - Residue and Tillage Management (Reduced Till), CPS 336 - Soil Carbon Amendment
- Ranking Threshold – 150 points





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Arkansas FY 2024 ACT NOW Opportunities (EQIP)

IRA On-Farm Energy

- Practices available: CPS 374 - Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation, CPS 670 - Energy Efficient Lighting System, and CPS 672 - Energy Efficient Building Envelope
- Ranking Threshold – 50 points



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Arkansas FY 2024 ACT NOW Opportunities (CSP)

COMMON CSP ENHANCEMENTS FOR SMALL-SCALE/URBAN AGRICULTURE

CROPLAND

CODE	CSP ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITY	LAND USE
E327A/E420A*	Conservation cover for pollinators and beneficial insects	cropland, forest, farmstead, associated ag. land
E328E*	Soil health crop rotation	cropland
E328F*	Modifications to improve soil health and increase soil organic matter	cropland
E328J	Improve crop rotation to provide benefits to pollinators	cropland
E328M	Diversify crop rotation with canola or sunflower for pollinators	cropland
E340A*	Cover crop to reduce soil erosion	cropland
E340F*	Cover crop to minimize soil compaction	cropland
E484A*	Mulching to improve soil health	cropland
E484C*	Mulching with natural materials in specialty crops for weed control	cropland
E570A	Enhanced rain garden for wildlife	cropland, associated ag. land, farmstead
E590A*	Improve nutrient uptake efficiency and reduce risk of nutrient loss	cropland
E590B*	Reduce risk of nutrient loss to surface water with precision agriculture	cropland
E595B	Reduced risk of pesticides in surface water and air by utilizing IPM PAMS techniques	cropland, pasture

PASTURE

E314A	Brush management to improve wildlife habitat	pasture, forest, associated ag. land
E511A	Harvest crop using measures that allow desired wildlife species to escape cropland, pasture	cropland, pasture
E512D*	Forage planting to increase organic matter	cropland, pasture
E512L*	Diversity forage with forbs and legumes	pasture, associated ag. land
E528A*	Maintaining quantity and quality of forage for animal health	pasture, associated ag. land
E528F*	Stockpiling cool season forage	cropland, pasture, associated ag. land
E528P*	Implementing bale or swath grazing to increase organic matter	cropland, pasture
E528R*	Managing intensive rotational grazing	pasture

FOREST

E612D	Add food-producing trees and shrubs to existing plantings	cropland, pasture, forest, farmstead, associated ag. land
E612E	Cultural plantings	forest, farmstead, associated ag. land
E666D*	Improve understory vegetation	forest
E666I*	Crop tree management for mast production	forest, associated ag. land, farmstead
E666J*	Facilitating oak forest regeneration	forest, associated ag. land
E666K*	Structural diversity with patch openings	forest, farmstead, associated ag. land
E666O	Snags, den trees, and coarse woody debris for wildlife	forest, farmstead, associated ag. land
E666P*	Summer roosting habitat for native forest-dwelling bat species	forest, associated ag. land, farmstead

Urban Agriculture

- Ranking Threshold-60 Points

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* Climate-smart agriculture and forestry (CSAF) mitigation enhancements eligible for Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding.

AR FY2025 ACT NOW Planning

- Planning has begun for future ACT NOW opportunities
- Evaluating past and present signups so that future signups will be more efficient
- Seeking technical and partner input on potential ACT NOW opportunities





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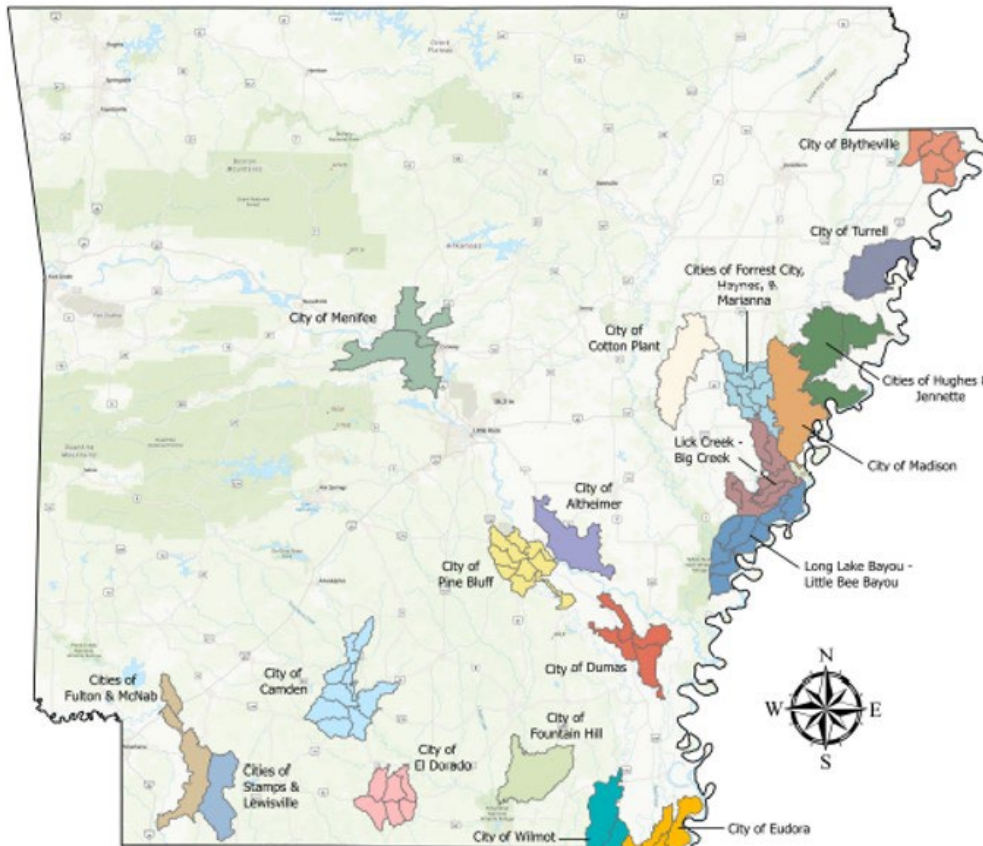


**ARKANSAS
PL-566
Flood Prevention
and
Ag Water Supply
Projects**

PL-566 Flood Prevention - Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

\$102.2 million dollars for 19 watershed projects in Arkansas to alleviate flooding in and around underserved communities

- Working with the Arkansas Black Mayors Association (ABMA), East Arkansas Enterprise Community, conservation districts and others on these projects – **Planning Efforts Approximately 50% Complete**





PL-566 Ag Water Supply/Irrigation Projects

Construction Completed or Under Construction

Bayou Meto and Grand Prairie

BAYOU METO

- Inlet Channel from AR River
- Pumping Station with all 6 pumps
- Discharge pipes and plunge basin
- Storage Reservoir with control gate structure
- First 2 miles of earthen canal
- First county road crossing (Col Maynard Rd)
- Cleanout of 13.8 miles of Indian Bayou/ Indian Bayou Ditch
- 2 miles of secondary delivery pipeline
- 2 State Hwy Bridges (Hwy 161 & 165)
- 3.5 miles of earthen canal
- 3 Secondary Delivery Pumps
- 8.5 miles of Indian Bayou Ditch/Wabbaseka Bayou Cleanout

GRAND PRAIRIE

- \$25M in OnFarm conservation measures
- Inlet Channel from White River
- Pumping Station with all 6 pumps
- Discharge pipes
- Storage Reservoir with control gate structure
- First 2 mile of earthen canal
- First county road crossing (Downs Rd)
- 11 miles of earthen channel
- Power to the Pump Station
- County Road Relocation



Arkansas PL-566 Projects

Improve Water Quantity, Quality, Ag Water Supply, Flood Prevention

Total Federal Investment is **\$211,131,924** million dollars in existing multi-year projects that aim to build vital infrastructure

- Grand Prairie Irrigation Project
- Bayou Meto Irrigation Project
- West Fork of the White River Watershed Project
- Departee Creek Watershed Project
- AMBA Projects
- Other Projects





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Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) & Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Updates

Dianne Schlenker
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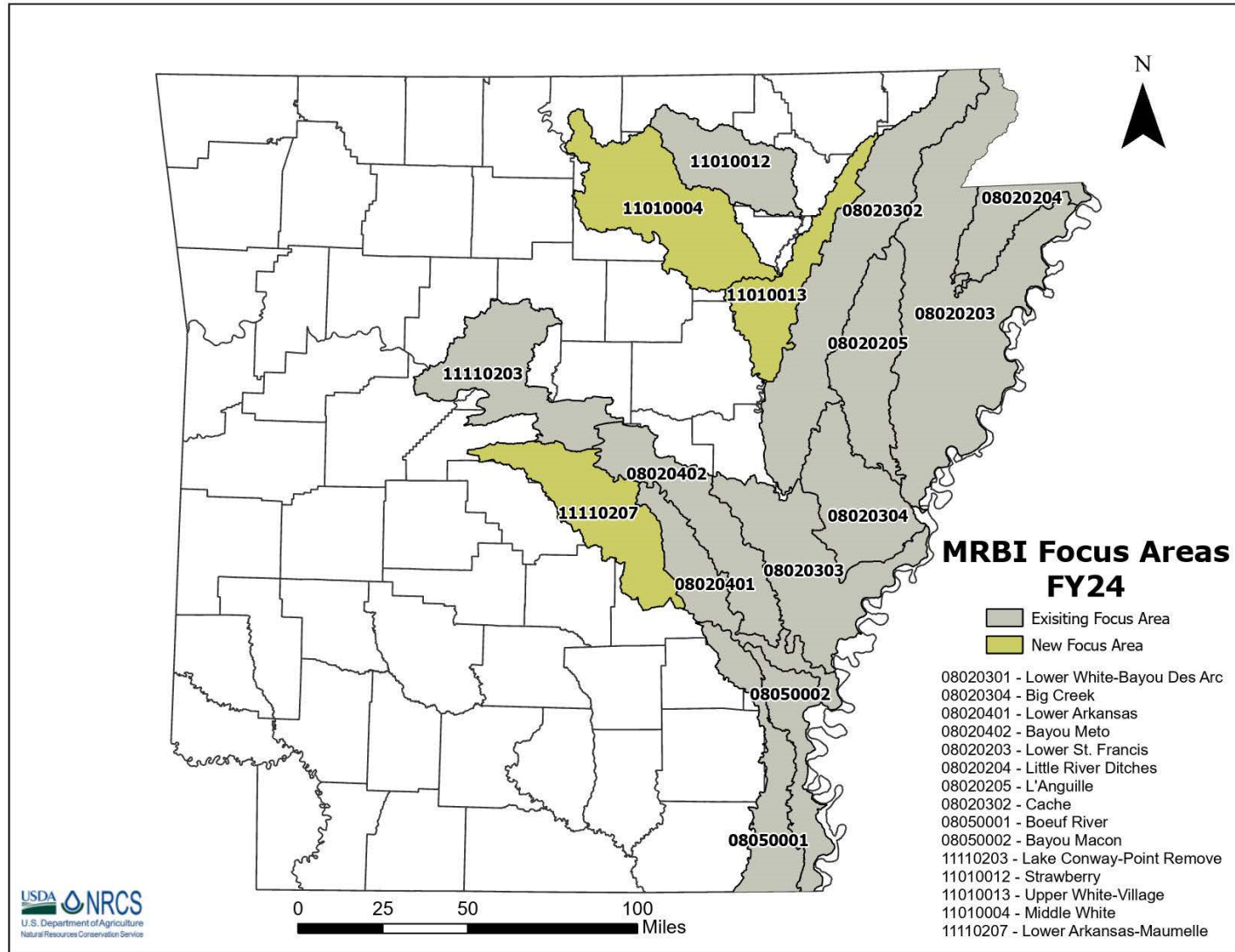


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Priority Watersheds



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2 Phase Process

Readiness Phase: First year fact finding-gather information through the watershed assessment.

Implementation Phase:

Second year starts managing the program with funding cycles for conservation practices



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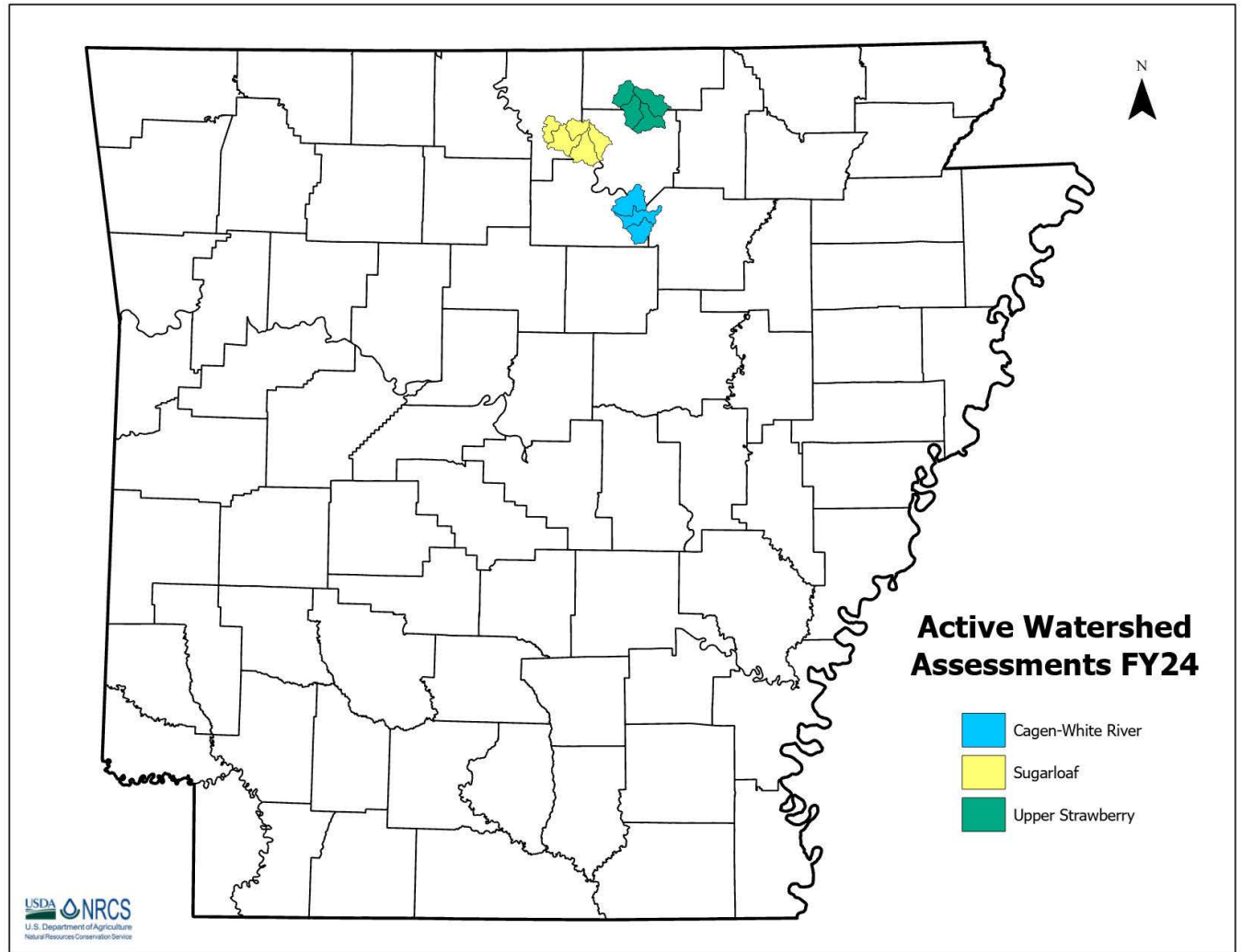
Watershed Assessments for FY24

Cagen Creek-White River

Sugarloaf

Note: Cagen Creek and Sugarloaf are from Middle White

Upper Strawberry



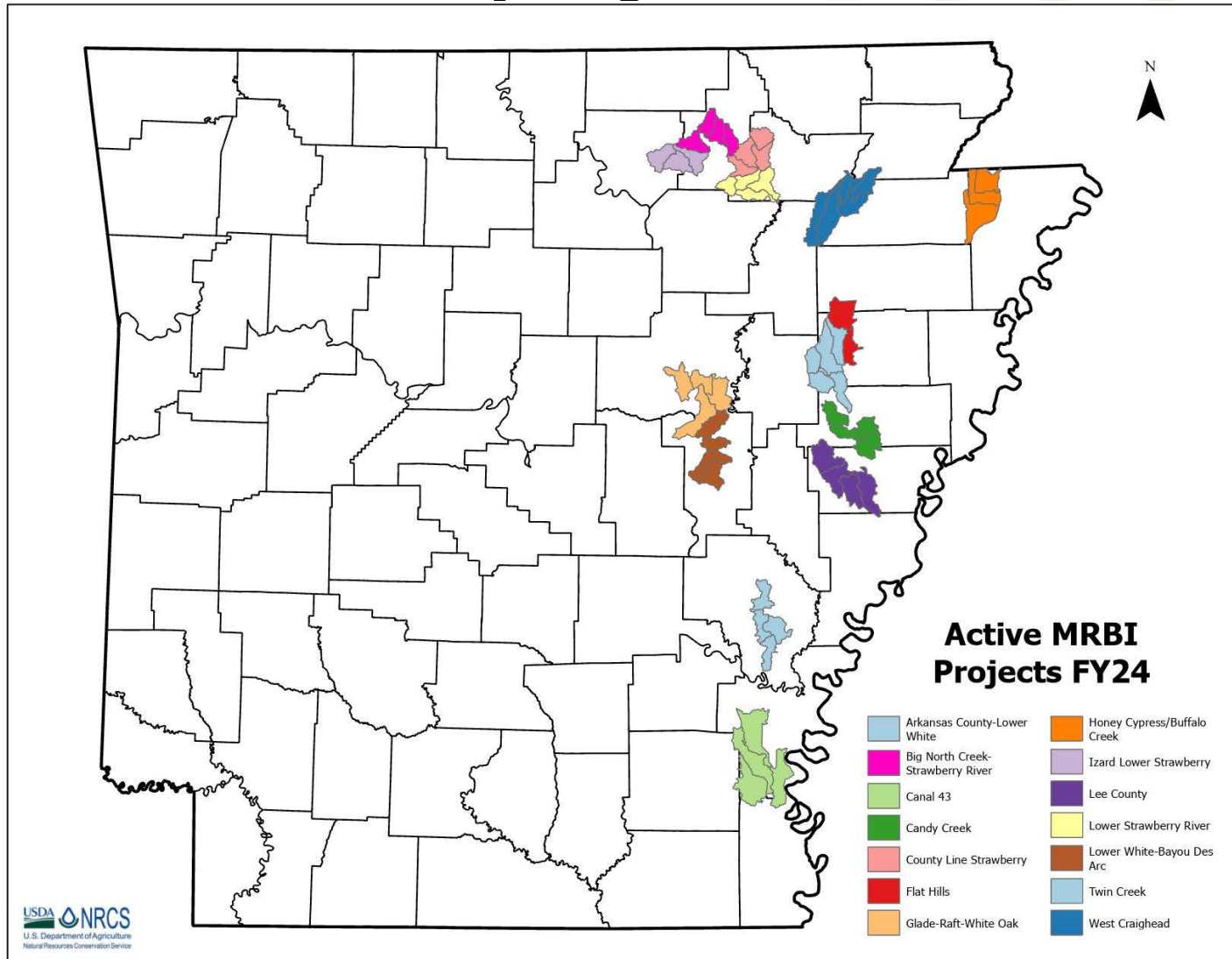
Implementation Phase

Multi year managing program

- 4 year budget
- EQIP and CSP
- Financial Assistance for EQIP 75/25
- Concentrates on system approach using core and supporting practices
- Adaptive management
- Targets producers in the watershed
- Outreach is on going
- Goals are developed with obtainable outcomes
- Partner support through in-kind or cash



MRBI projects for FY24



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MRBI Implementation Phase Funding

MRBI Project	Life of Project	EQIP for FY24	Allocated with 21.9% Reduction
Candy Creek	FY2021-FY2024	\$500,140	\$500,140.00
Canal 43	FY2021-FY2024	\$1,500,003	\$1,171,502.34
Twin Creek	FY2021-FY2024	\$1,270,516	\$992,273.00
Izard Lower Strawberry	FY2021-FY2024	\$300,000	\$300.000
County Line Strawberry	FY2022-FY2025	\$364,408	\$364,408.00
Flat Hills	FY2022-FY2025	\$666,428	\$666,428.00
Glade-Raft-White Oak Creek	FY2022-FY2025	\$1,323,400	\$1,033,575.40
Lee County	FY2022-FY2025	\$1,500,000	\$1,171,500.00
Lower White-Bayou Des Arc	FY2022-FY2025	\$1,846,417	\$1,442,051.68
West Craighead	FY2023-FY2026	\$1,504,825	\$1,175,268.33
Big North Creek- Strawberry	FY2023-FY2026	\$421,725	\$421,725.00
Arkansas County Lower White	FY2023-FY2026	\$1,416,826	\$1,106,541.11
Honey Cypress Buffalo	FY2024-FY2027	\$1,563,610	\$1,221,179.41
Lower Strawberry River	FY2024-FY2027	\$750,000	\$750,000





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Regional Conservation Partnership (RCPP) Update



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New NFO for RCPP – April 3, 2024

Funding availability-\$1.5 Billion



Webinar April 23rd and May 30th

Apply through RCPP portal

Maximum funding \$25 million

Deadline-July 2, 2024 3:59 pm CST.



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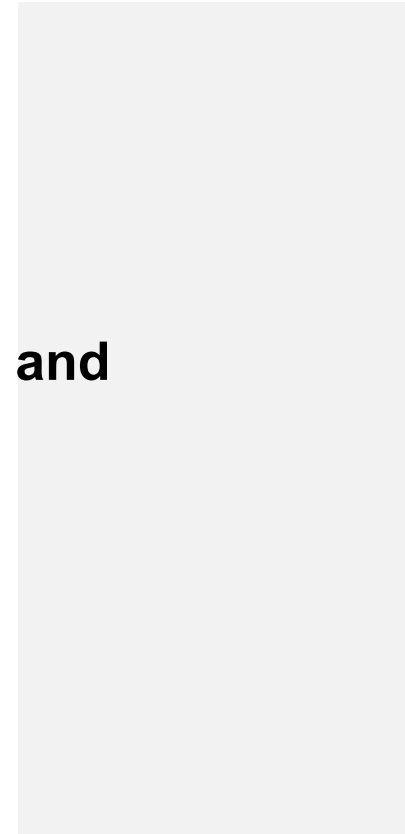
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RCPP



Partner Program Agreement (PPA)

- 5 year budget
- Stand alone program
- Financial Assistance options
- Encourage system approach using core and supporting practices that meet NRCS standards and specs.
- Adaptive management
- Targets producers in the watershed
- Outreach is on going
- Goals are developed with obtainable outcomes
- Partner support through in-kind or cash
- Ranking is through CART

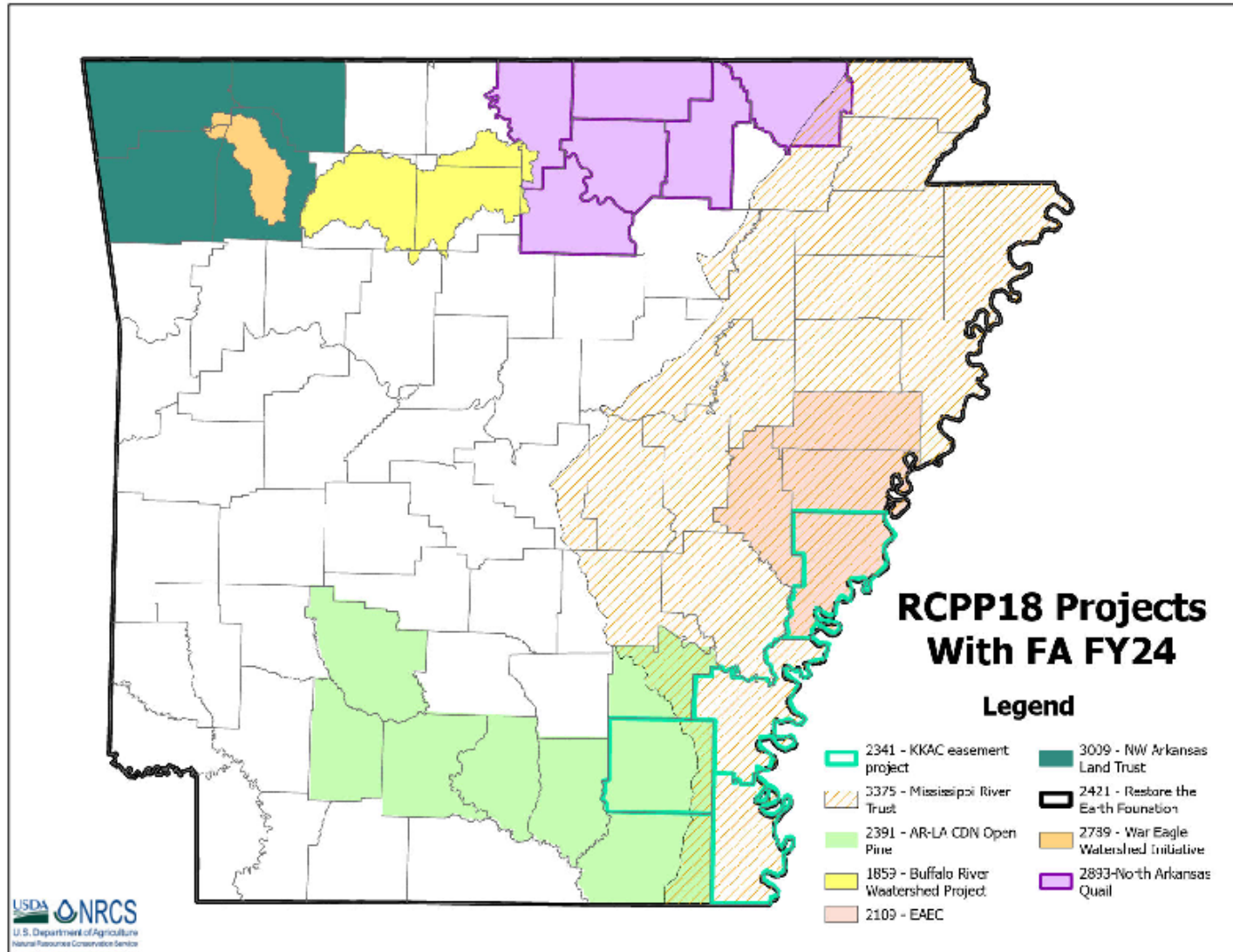


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FY24 RCPP Projects Receiving FA



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FY24 AR RCPP Project Funding



Project Name	Project Type	FY24 Funding	Payment Rate
Buffalo River Watershed Enhancement Project	Land Management	\$400,000	75/25
East Arkansas Delta Regional Conservation	Land Management	\$2,800,000	75/25
North Arkansas Quail Focal Landscape Renewal	Land Management	\$248,000	75/25
AR LA CDN Open Pine Landscape Restoration *	Land Management	\$619,500	60/40
KKAC AR MS Conservation & Social Consortium *	Easement	\$838,000	PPA signed SA signed
Restore the Earth – Pilot Private Sector Investment *	Easement	\$1,973,334	PPA signed SA signed
War Eagle Watershed Initiative	Land Management	\$800,000	75/25
Conjunctive Water Use Protects Mid-South Aquifers	Land Management	No funding but continued work	
Totals		\$3,200,413	

Proposals Awarded



Partner	Project Type	Funds Requested	Funding Pool
Mississippi River Trust	Easements	\$25 million	CCA
Restore the Earth	Easements	\$25 million	CCA
Northwest Arkansas Land Trust	Easements	\$650,000	State/Multi State
Working with partners toward PPA by May 18 th .			





Buffalo River Watershed Enhancement Project

- Description: Collaborate with interested farmers and landowners to increase agricultural sustainability by implementing voluntary conservation practices within the Buffalo River Watershed. Objectives: 1) Collaborate with local farmers, landowners and community leaders in priority watersheds to identify resource concerns and conservation practices to improve farm sustainability and water quality. 2) Reduce sediment and nutrient loads to the Buffalo River by providing technical and financial assistance to implement practices that improves pasture and nutrient management, restore eroding streambanks to prevent loss of pastureland and reduce maintenance costs and sediment loads from erosion of unpaved roads. 3) Assist interested landowners conserve key conservation lands to prevent future erosion and nutrient loads in the Buffalo River watershed.
- Lead Partner: The Nature Conservancy
- Total FA Funding: \$2,000,000.00





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Quick Comparison of the Landscape Initiatives

Activities	RCPP	MRBI	NWQI
Partner Involvement	yes	yes	yes
Contribution (in kind/cash)	yes-required	yes-encouraged	yes-encouraged
Desired 1 to 1 match	yes	no	no
Length of Project in years	5 year agreement	4 years	4 years
Resource Concerns	all	Water Quality/Quantity	Water Quality
Practices	all	approved MRBI list	approved NWQI list
Targeting land treatment	yes	yes	yes
Required Reporting by partner	Heavy	Moderate to Light	no
NRCS driven	no	yes	yes
Partner driven	yes	no	no
Portal access-computer	yes	no	no
DUNS/SAM number needed	yes	no	no
Support letters from partners	yes	no	no
Input on CART/Ranking	yes	yes	yes
Development of Agreements PPA/SA	yes	no	no
Land Activity Type	Land management	EQIP/CSP	EQIP
Land Use Type	all	cropland/pastureland	cropland, pastureland, woodland
Source water protection sources identified	yes	yes	yes
Eligible area	whole state	12 digit HUCs from focus map	identified watersheds
Eligible funds available	\$25 million limit	based on assessment	based on assessment
Financial assistance rate	usually 75/25	75/25	60/40
Required watershed assessment	no	yes	yes
HU consideration	yes	yes	yes
Responsibility of measurable outcomes	Partner	NRCS	NRCS
Proposal development	Partner	NRCS with input from District	NRCS with input from District
Compete nationally	yes	yes between MRBI states	yes
Most flexible	yes	no	no
Innovative	yes	no	no
Align with State Nutrient Strategy Plan	no	yes	no
Multi county involvement	yes	yes	yes

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Questions?



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State Technical Committee Meeting Agenda
State Extension Office Building Auditorium
2301 South University, Little Rock, AR 72204
May 15th, 2024

In-person registration link: <https://forms.office.com/r/96wWJ7mvK1?origin=lprLink>

Virtual **Zoom** registration link: <https://bit.ly/Spring-2024-ASTCM-Zoom-Registration>

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Welcome & Opening Remarks

Mike Sullivan

Subcommittee Reports (*max 8 mins each*)

Grassland

Jeremy Huff

Water Quality

Mary Clayton

Soil Health

Keith Scoggins

Alternative Crops

Troyce Barnett

Water Quantity

Rodney Wright

Energy

Britt Hill

Wildlife

Canton Ford

Forestry

Doug Akin

Urban Conservation

Katy Brantley

Outreach, Equity, and Inclusion

Alvin Peer

Locally Led Workgroup Training Efforts

Clyde Williams

Inflation Reduction Act Practice Update

Stephen Smedley

Lunch (11:30-12:15) Sponsored by AACD

FY 24 ACT NOW

Clyde Williams

Program Updates-

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Corey Cornelious

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Chris Stowers

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

Lori Barker

Partnership Programs (RCPP/MRBI)

Dianne Schlenker

Agriculture Conservation Easements Program (ACEP)

Alexis Cook

Watershed Programs

Randy Childress

Open Discussion

All Attendees

Closing Remarks & Adjourn

Mike Sullivan

	NAME	COMPANY	PHONE	EMAIL
1	Johnie Coleman	NRCS		
2	Amanda Mathis	NRCS		
3	Bill	W (C)		
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6	Mike Sullivan	NRCS		
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