

Spring Technical Committee Meeting Agenda

State Extension Office Building Auditorium
2301 South University, Little Rock, AR 72204
May 21st, 2026 9:00am – 2:00pm

Registration for in-person attendance: <https://bit.ly/In-Person-Registration-May-21-2026-STC>

Registration for ZOOM: <https://bit.ly/Zoom-Registration-May-21-2026-STC>

Welcome & Opening Remarks

Amanda Mathis, STC

Subcommittee Reports (*max 8 mins each*)

Grassland

Jeremy Huff

Water Quality

Mary Clayton

Soil Health

Keith Scoggins

Water Quantity

Rodney Wright

Energy

Britt Hill

Wildlife

Canton Ford

Forestry

Doug Akin

Alternative Crop

Troyce Barnett

Small Scale/Urban

Katy Brantley

Program Updates -

Partnership Programs (RCPP)

Katy Brantley

2026 Program Working Land Program updates

Clyde Williams

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Michela Martin

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Corey Cornelious

Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP) -

Let's Dig into the Details

Keith Scoggins

Rainfall Simulator Demonstration (outside) –

Cropland Plot Simulation

Keith Scoggins

Pasture Plot Simulation

Jeremy Huff

Lunch – Provided by Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts

Agriculture Conservation Easements Program (ACEP)

Alexis Cook

Watershed Programs

Stephen Smedley/Bill Kinkaid

Open Discussion

All Attendees

Closing Remarks & Adjourn

Amanda Mathis

Arkansas Democrat Gazette

Account #: ADCL1350024

Company: USDA-NRCS

700 W Capitol Ave Ste 3416

Little Rock, AR 72201-3215

Ad number #: 595501

PO #:

Matter of: committee meeting

AFFIDAVIT • STATE OF ARKANSAS

I, Charles A. McNeice Jr., do solemnly swear that I am the Business Manager of the **Arkansas Democrat-Gazette**, a daily newspaper printed and published in PULASKI county, State of ARKANSAS; that I was so related to this publication at and during the publication of the annexed legal advertisement in the matter of :

committee meeting

Pending in the court, in said County, and at the dates of the several publications of said advertisement stated below, and that during said periods and at said dates, said newspaper was printed and had a bona fide circulation in said County, that said newspaper had been regularly printed and published in said county, and had a bona fide circulation therein for the period of one month before the date of the first publication of said advertisement; and that said advertisement was published in the regular daily issues of said newspaper as stated below.

And that there is due or has been paid the **Arkansas Democrat-Gazette** for publication the sum of \$53.38.
(Includes \$0.00 Affidavit Charge).

*ADG Arkansas Democrat-Gazette 05/03/26; ADG.com 05/03/26; NWA Democrat Gazette 05/03/26;
NWA nwaonline.com 05/03/26*



Business Manager

State of ARKANSAS, County of PULASKI, Subscribed and sworn to before me on this 4th day of May, 2026


NOTARY PUBLIC

DEANNA GRIFFIN
PULASKI COUNTY
NOTARY PUBLIC – ARKANSAS
My Commission Expires February 19, 2036
Commission No. 00009724

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service will host a hybrid State Technical Committee meeting Monday, Nov. 9, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m., at the State Extension Office Building Auditorium located at South University, in Little Rock. In-person participants can register via the provided link for an accurate lunch count: <https://bit.ly/4tCnvAJ>. Virtual participants are encouraged to register with the following link: <https://bit.ly/3P2VJ2D>. The meeting will begin at 9:00 a.m. Main agenda items include:

- Program Updates
- Regenerative Pilot Program
- Agriculture Conservation Easement Program

State Technical Committee meetings are open to the public. If you require special accommodation, contact Roger Cousins, 501-301-3162, 5955011.

In-person total: 43



Alexis	Cook	Alexis.cook@usda.gov
Alvin	Peer	alvin.peer
Austin	Coleman	austin_coleman@cotton.senate.gov
Barbara	Erby	berby1957@hotmail.com
Bill	Kinkaid	william.kinkaid@usda.gov
Britt	Hill	joseph.hill@usda.gov
Burthel	Thomas	burthelthomas@hotmail.com
Caleb	Renfroe	caleb.renfroe@usda.gov
Canton	Ford	canton.ford@usda.gov
Clyde	Williams	clyde.williams@usda.gov
Cody	Burkham	cody.burkham@mail.house.gov
Connie	Coleman	colemanconnie0@gmail.com
Connie	Coleman	consuelo.coleman@usda.gov
Corey	Nelson	corey.nelson@usda.gov
Corey	Cornelious	corey.cornelious@usda.gov
Debbie	Moreland	debbiepinreal@aol.com
Emily	Woodall	ewoodall@usarice.com
Garrick	Dugger	Garrick.Dugger@agfc.ar.gov
Gene	Higginbotham	gene.higginbotham@mail.house.gov
Jeff	Fore	jfore@tnc.org
jeff	powelson	jpowelson@abcbirds.org
Jeremy	Huff	jeremy.huff@usda.gov
Josh	Hankins	jhankins@usarice.com
Kanesha	Griffiths	Kanesha.Griffiths@ar.nacdn.net
Karen	Thompson	karen.thompson2@usda.gov
Karl	VanDevender	karl.vandevender@arkansas.gov
Katharine	Huggins	khuggins@abcbirds.org
Katharine	Huggins	khuggins@abcbirds.org
Katy	Brantley	katy.brantley@usda.gov
Keith	Scoggins	keith.scoggins@usda.gov
Kelly	Robbins	kelly@arkansasrice.org
Kennard	Williams	kennard.williams@usda.gov
Keri	Neal	keri.neal@usda.gov
Mary	Clayton	mary.clayton2@usda.gov
Mary	Sanders	msanders@usarice.com
Marya	Bunch	bunchmarya5@gmail.com

Megan	Perkins	megan.m.perkins@arkansas.gov
Monica	Hancock	monica.hancock@arkansas.gov
Morgan	Morrissett	morgan.morrissett@usda.gov
Rebecca	Fox	rebecca.fox@usda.gov
Reginald	Jackson	REGINALD.JACKSON@USDA.GOV
Rodney	Wright	rodney.wright@usda.gov
Rodney	Wright	rodney.wright@usda.gov
Shanon	Griffin	shanon.griffin@usda.gov
Stephen	Smedley	stephen.smedley@usda.gov

Zoom Registrations – 18 total

Registrants for '2026 Spring Hybrid Arkansas State Technical Committee Meeting'

Search by name or email		
Cancel Registration Resend Confirmation Email		
☐ Registrants	Email Address	Registration Date
☐ Michael Tucker	michael_tucker79@yahoo.com	May 19, 2026 02:42 PM
☐ Marshall Hancock	marshall.hancock@usda.gov	May 19, 2026 11:52 AM
☐ Janie Williams	jwill0566@sbcglobal.net	May 16, 2026 08:12 PM
☐ Natalie Forster	natalieforster@gmail.com	May 15, 2026 11:36 AM
☐ Joycelyn Thielemier	chickjet@yahoo.com	May 13, 2026 09:14 PM
☐ Chris Culver	chris.culver@usda.gov	May 13, 2026 01:21 PM
☐ Andrew Grobmyer	andrew.grobmyer@agcouncil.net	May 13, 2026 10:42 AM
☐ Mike Sullivan	mikesullivan@sullivanassoc.com	May 13, 2026 10:25 AM
☐ Jimmie Kersh	Chickamauganationar@protonmail.com	May 13, 2026 10:24 AM
☐ Rick Spargo	waterhoginc@outlook.com	May 13, 2026 09:53 AM
☐ Joseph Schafer	joseph.schafer@winrock.org	May 13, 2026 09:03 AM
☐ Brittany Singleton	bltsingleton@gmail.com	May 8, 2026 11:46 AM
☐ Loren Labusch	loren.labusch@arkansas.gov	May 6, 2026 08:43 AM
☐ Brie Lusk	brie.lusk@arkansas.gov	May 6, 2026 08:16 AM
☐ John McAlpine	jmc Alpine@kingwoodforestry.com	Apr 30, 2026 09:48 AM
☐ Kittilea Jackson	kittilea.jackson@kkac.org	Mar 3, 2026 08:47 AM
☐ Troyce Barnett	troyce.barnett@usda.gov	Mar 2, 2026 02:49 PM
☐ Tate Wentz	tate.wentz@arkansas.gov	Mar 2, 2026 02:23 PM

NRCS State Technical Committee

9:00am Thursday, May 21, 2026

U of A Cooperative Extension Office, Little Rock, AR

Agenda attached

Meeting called to order by Roger Cousins, NRCS Asst. State Conservationist-Partnerships at 9:00am.

Members present: Sign in sheet & Zoom participants

Welcome and Opening Remarks – Amanda Mathis, State Conservationist

- Thanked the group for their participation and reinforced the need for input so help NRCS meet the landowners needs and be “Farmers First”
- Reviewed the Roundtable Discussion Groups which provided input on practices, programs and other potential areas of concern
- Financial Report – good year for Arkansas for funding for EQIP, CSP and Working Lands for Wildlife, Amanda described FY25 funding and what to expect in FY26
- NRCS leadership is conducting a due diligence review of all active agreements which is putting a pause on all new agreements to ensure oversight and agency goals
 - The review is expected to be completed by mid July
- USDA has announced that Colton Buckley is now the NRCS Chief.
 - Background in conservation and described his vision for the future as relayed so far
 - Background includes family in Cattle in Texas
 - A focus on locally led conservation

Subcommittee Reports

- **Grassland Subcommittee** – Jeremy Huff, Grazing Specialist
- Recommendations:
 - #1 - Recommendation – Payment rates need to be aligned more appropriately if changes will be made by NHQ/Regional offices. The payment rates that were used in 2025 were more realistic to the specification requirements.
 - #2 – Recommendation – Use the electric fence payment scenarios of previous years than what has been told to use for 2026 from NHQ/Regional offices.

- #3 – Recommendation – Add the payment scenario “woven wire” back into the EQIP/CSP cost list for all future financial assistance opportunities.
- **Water Quality** – Mary Clayton, NRCS
- **Recommendation:** Prioritization of CPS 336 (Soil Carbon Amendment – Biochar)
The committee recommends that CPS 336 (Soil Carbon Amendment – Biochar) be designated as a high-priority conservation practice at the state level and explicitly recognized as a source water protection practice.
 - Given its dual benefits for source water protection and soil health, CPS 336 represents a cost-effective, scalable intervention consistent with NRCS priorities.
- Source Water Protection
 - 2025, recommended to add additional HUCs but nothing this year
 - Code 360 – Waste Facility Closure to remain a high priority practice
- MRBI – 13 projects state wide for MRBI-EQIP but working on preapprovals - \$6 million for 5 projects in MRBI-CSP
 - MRBI - \$154 million obligated over 15 years, lifetime of the MRBI program
- Edge of Field Monitoring – 3 new projects
 - Phillips, Arkansas & Jefferson
 - Arkansas only state funded in FY25
- **Soil Health** – Keith Scoggins, State Agronomist
 - **Recommendation** for reduced til and no-til but based on the percent of residue of left was unfeasible as determined by eco sciences staff and State Conservationist.
 - Arkansas Soil Health Alliance – letter to Arkansas Plant Board to remove Sun hemp from the noxious and invasive species list.
 - Economic study at ASU with Smith Farm – data is being processed and hopefully available for distribution in Fall 2026
- **Water Quantity** – Rodney Wright
 - 2026 Arkansas Drought – 63% of the state is in a drought
 - Farmers have been unable to fill their irrigation reservoir in many examples
 - Partner Reports
 - Working Lands for Wildlife-Aquatic Connectivity Initiative / Conservation Delivery Network – Canton Ford, State Biologist, NRCS
 - Canton Ford – reported that Joy Wasson was hired under a grant agreement to work on watershed management. Also, noted that if

anyone wanted to participate in that committee, please let Canton know.

- CommuniTree Project, Phase II – Joy Wasson, Coordinator, Arkansas Forests and Drinking Water Collaborative
- Poultry Registration / Liquid Waste Facility - Monica Hancock, Agriculture Program Coordinator, Natural Resources Division, Arkansas Department of Agriculture
 - Provided an overview of the poultry registration which is online
 - New questions added to determine if water usage is ground water, surface water or rural water
 - Nutrient Applicator Certification module being worked on with Spring 2027 due date (private or commercial Nutrient Applicators)
 - Washington County Extension Office is the first class on April 28, 2026 at 1:00pm. Registration required.
 - Provided an overview of the various programs managed by ADA-Natural Resources Division
- Drainage Partnership Work – Blake Caldarera, Agriculture Drainage Project Manager, The Nature Conservancy in Arkansas
 - Upper Cache Drainage Project
 - Stressed the importance of working with local Irrigation and Drainage Districts in partnership.
- Water Quality/Quantity Research – Mike Daniels, Distinguished Professor, Extension Soil and Water Conservation; Associate Department Head – Extension, University of Arkansas.
 - Biochar with poultry litter research project
 - Must sign up producers to participate
 - Bill Haak has multiple soil sensors on his dairy operation
 - Potassium is being lost especially in the winter month which could impact the economic impact of the yields
- Irrigation Water Management Updates – Mike Hamilton, Irrigation Instructor, University of Arkansas; Irrigation Water Management Specialist, NRCS
- AGWI and ARS Research Updates, Michele Reba, Research Hydrologist, Delta Water Management Research Unit
- Pitless Tailwater Recovery / Irrigation Contest – Chris Henry, Professor and Water Management Engineer, University of Arkansas.

- Arkansas Water Plan and 319 Update – Blake Forrest, Biologist Supervisor/Expert, Natural Resources Division, Arkansas Department of Agriculture
- Groundwater Update – Corbin Cannon, Geology Supervisor, Natural Resources Division, Arkansas Department of Agriculture
- Bayou Meto Construction/Pumping Update – Edward Swaim, Executive Director, Bayou Meto Water Management District
- **Recommendation #1** - to pursue additional funding for IWM Technicians and need to review the IWM agreements
- **Recommendation #2** - Alternate Wetting and Drying practice was recommended to HQ to restore Code 449, Scenario #10
- Submit Practices 374 and 449 for high-priority designation.
- AGWI - Phase 1 & Phase 2 are prioritized in the ranking system
- Practice Code for Biochar moved to the Approved Conservation Practices
- Recommendation #4 - Investigate creation of a new telemetry/irrigation device category or CEMA activity. (All practices under one category)
- **Energy** – Stephen Smedley, State Engineer (Britt Hill – Chair)
 - Thermal Dehydrator for deceased poultry
 - Included in FY25
 - Smaller footprint
 - Encouraging Technical Service Providers to do checkouts (CPS 900 Series)
 - Payment benefits
 - Experienced individuals performing the completion of the CPS
 - Suggestion from State Engineer
 - Diversify subcommittee to not focus exclusively on poultry operations and work with irrigation pump transformation from diesel to electric -energy resource concern
- **Forestry Subcommittee** – Canton Ford (Doug Akin, Chair)
 - 612 Tree Establishment Standard adjustments
 - Criteria –
 - Determine desired stocking levels for trees and/or shrubs based on landowner objectives and ecological characteristics of the site and species
 - Request – modify 612 Specifications to include:
 - Language presented in the power point

- Potential sites should be assessed by a forester to determine applicable resource concerns that could be treated with tree/shrub establishment. Harvested sites over 3 years old that have already received natural regeneration should be assessed to determine if the regenerated species are adapted to the site and meet an adequate stocking guideline that supports the desired ecological function. If found to have met the above criteria, then the stand should be managed as is. Refer to 666- Forest stand improvement for management options to alter species composition and density if needed. If the stand does not meet the above criteria, then use of Tree/Shrub Site Preparation, code 490, and Tree/shrub Establishment should be planned according to the guidelines below.
 - George Rheinhardt – noted that originally the rule was “you can’t kill a tree to plant a tree”. Wants to keep the options open to allow landowners to decide what is desirable for their long-term goals.
 - Web Soil Survey, etc. should be considered when making recommendations
- Wildlife – Canton Ford, State Biologist
 - Presented updated practice standards and specifications
 - CP 390 Riparian Herbaceous Cover
 - Scenario 3 Grass
 - Scenario 4 Native Grass and Forbs
 - Scenario 5 Specialized See
 - Scenario 8 Plugging and Seeding
 - CP 420 Wildlife Habitat Planting
 - Scenario 225
 - Scenario 279
 - Scenario 348
 - CP 422 – Hedgerow Planting
 - Scenario 24 Grasses for Poultry House Air Quality Mitigation
 - Scenario 25 Wildlife Hedgerow, High labor
 - Scenario 26 Wildlife Hedgerow, Low labor
 - Interim CP 828 – Wildlife Habitat Site Preparation
 - Scenario 1 High Intensity
 - Scenario 2 Low Intensity
 - Scenario 3 Mechanical, Stale Seed Bed
 - Canton Ford - Asked the group for pro/con feedback about the practice documents, planning the practice, working with landowners, and implementing the practice.
 - CP420 – Wildlife Habitat Planting will be split moving site prep out of it

FY26 High Priority Practices

- Practice 360 Waste Facility Closure
- Practice 390 Riparian Herbaceous Cover
- Practice 391 Riparian Forest Buffer
- Practice 449 Irrigation Water Management
- **Recommendation** - Practice 643 – Restoration of Rare and Declining Natural Communities – Dropped based on following recommendation
 - Bubba Groves recommended that 643 be dropped.
- Practice 828 Wildlife Habitat Site Preparation
- Conservation Delivery Network – Ted Zawislak
 - Goal is go incorporate nontraditional stakeholders working together
- Open Pines Restoration Successes
 - Austin Klais reported on the RCPP projects currently in place which goes from Little Rock to Alexandria, LA
 - Partners include American Bird Conservancy, U of A, AGFC & USGS
 - Laura Luther -leluther@uark.edu
 - Quantify the responses of quail abundance
 - Summer 2025 & 2026 – Data Collection
 - Point Counts
 - 3 minute counts to record birds in 400 m radius
 - Abundance data
 - Unthinned Site changed to a Thinned Site
 - Grassland and Scrub Birds studied
 - Challenges include lack of documentation by landowners on management practices
- Wholesale Nursery Startup in NLR - Trey Rosenbaum
 - Focus on native plants
 - Arkansas – do we have a Native Grass Group?
 - Will be industry standards
 - Plugs run \$1 - \$2 per plus with 162 per tray
 - Primarily grasses, forbes will be the main focus based on demand
- Central Arkansas Tree Planting Tree Project – John Pennington
 - Available for businesses, landowners, city parks, etc.
 - Perry, Pulaski, Saline, Faulkner, Grant & Lonoke area in the approved area
 - Ask folks to let them know what type of trees they would like to have
 - Currently the plants come from the Arkansas Forestry Division but from nearby states previously
 - Objectives:
 - Community Beautification
 - Support Wildlife habitat
 - Sequester carbon dioxide
 - Improve watershed health

- Treeplantingproject@uada.edu
- Joy Wasson was hired to work part time on a variety of watershed issues

Alternative Crop Subcommittee – Troyce Barnett (on Zoom)

- Committee focused on compost bins
- TSP has been certified to work on organic conservation plans as well as NMP and RCPP

Small Scale/Urban – Katy Brantley, RCPP Coordinator

- Combining with the Alternative Crop Subcommittee was decided

Partnership Program (RCPP) – Katy Brantley, Initiative Coordinator

- Four signups currently
 - War Eagle Creek Watershed Initiative
 - 5 applications for \$244,000
 - North AR Quail Focal Landscape Renewal Project
 - Intend to create early successional habitat
 - Described FY26 funding levels
 - Mid-South Development District Project
 - Project managed by Tennessee NRCS also includes MS, Crittenden Co for AR
 - FY26 – 7 pre-applications
 - \$1.1 million
 - Focus on soil health with cover crops for year 1
 - AR-LA CDN Open Pine Landscape Restoration
 - AR-LA West Gulf Coastal Plain
 - American Bird Conservancy is the lead partner
 - FY26 - \$6 million
 - Project are in high priority locations, create or add to at least 245 acres treated in open pine conditions
 - Many include bird monitoring and go to 50 basal area or less
 - FY26 Notice of Funding Opportunity
 - Anticipating release on NOFO soon
 - Some changes to proposal questions
 - Condensed application and review timeline
 - Start getting together now
- **2026 Program Working Land Program updates – Clyde Williams**
 - In the past we have had more than 100 ranking pools for both EQIP and CSP during one fiscal year.
 - The large number of pools allowed NRCS to approve applications
 - Currently we six pools
 - For FY AR has four EQIP and two CSP Pools

- FY2026 EQIP Pool
 - NW, SW, NE and SE Ranking Pools
- CSP Ranking Pools
 - General (AgLand) and Non-Industrial Forest Land
- How is it going (Ranking Pools)
 - Field office perspective
 - Less time to rank assessments/applications
 - Adjustment to lower ranking scores
 - No more “Partially funded” applications
- State Office Perspective
 - It now takes more time to select applications for funding’
 - Adjustment to balancing funds/funds codes
 - No more “Partially funded” applications
- CSP Activities
 - Unique enhancement codes (“E” codes) no longer used
 - Overall perspective
 - Now utilizing only conservation practices in addition to EAP being capped/limited to \$4000 beginning to see more additional activities being planned instead of X acres of only EAP planned
 - Some challenges differentiating EQIP vs. CSP
 - Management contracts with enhancements scheduled vs. ??
- **Conservation Stewardship Program** – Micheala Martin
 - Provided a list for FY2027
 - List is focused on the NRCS State Priority Resource Concerns
 - Asked that she be put on the Agenda for each subcommittee meeting in the Fall
 - Eight categories are listed on NRCS site
 - Refer to list provided
 - Each county will be assessed individually with a specific appropriation
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** – Corey Cornelious
 - Ranking was complicated but with the transition into FY26 but have planned on how it could be improved for the next FY
 - Ranking has been streamlined to make it easier and more time efficient for the field office staff
- **Agriculture Conservation Easements Program (ACEP)**
 - ALE- Agricultural Land Easements leverage local partnerships to match NRCS funding and local partners hold the easements and are responsible for the long-term stewardship of the easement.
 - Entities such as private and tribal landowners, land trusts and other entities such as state and local governments to protect the long-term viability of the nation’s food supply

- NRCS provide up to 50% of the purchase price of the easement and the remaining funding comes from either:
 - The eligible entity
 - Landowner donation
 - Land is still eligible for NRCS programs
- Landowner Eligibility
 - Own Ag-Land
 - USDA – FSA Farm records (farm and tract number)
 - HELC and Wetland compliant on all your land
 - AGI compliant (rolling 3-year average AGI less than \$900,000 annually)
 - Must have at least one of the following:
 - 50% prime or important soils as determined by a soils map
 - Contain historical or archaeological resources
 - Protects grazing uses and related conservation values
 - Further a state or local government policy consistent with the purposes of the ALE program.
 - Noted local government policy in Washington County, AR that is designed to protect ag land
- Additional Land Eligibility
 - Resources on the land must be ag-related
 - Land free from other easement or deed restrictions
 - Land free from title issues, hazardous materials or adverse land uses on-site
- Arkansas has one Program Agreement out for signature and a 2nd application we are processing now.
 - 2nd national ranking period that ends May 29, 2026 with ranking concluded by June 8th.

- **Watershed Programs – Bill Kinkaid**

- ABMA Projects in various stages - 17
 - 8 projects have authorized watershed plans
 - 9 projects approved
- Cache River
 - Execution of existing practices
 - PL566 likely involved in the future as part of the log jam solution
- Emergency Watershed Program FY26
 - Stone County - \$274,000
 - War Eagle Clifty - \$400,000
 - Pumpkin Hollow - \$85,000
 - Coon Creek - \$79, 000

- **Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP) – Keith Scoggins**

- Whole Farm Assessment

- EQIP Regen – supports a subset of land under control of the customer to be part of the application, therefore in conjunction with input from customer the planner will determine the extent of the whole farm
- CSP Regen – all of the land
- A complete assessment of all resource concerns is required with the goal of establishing a whole farm plan before the end of the contract period. Must meet NRCS planning criteria in the soil and water resource categories.
 - CSP – on at least one land use (crop, pasture and forest)
- Documentation of the resource concerns
- Conservation plan
 - Conservation Plan must span a minimum of 5 years
 - A minimum of one primary Regen Practice
 - Existing
 - Planned
 - Soil Health Testing 216 planned beginning and end of plan/contract
 - Demonstrates soil health level at the start and outcome at the end of 5 years
- Primary Practices
 - List of practices
 - Practice Implementation Requirements
 - The practice must meet all general requirements and additional criteria
- Soil Health Testing CEMA 216
 - Through the planning process customer should be encouraged to plan Soil Health Testing provide a sampling
 - Assessments that meet the pilot's requirement may be ranked in the categories
 - This is not the same soil test that is handled by Extension
 - 3 samples per field at \$150+ per sample - \$877 per landowner
 - Numerous individuals can qualify to take the sample but only a few labs can do the test due to requirements.
 - Soil and Water Conservation Concerns – defined by HQ
 - Soil testing at the end of the 5 years – option to upload the soil data
 - Program is voluntary
 - Designated funds are dedicated to this program

Open Discussion

- **Arkansas State Water Plan** – Megan Perkins, ADA-Natural Resource Division
 - Status – all partners are complying the data to be given back to NRD along with recommendations.
 - Public meetings will be held for public comments
- **New Arkansas Conservation Delivery Network** – September 15, 2026
 - Contact Canton Ford or Ryan Parker
- Mike Daniels noted that **Amanda Mathis** was written up in the 501 Magazine.
 - [501 LIFE Magazine | Amanda Mathis: The path to impact](#)

- TNC reported on the Master Irrigator Program – to support growers and noted that they will need resources and support.

Rainfall Simulator Demonstration – Jeremy Huff and Keith Scoggins

- Group left the building to see the demonstration outside
- Demonstration by the NRCS State Agronomist and NRCS State Grazing Specialist
- Showed the reduced sediment runoff in well managed systems vs poorly managed systems

Meeting adjourned at 1:30pm.

Respectfully submitted by Debbie Moreland, Acting Secretary.



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

SPRING 2026

STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

May 21, 2026

(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



TOTAL	97
In-person	26
On-line	71

AGENDA

9:30am Thursday, April 2, 2026

- I. Opening / Fall 2025 Minutes
- II. Partnership Reports ~ 9:35 AM
- III. Quality Business ~ 11:10 AM
- IV. Quantity Business ~ 11:30 AM
- V. Closing / Lunch ~ 11:55 AM

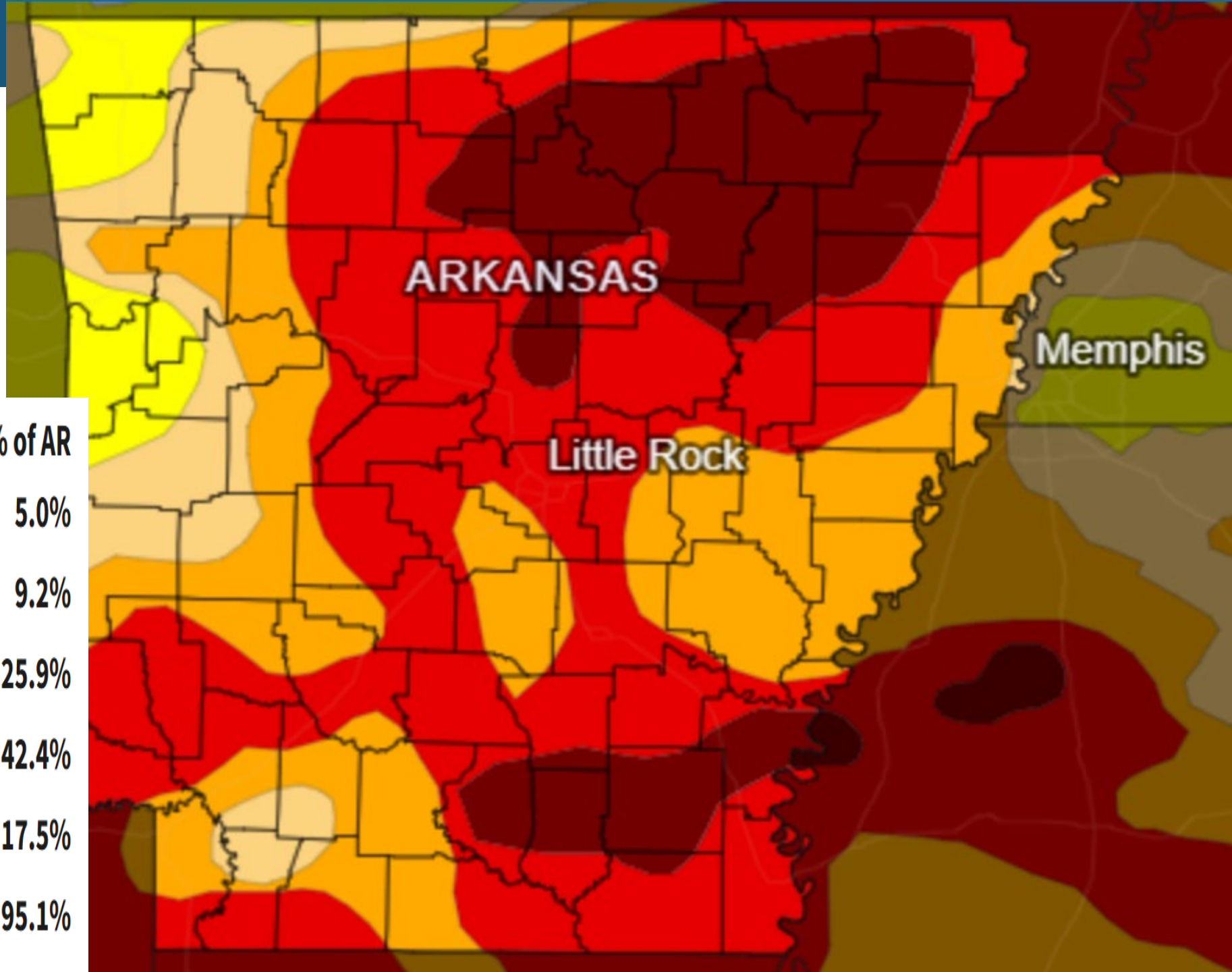
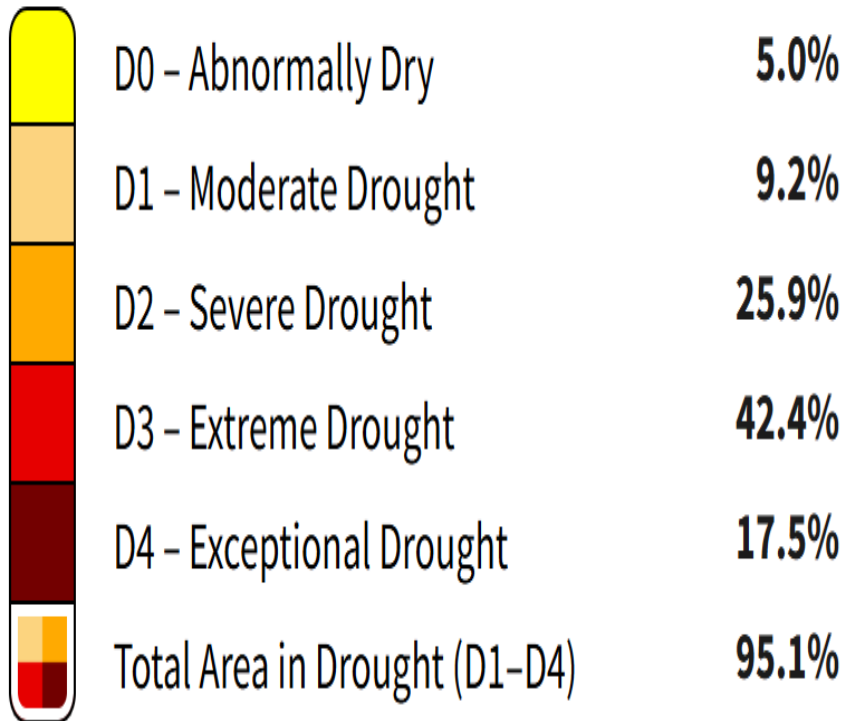


EARTH SETTING: View from Artemis II Mission, April 6, 2026



2026 Arkansas Drought

Drought & Dryness Categories





April 2026 Arkansas Drought

**NEA
Reservoirs**





PRESENTATIONS

1. **Canton Ford**, State Biologist, NRCS
2. **Joy Wasson**, Coordinator, Arkansas Forests and Drinking Water Collaborative
3. **Monica Hancock**, Agriculture Program Coordinator, Natural Resources Division, Arkansas Department of Agriculture
4. **Blake Calderera**, Agriculture Drainage Project Manager, The Nature Conservancy in Arkansas

PRESENTATIONS

5. **Mike Daniels**, Distinguished Professor, Extension Soil and Water Conservation; Associate Department Head – Extension, University of Arkansas.
6. **Mike Hamilton**, Irrigation Instructor, University of Arkansas; Irrigation Water Management Specialist, NRCS
7. **Michele Reba**, Research Hydrologist, Delta Water Management Research Unit
8. **Chris Henry**, Professor and Water Management Engineer, University of Arkansas.

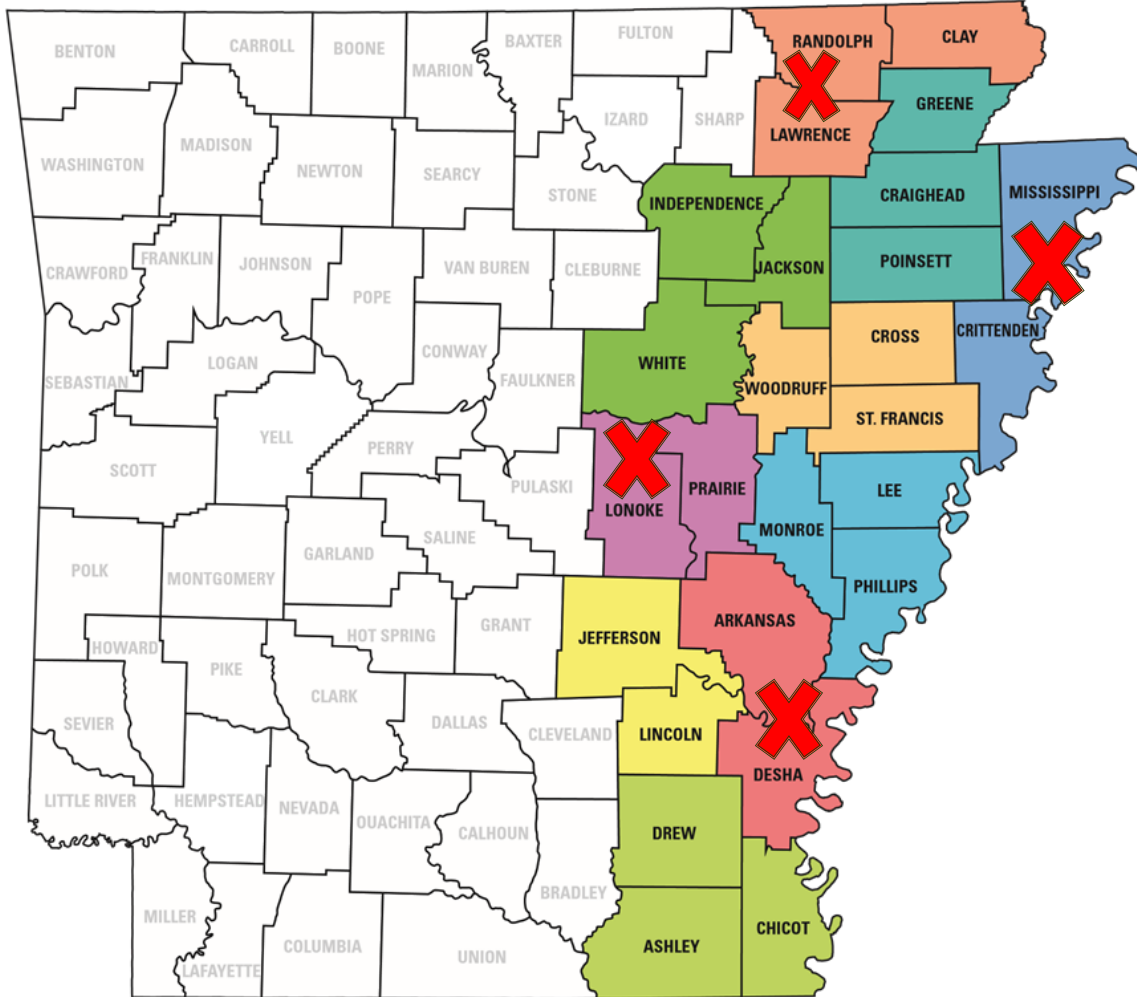


PRESENTATIONS

9. **Blake Forrest**, Biologist Supervisor/Expert, Natural Resources Division, Arkansas Department of Agriculture
10. **Corbin Cannon**, Geology Supervisor, Natural Resources Division, Arkansas Department of Agriculture
11. **Edward Swaim**, Executive Director, Bayou Meto Water Management District.



2026 Arkansas NRCS IWM Specialists



Clay, Lawrence,
Randolph

Abbey Andrews
Greene, Craighead,
Poinsett

Tyler Asberry
White, Jackson,
Independence

870-476-8862

870-805-1980

Madeline Belford
Lonoke, Prairie

Ronell Williams
Phillips, Lee,
Monroe

Hannah Alder
Jefferson, Lincoln

501-804-9603

870-753-2458

870-550-2778

Macy Morris
Cross, St. Francis,
Woodruff

Crittenden,
Mississippi

870-317-7346

870-362-1985

Arkansas, Desha

Parker Adams
Ashley, Drew,
Chicot

870-281-7479

Water Quantity Recommendation One



Following the discussion regarding the significant contributions of the IWM Specialists, the Subcommittee recommends that Arkansas NRCS encourage ANRD, to pursue additional financial support for the IWM Specialists.

- Current pay scale is similar to a GS-5 level
- Pay maxes out after 3 years unless adjusted in a new agreement.
- No COLA
- Mileage Reimbursement is fixed below the current state rate.
- **Average length of service: 2.3 years**



CIG

Conservation Innovation Grants

Conservation Innovation Grants No State CIGs in FY26 Waiting on National CIG Guidance



High Priority Practices (HPP)

- State Conservationists may designate up to 10 practices to be eligible
- 2018 Farm Bill allows States to provide increased payment rates for high-priority practices.
- **Address the conservation of water and declining aquifers** and mitigate drought.
- Other criteria:
 - high potential for conservation benefit but are underutilized
 - Specific geographic areas where a practice is historically underutilized

High Priority Practices (HPP)

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

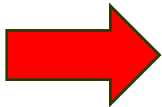
Submitted:

- 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

High Priority Practices (HPP)

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

Submitted:

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

FY27 High Priority Practices (HPP)

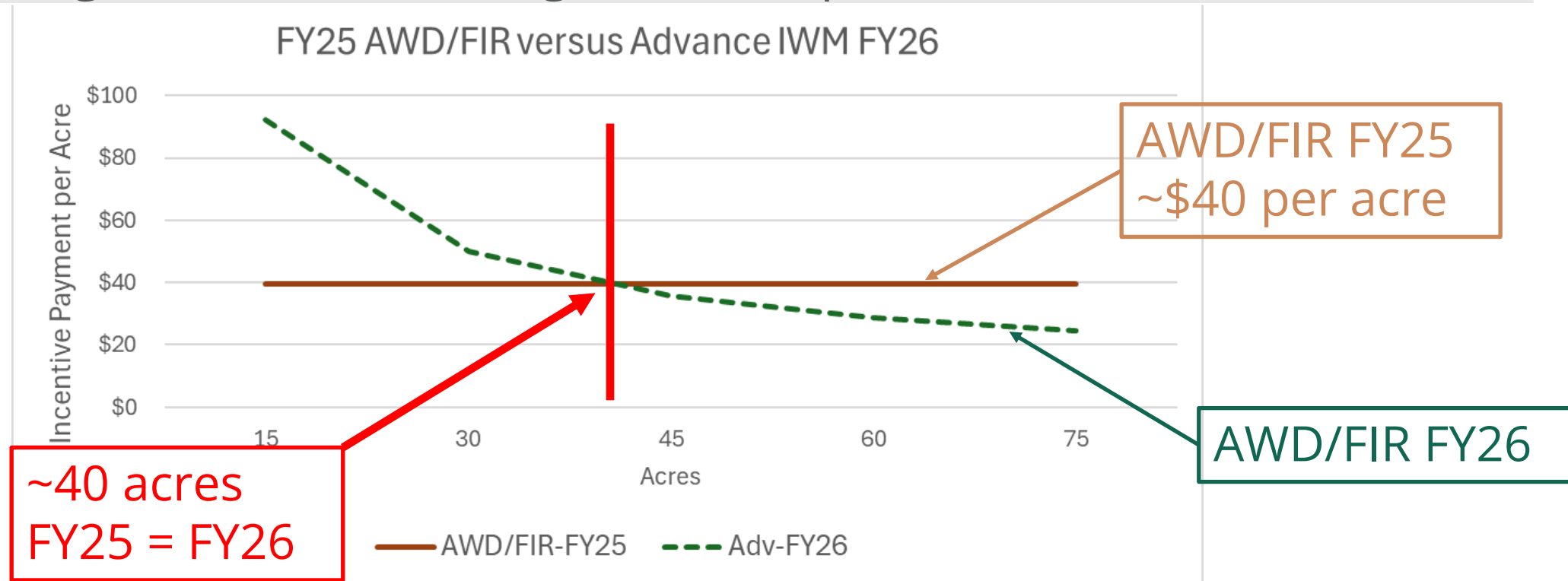
Submitted:

- **If restored**, 449 - Irrigation Water Management, Scenario 10, Rice Intermittent Flood All Season (AWD & Row Rice)
- 449 - Advanced IWM
- 374 - Advanced Pump Automation, Telemetry
- 449 - Soil Moisture Sensors, Telemetry
- 464 - Irrigation Land Leveling
- 447 - Irrigation and Drainage Tailwater Recovery
- 436 - Irrigation Reservoir
- 430 - Irrigation Pipeline

449-Scenario 10, Rice Intermittent Flood All Season - removed, encouraging its use under Advanced IWM

Advanced Irrigation Water Management, Base Cost, EACH.

Advanced Irrigation Water Management, Implementation Cost, ACRES



Water Quantity Recommendation Two

The Subcommittee recommends Arkansas NRCS encourage the National Programs staff to restore 449-IWM, Scenario #10, Rice Intermittent Flood All Season (AWD/FIR).

Irrigation Method	Number of On-Farm Measurements (N)	Average Applied Irrigation (inches)
Cascade	434	35.6
Multiple-Inlet Rice Irrigation (MIRI)	100	29.9
Zero-grade	36	22.6
MIRI + AWD	30	22.9
Furrow-irrigated	11	22.5
Zero-grade + AWD*	8	12

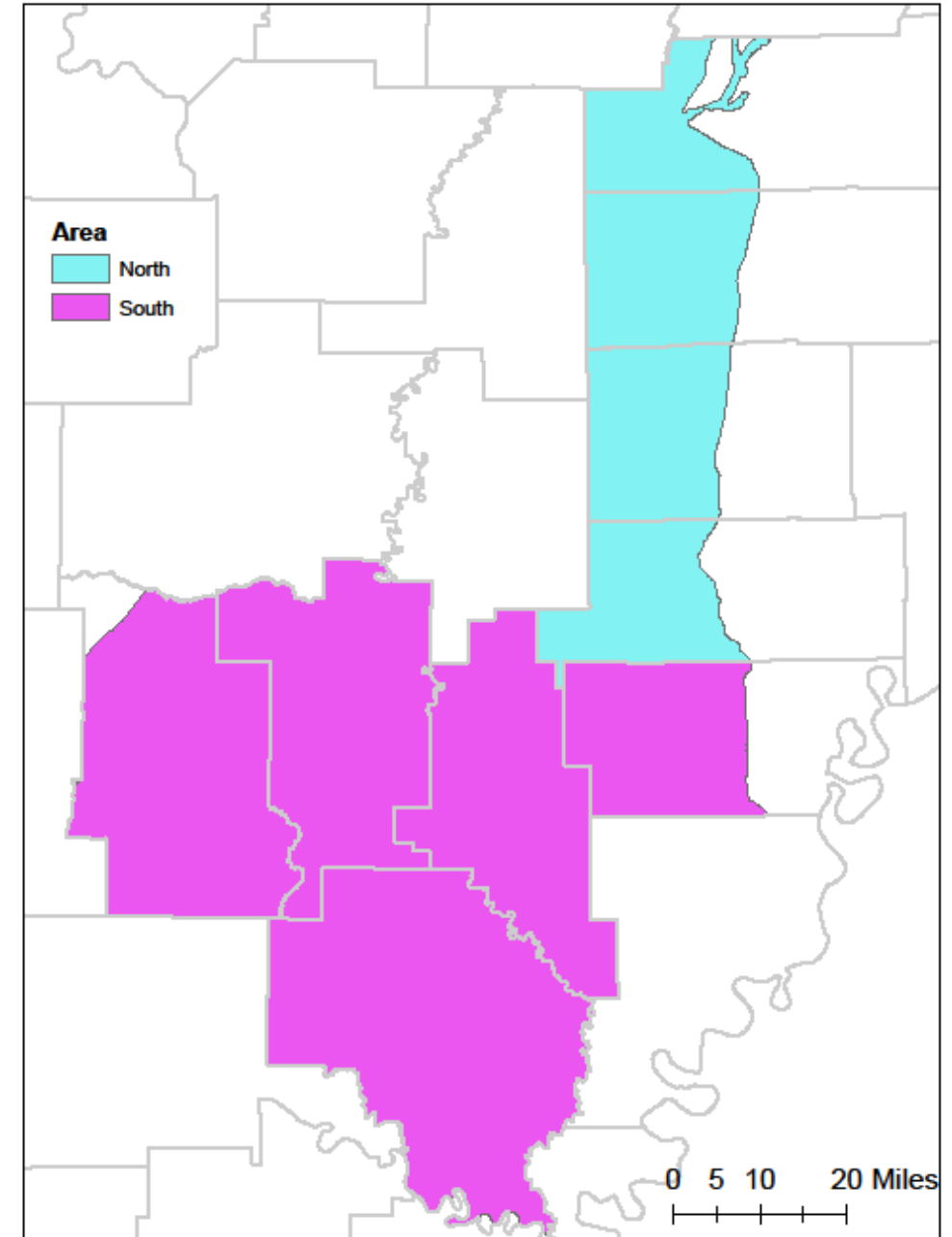
} **36%** Reduction in Water Applied

AGWI Tier / Ranking Update

Add a spatial ranking question to the AGWI Ranking pool report that gives priority to producers in the **Phase I areas** of the **South AGWI Area** for a temporary three-year period.

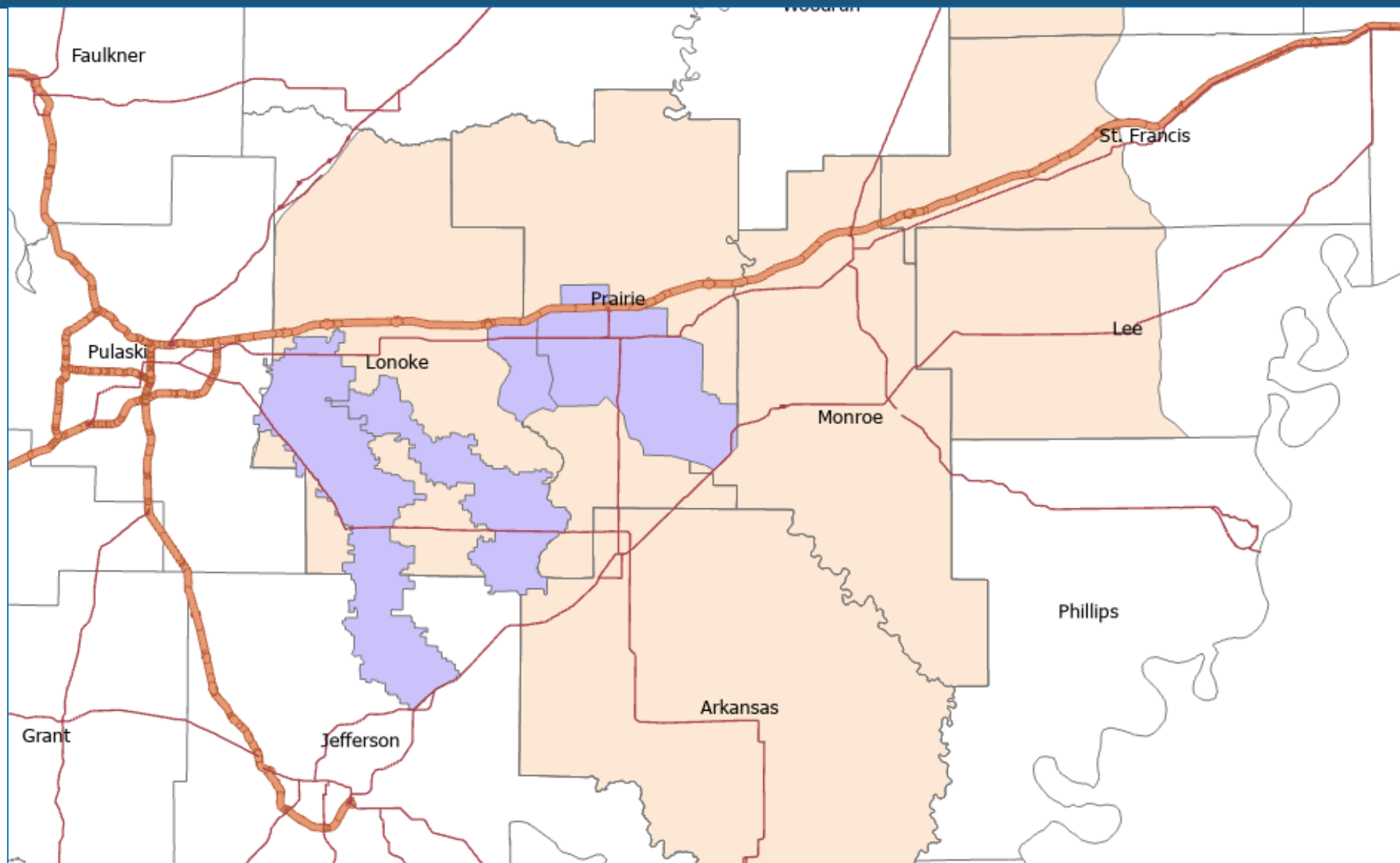
Approved

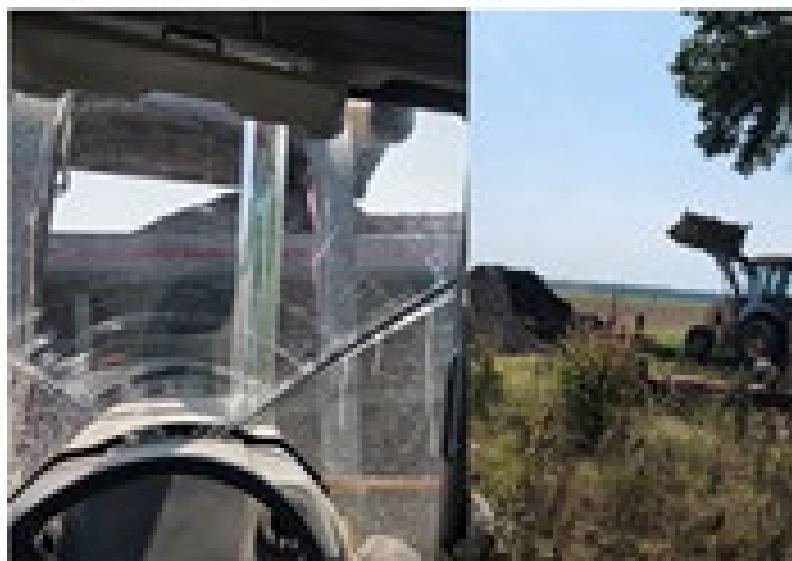
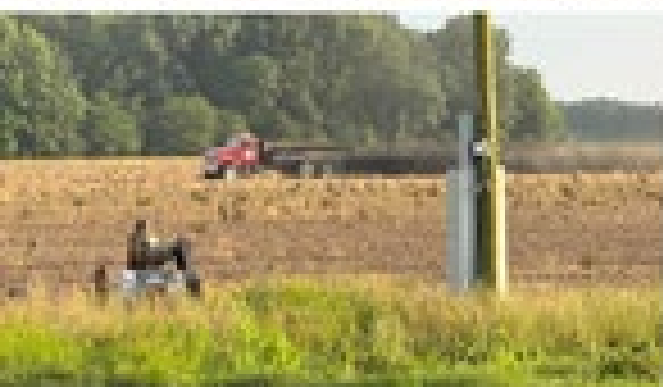
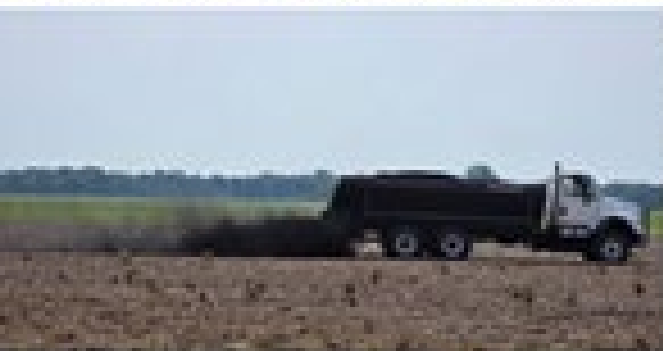
2024 AGWI - North and South Areas



AGWI Ranking Update

Phase I and
II are
prioritized





Based on Matthew's presentation and recommendation the Subcommittee agrees to propose adding:

Conservation Practice Code 336 to the Approved Conservation Practices for the AGWI Funding Pool.

Ranking Pools: FY25

approx.

34

Ranking Pool Name	Program	State	Status
199P LM Producer FY24	SCPP18	AR (Admin)	Success
210P LM Producer FY24	SCPP18	AR (Admin)	Success
2274 LM Producer FY24	SCPP18	AR (Admin)	Success
2779 LM Producer FY24	SCPP18	AR (Admin)	Success
278N LM Producer FY24	SCPP18	AR (Admin)	Success
3883 LM Producer FY24	SCPP18	AR (Admin)	Success
AR CSP Renewals 2024 Statewide Ag	CSuP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR CSP Renewals 2024 Statewide Ag BFR	CSuP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR CSP Renewals 2024 Statewide Ag SDR	CSuP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 ACSP-RRS Renewal	ACSP-RRS	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 Alternative Crop	EQP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 Arkansas Groundwater Initiative AGWI (R&D)	EQP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 Arkansas Joint Chiefs Project	EQP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 Beginning Farmer Rancher (BFR)	EQP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG EAST	CSuP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG EAST BFR	CSuP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG EAST SDR	CSuP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG WEST	CSuP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG WEST BFR	CSuP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG WEST SDR	CSuP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 EQP Statewide Land Use Renewal	EQP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 Limited Resource Farmer/Rancher (LRF)	EQP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 LRA 3 Crop	EQP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 LRA 4 (NOP)	EQP	AR (Admin)	Success
AR FY24 LRA 5 (NOP)	EQP	AR (Admin)	Success

[RETURN TO ASSESSMENT SUMMARY](#) [CONTINUE GEOSPATIAL PROCESS](#) [CONTINUE](#)

Geospatial Interim Applicable Ranking Pool Matches

Ranking Pool Name	Program	State	Display Group Name	Status
2274 LM Producer FY24	SCPP18	AR (Admin)	2274 LM Producer FY24 Display Group	Geospatial Applicability Not Met
AR CSP Renewals 2024 Statewide Ag	CSuP	AR (Admin)	AR FY24 Renewal Statewide Ag	Success
AR CSP Renewals 2024 Statewide Ag BFR	CSuP	AR (Admin)	AR FY24 CSP Renewals Statewide Ag BFR	Success
AR CSP Renewals 2024 Statewide Ag SDR	CSuP	AR (Admin)	AR FY24 CSP Renewals Statewide Ag SDR	Success
AR FY24 Alternative Crop	EQP	AR (Admin)	AR FY24 Alternative Crop	Success
AR FY24 Beginning Farmer Rancher (BFR)	EQP	AR (Admin)	AR FY24 Beginning Farmer Rancher (BFR)	Success
AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG EAST	CSuP	AR (Admin)	AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG EAST	Success
AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG EAST BFR	CSuP	AR (Admin)	AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG EAST BFR	Success
AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG EAST SDR	CSuP	AR (Admin)	AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG EAST SDR	Success
AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG WEST	CSuP	AR (Admin)	AR FY24 CSP CLASSIC STATEWIDE AG WEST	Success

[RETURN TO ASSESSMENT SUMMARY](#) [SAVE AND MATCH AGAIN](#) [CONTINUE](#)

Ranking Pools FY26



AR FY26 NE Semi



AR FY26 NW Semi



AR FY26 SE Semi



AR FY26 SW Semi

4

CSP – 2 Pools

RCPP – 4 Pools

ACEP – 2 Pools

Basic IWM?

EQIP FUNDING CHANGES
Base + Implementation

Pump Automation has
moved to 374-Energy
Efficient Agricultural
Operation

NRCS Pipe Weight Calculator Logo Here

Arkansas Fiscal Year 2026 Practice Caps

**IWM Devices are now Soil
Moisture Sensor Practices**



Devices
become
obsolete!

Timeframe related to Telemetry Equipment

- Flowmeters - 20 yrs
- Pump Automation - 10 yrs
- Surge Valves - 15 yrs
- IWM Devices - 1 yr



National Engineering Discipline notified.

30126-61 R6

Arkansas Groundwater Conservation Tax Credits

Tax credits for Projects including:

Reservoirs (50%)

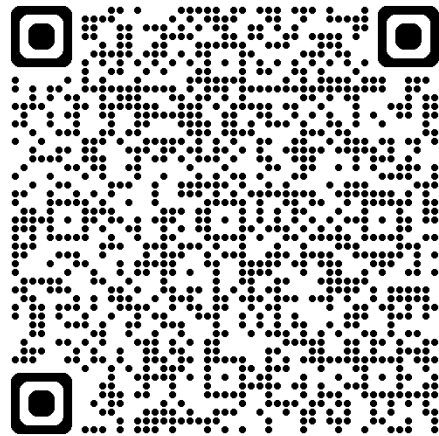
Land Leveling (25%)

**Conversion to Surface Water (50%- inside
a critical groundwater area, 25%-outside)**

Water Meters

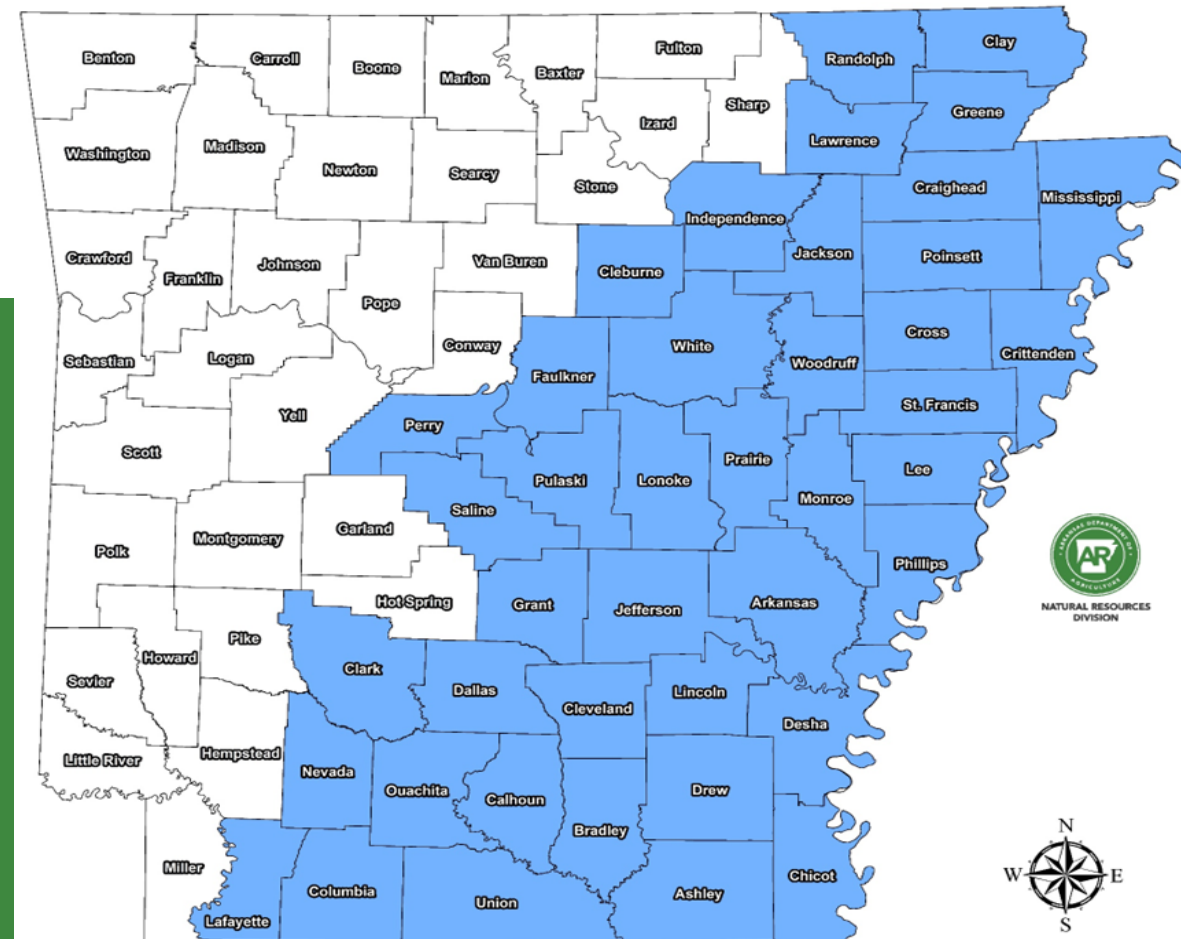
**(50%-inside a critical
groundwater area,
25%-outside)**

**Carryover for 15 years.
Can sell credits to other
taxpayers.**



SCAN HERE

Critical Groundwater Area for Groundwater Conservation Tax Credits





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RECOMMENDATION 1: Arkansas NRCS should pursue additional funding for the IWM Specialists agreement from the State of Arkansas.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Propose Arkansas NRCS encourage the National Programs staff to restore 449-IWM, Scenario #10, Rice Intermittent Flood All Season (AWD/FIR).



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



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Energy Subcommittee Meeting

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Recommendations

- Increase caps for certain practices
 - CPS 672 Insulated roll-up doors
 - At \$2040 now and should be about \$4000
 - Don't like sturdy seal doors compared to bi-fold
 - CPS 374 Controller Installation
 - Was \$9157 and now \$2100
 - Installation cost is very expensive- controller, installation and rewiring of house

Thermal Dehydrators

- Included into FY '26
 - CPS 316 Animal Mortality Management
 - Smaller footprint than rotary drums or static bins
 - Faster decomposition time
 - High nutrient content for additional inputs for various livestock on the facility



CPS 900 Series

- Encouraging TSPs to do checkouts
 - Payment benefits
 - Experienced individuals performing the completion of the CPS



Suggestion from State Engineer

- Diversify subcommittee to not focus exclusively on poultry operations and work with irrigation pump transformations from diesel to electric





Contact Information

- Britt Hill
 - Joseph.hill@usda.gov
 - 870-714-9976





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Spring FY26 Forestry and Wildlife Subcommittee Report



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Spring Forestry and Wildlife Meeting

- Meeting held at U of A Extension Headquarters in Little Rock
 - Thursday May 7, 2026
 - 30 members in-person attendance, additional 12+ attended online
 - Partner updates included:
 - Shortleaf pine restoration efforts
 - Arkansas Central Highlands Conservation Delivery Network (ARCEN-CDN)
 - Open Pine RCPP Monitoring Report
 - Wholesale native plant nursery startup in Little Rock
 - Central Arkansas Tree Planting Project

Forestry Recommendation

- Recommendation: modify 612 Specifications to include this statement:
 - Potential sites should be assessed by a forester to determine applicable resource concerns that could be treated with tree/shrub establishment. Harvested sites over 3 years old that have already received natural regeneration should be assessed to determine if the regenerated species are adapted to the site and meet an adequate stocking guideline that supports the desired ecological function. If found to have met the above criteria, then the stand should be managed as is. Refer to 666- Forest stand improvement for management options to alter species composition and density if needed. If the stand does not meet the above criteria, then use of Tree/Shrub Site Preparation, code 490, and Tree/shrub Establishment should be planned according to the guidelines below.



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Spring FY26 Wildlife Subcommittee Report



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Practice Document and Scenario Updates

- CP 390 – Riparian Herbaceous Cover
 - Available in Section 4 of the electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG)
 - Practice Specification, Implementation Requirements, and Statement of Work
- Interim CP 828 – Wildlife Habitat Site Preparation
 - Available in Section 1 of the electronic Field Office Technical Guide
 - Practice Specification, Implementation Requirements, and Statement of Work
- CP 422 – Hedgerow Planting will be uploaded to eFOTG soon
- CP 420 – Wildlife Habitat Planting will be updated soon

High Priority Practice Recommendation

- Practice: 643 - Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities
 - Recommendation to remove as a High Priority Practice
 - Practice scenarios changed in FY26
 - Key scenario lost: Woodland, Glade, Barren, Savanna or Prairie Restoration
 - Public could have a chance to provide comment to bring back scenarios like this



WLFW Aquatics: Southern Waters Framework





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Small Farm and Urban Agriculture Subcommittee

Recommendations for the
State Technical Committee

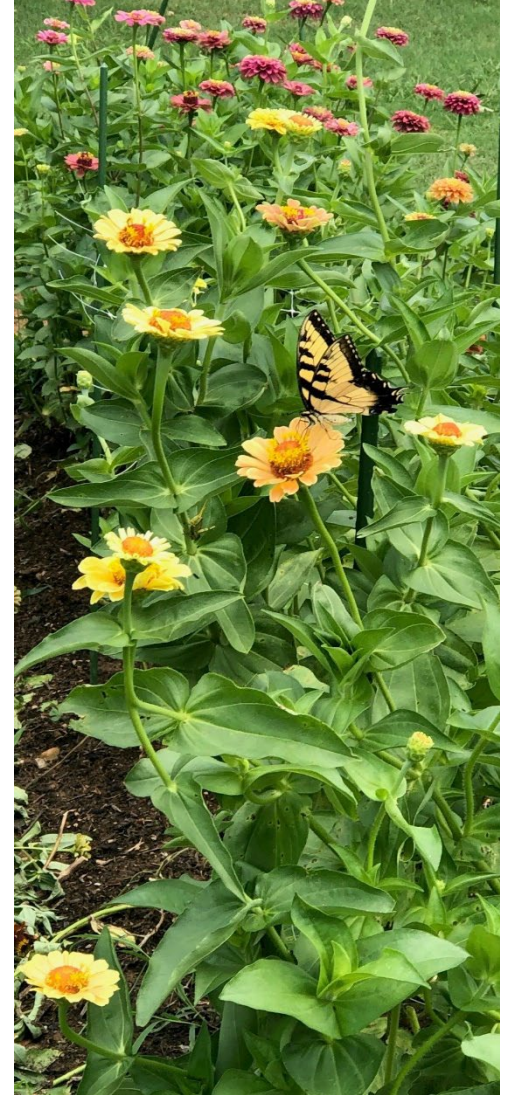


May 21, 2026

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Recommendation

- Merge the Small Farm and Urban Ag Subcommittee with the Specialty Crop Subcommittee
 - The two subcommittees have many of the same members and discuss similar topics
 - There was substantial support for this idea from members and no opposition





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FY26 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Updates

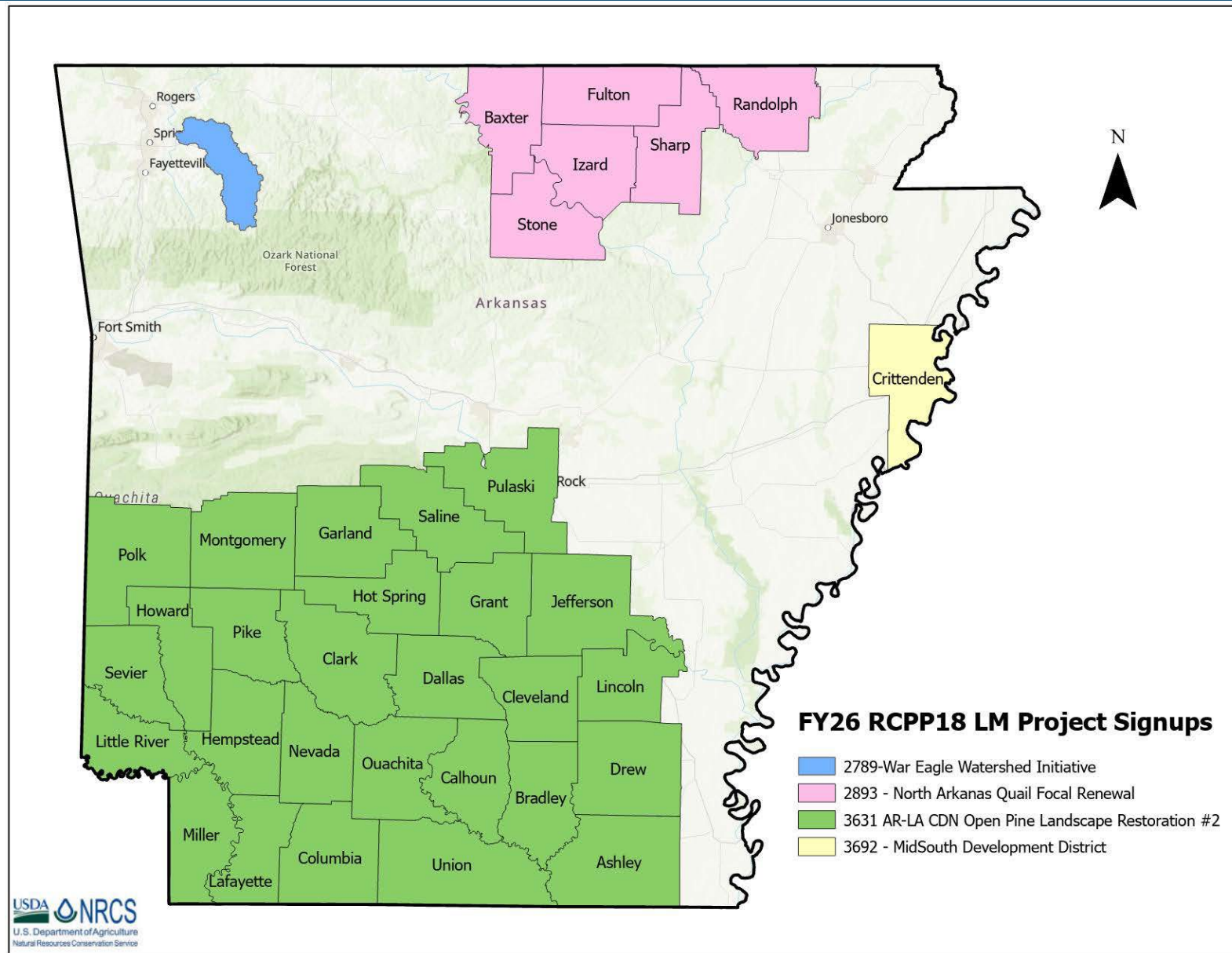


Katy Brantley
Initiative Coordinator
Katy.Brantley@usda.gov

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Project Signups

- War Eagle Creek Watershed Initiative
- North AR Quail Focal Renewal Project
- Mid-South Development District Project
- AR-LA CDN Open Pine Landscape Restoration #2 Project



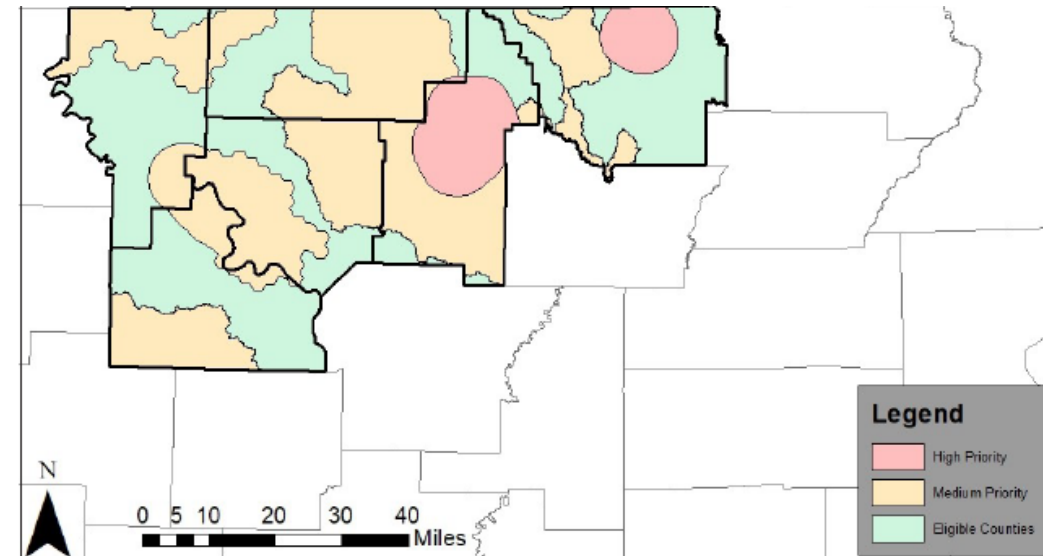
War Eagle Creek Watershed Initiative

- Lead partner is Beaver Watershed Alliance
- Goal to reduce sediment and nutrient loading into Beaver Lake
- Last year for applications
- FY26:
 - 5 pre-approved applications
 - \$243,573.00
 - Pasture and forestry practices
 - Streambank protection



North AR Quail Focal Landscape Renewal Project

- Lead partner is Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
- Intend to create early successional habitat to benefit quail, pollinators, and other wildlife in northern Arkansas
- Last year for applications
- FY26:
 - 4 pre-approved applications
 - \$128,521.00
 - Bird monitoring, forest stand improvement, prescribed burning, firebreak, wildlife habitat planting



MidSouth Development District Project

- Project managed by Tennessee NRCS
- Lead partner is MidSouth Development District in Memphis; supports TN, AR, MS
- Includes Crittenden County in Arkansas
- First signup this year
- FY26:
 - 7 pre-approved applications
 - \$1,112,310.00
 - Focus on soil health with cover crops for year 1



Open Pine Landscape Restoration Partnership #2

- Expansion of a previous RCPP with the AR-LA West Gulf Coastal Plain Conservation Delivery Network
- Lead partner is American Bird Conservancy
- The project's goal is to open forest conditions for the benefit of priority wildlife species
- First signup this year
- FY26: estimating over \$6 million in AR
- Projects are in high priority locations, create or add to at least 245 acres treated in open pine conditions (<60 BA managed with fire every 2-3 years)
 - Many include bird monitoring and go to 50 BA or less



FY26 Notice of Funding Opportunity

- Anticipating release of NOFO soon
 - There will be some changes to the proposal questions
 - Classic and Alternative Funding Arrangement will be available
 - Condensed application and review timeline
 - Start getting together:
 - Project objectives
 - Expected conservation benefits and outcomes
 - Targeted geography
 - Targeted practices, if choosing land management contracts
 - Contributing partners
 - Budgets (financial assistance and technical assistance)
- Let me know if you are aware of a partner who would like to apply





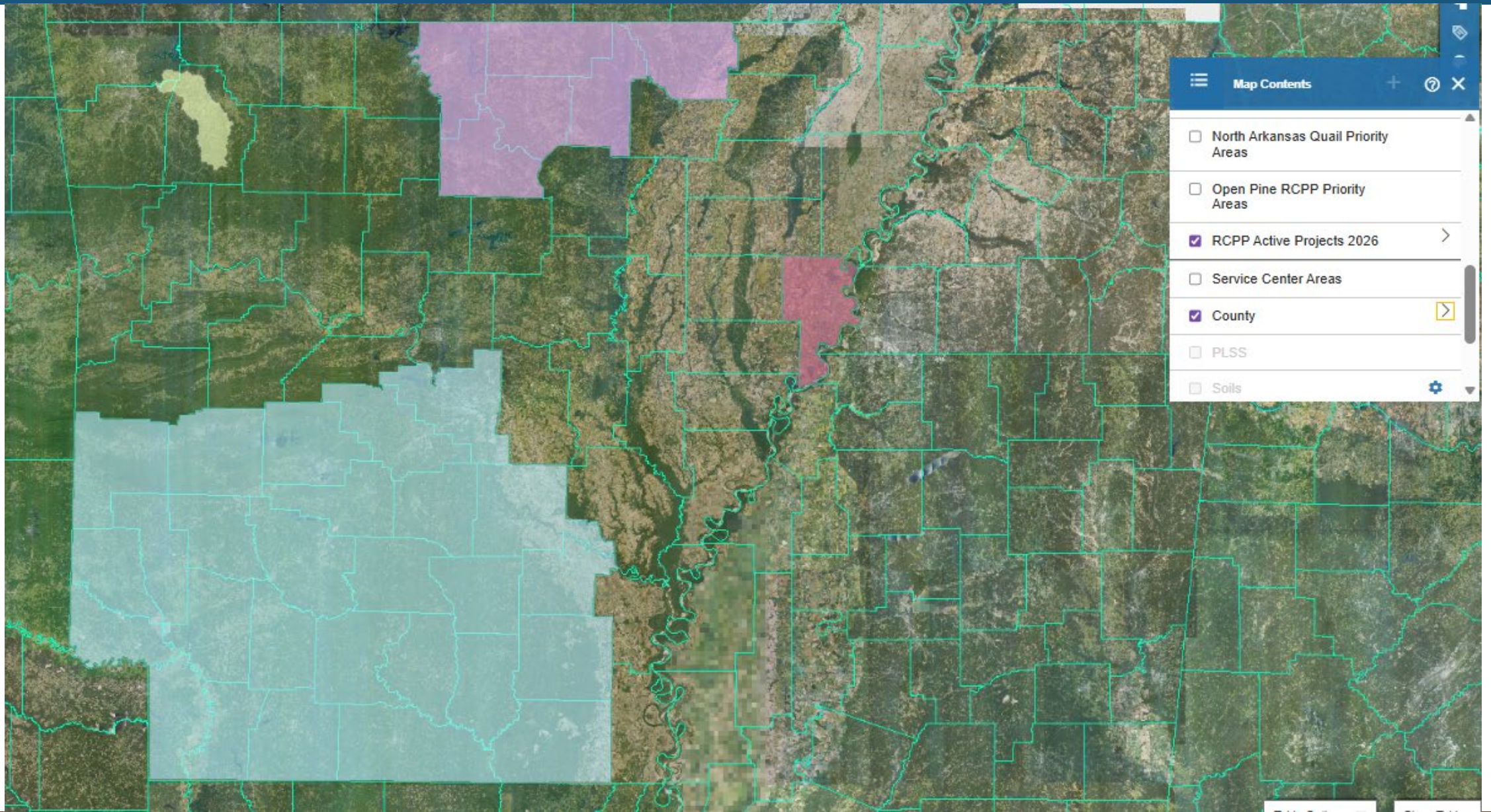
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Questions?



Katy Brantley
Initiative Coordinator
Katy.Brantley@usda.gov

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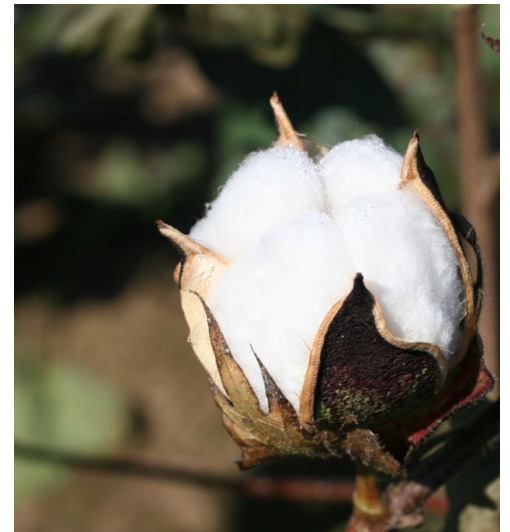
EASEMENT PROGRAMS

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

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ACEP-ALE

Agricultural Land Easements help private and tribal landowners, land trusts, and other entities such as state and local governments protect the long-term viability of the nation's food supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses. Additionally, Agricultural Land Easements leverage local partnerships to match NRCS funding and local partners hold the easements and are responsible for the long-term stewardship of the easement.

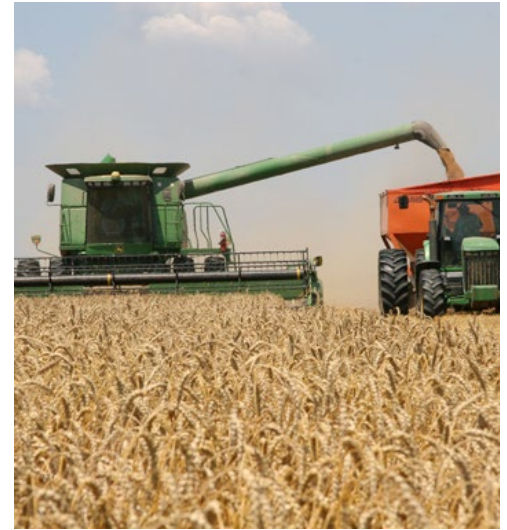


ACEP-ALE

USDA-NRCS provides up to 50% of the purchase price of the easement and the remaining funding comes from either:

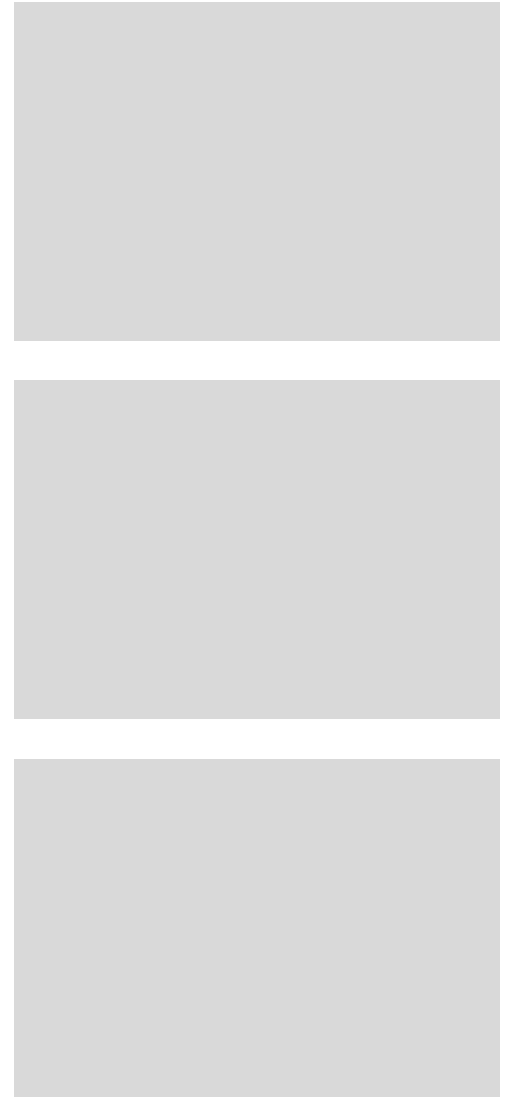
- 1.) the eligible entity
- 2.) landowner donation
 - the landowner can just forgo/donate the remaining 50% of the easement price in exchange for the protection and/or tax benefits – not sure about how much of a selling point this will be in Arkansas.

Land is still eligible for other NRCS programs like EQIP and CSP



Who is Eligible?

- ACEP-ALE easements are held by “eligible entities” and those entities submit applications to USDA-NRCS.
- They first submit an application to be an eligible entity – and successful Entities will enter into Program Agreements that allow for them to submit parcel applications for individual tracts to be ranked and funded.
- So there are 2 sets of “eligibility” criteria – those for entities and those for landowners.

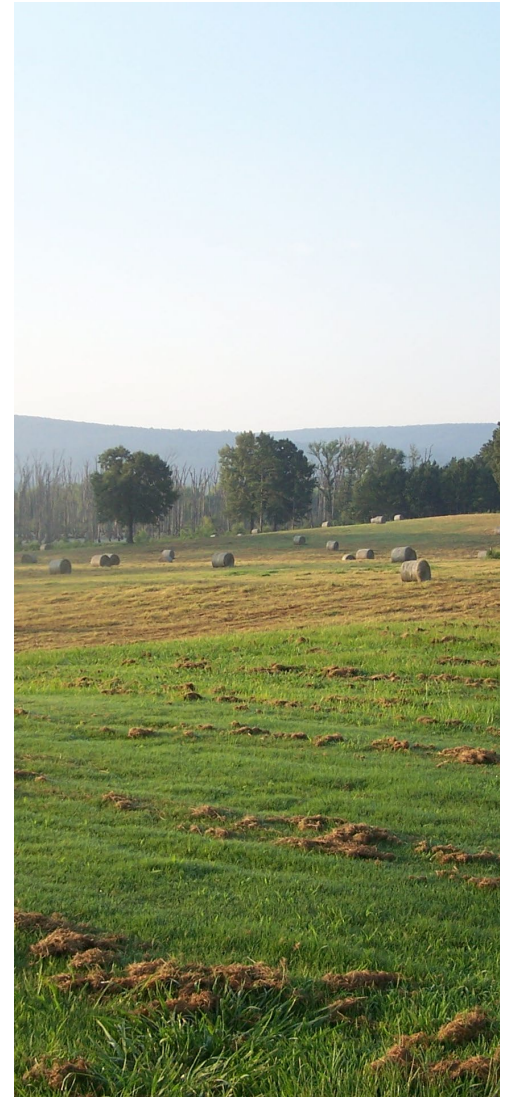


Entity Eligibility

- Eligible partners include American Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations that have farmland, rangeland or grassland protection programs.
 - Must possess the authority and capability to acquire, manage, and enforce agricultural land easements.
 - Be registered in SAM
 - Have entity records established with USDA-FSA

landowner Eligibility

- Own Ag-land
- USDA-FSA farm records
- Be HELC and Wetland compliant on all your land registered with USDA-FSA
- Be AGI compliant – (rolling 3 year average AGI less than \$900,000 annually)



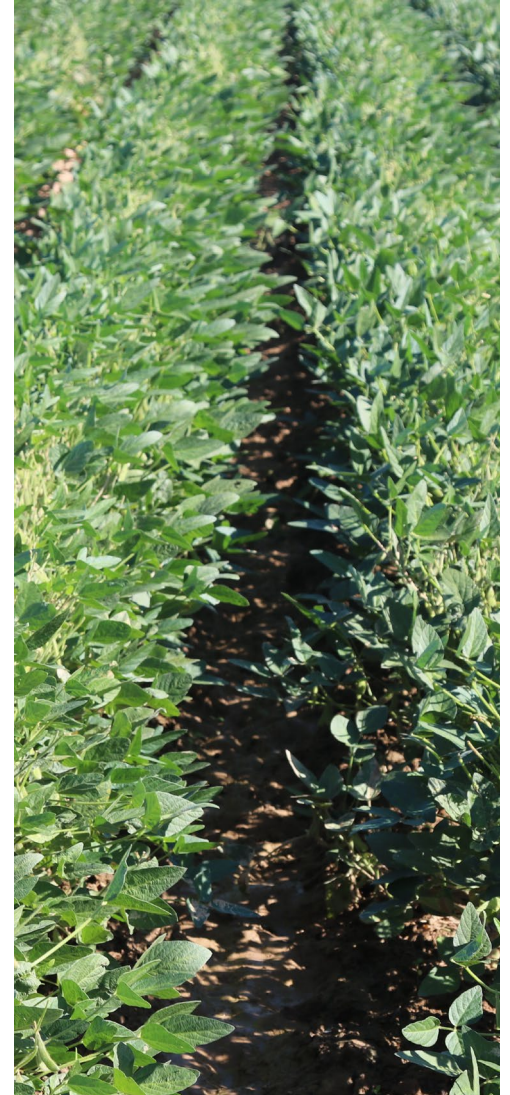
Land Eligibility – must meet at least one of the following

- Comprised of at least 50% prime or important soils as determined by a soils map provided by your partner or NRCS Web Soil Survey. These are NRCS recognized soils that are designated as productive for agriculture.
- Contain historical or archaeological resources
- Protects grazing uses and related conservation values
- **Furthers a state or local government policy consistent with the purposes of the ALE program.**
 - This one could use some help from outside sources – not very many in Arkansas. Could literally be any local government policy that states it has a goal of protecting Ag land.
 - **EX: Washington County has a “Plan for Land Use and Development” that states-” The protection and preservation of agricultural lands through the proper use regulatory mechanisms is critical to retain the rural nature of the county. “ Need more of this.**



Additional Land Eligibility

- Land made up of cropland, rangeland, pastureland, and/or shrubland for which grazing is the predominant use - Forest land is okay too as long as it doesn't exceed 2/3 of the easement area and contributes to the economic viability of the parcel or serves as a buffer to protect the land from development.
- Land free from other easement or deed restrictions which provide similar protection as ALE
- Land free from title issues, hazardous materials, or adverse land uses on-site or nearby
- Have legal access to the property



Outlook

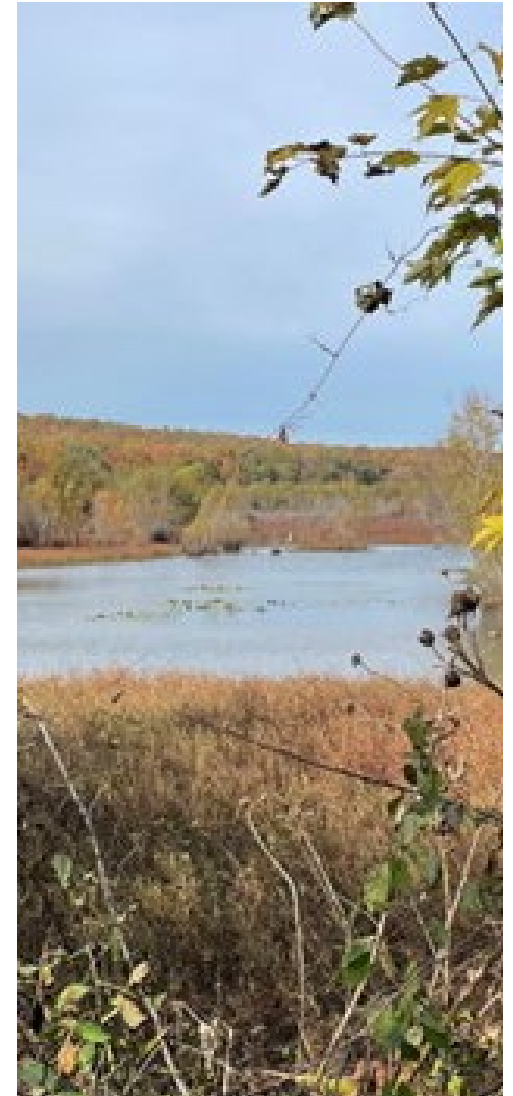
- Have one Program Agreement out for signature and a 2nd application we are processing now for program agreement.
- Have 3 Parcel applications for ranking so far.
- There was just announced a 2nd national ranking period that ends May 29th with ranking to be concluded by June 8th.
 - Other Land Trusts or eligible Entities can both apply for a program Agreement and submit parcel applications by this deadline – Can be submitted simultaneously.

ACEP-ALE

- Looking at building partnerships with land trusts
- Soil that is locally important farmland soil for a specific region and/or adjusting 50% prime soil requirement for the specific region
 - Due to lack of abundance of prime designated soils in NW AR
 - State Soil Scientist will do spatial analysis of areas mapped as prime farmland and how much has already been converted to non-agricultural uses to show the need in preserving all farmland

Easement Programs in Arkansas

- **ACEP-Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)**
 - 2 Program Agreements in process – 3 parcel applications currently being ranked
- **ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)**
 - United States Held Easements
 - 736 Easements protected and another 16 under purchase agreement – 284,585 acres protected. (1,656.83 acres in closing soon)
- **HFRP & GRP**
 - GRP – 8 Easements – 1,151.32 acres protected
 - HFRP – 2 Easements – 313 acres protected
- **RCPP - US Held Easements**
 - KKAC multistate project in AR and MS
 - AR put 3 easements under agreement in FY25 obligating the entirety of our share of the funding. \$1 million obligated – 280 acres enrolled
 - Restore the Earth Foundation in AR
 - AR has tentatively selected 8 easements for approximately \$7 million in funding and 1,532 acres to be protected.



ACEP-WRE

FY25 (Recap)

- Number of Easements that entered into Agreements to purchase-6
- Number of Easement Acres Selected for Acquisition -4,701.5 Acres
- 2025 Funding obligated for Acquisition and restoration - \$28,436,147.76
- Also entered into Agreements to Purchase on 3 RCPP – US Held Easements for 280 acres and obligated just under \$1 million



FY26 Outlook

Tentatively Selected

- 32 Easements
 - 27 of which have been high priority for the previous 2 years
 - 5 are new Batture projects that are receiving Batture WREP funding

When team successfully finishes this FY it will constitute – 32 new Easements enrolled for restoration and protection of priority wetland habitat covering – 12,293.33 acres and just over \$45,500,000 in capital investments going to Arkansas farmers.



Successes so far in FY26

- Closed 4 easements
 - 4,556.47 acres closed and restoration beginning
- Completed Restoration on 2 easements
 - 1,035.52 acres restoration complete
- Only 10 WRE easements not fully restored including the 4 closed this FY
- 14 WRE Easements enrolled but not closed
 - 11 of those the acquisition is being handled by a national team
 - My team has 3 working through the pre-closing steps

IRA ENROLLED

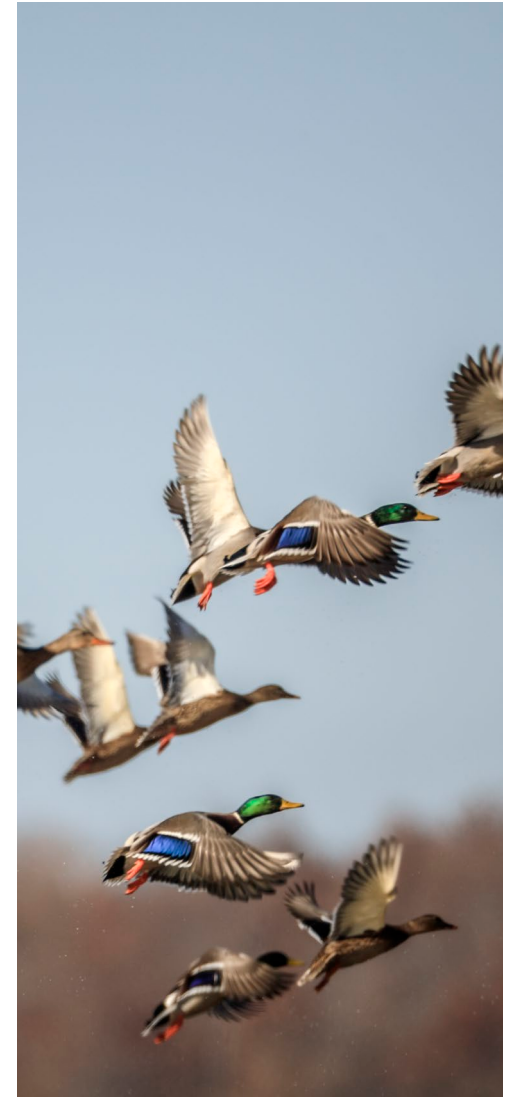
- 10 IRA EASEMENTS
 - Acquisition being handled by national team
 - Reviewing boundaries for adherence to original footprint
 - 4 are with our office of general council
 - 2 are being surveyed
 - 3 are having boundaries reviewed
 - 1 is waiting on title contract

They are moving and things are happening!



Other Easements

- Regional Conservationist Partnership Program (RCPP) Easements.
 - 2 options:
 - Entity Held (ACEP-ALE like)
 - US Held (ACEP-WRE like)
 - New sign up period might happen any time – be on the lookout for Notice of Funding Opportunity
 - Have 2 existing projects both US Held – both have funding fully allocated.
 - KKAC multistate project in AR and MS
 - AR put 3 easements under agreement in FY25 obligating the entirety of our share of the funding. \$1 million obligated – 280 acres enrolled
 - Restore the Earth Foundation in AR
 - AR has tentatively selected 8 easements for approximately \$7 million in funding and 1,532 acres to be protected.



GARC

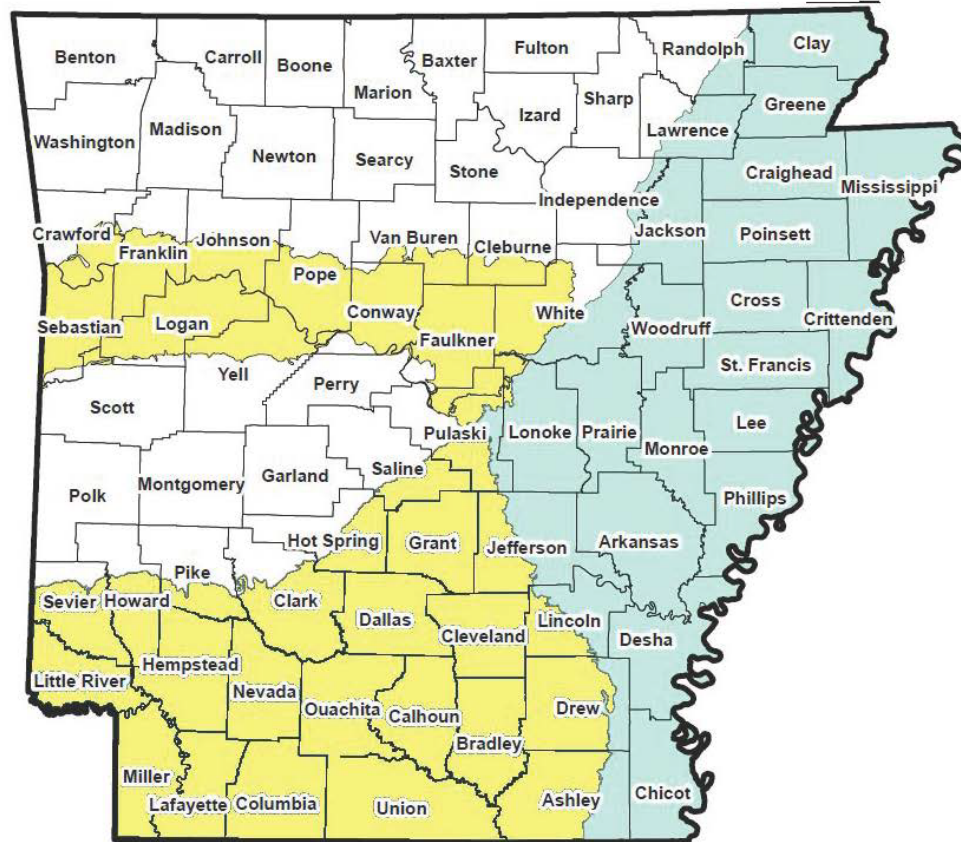
For FY26

we are doing appraisals on everything – AWMA contract expired and working on new 5 year contract.

FY27

- We are planning on revising our previous land uses and geographic areas – to simplify.
- Hoping to have fewer exceptions to GARC applicability
- Should not be a major difference to landowners
- Can adjust for FY28 if it does create major disturbance

Arkansas WRE and FPE - FY 2026 Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC)



ACEP-WRE and EWPP-FPE Market Areas

Arkansas River Valley & Gulf Coastal Regions

Mississippi River Valley

Irrigated Cropland	\$
All Other Ag Land (excluding CRP)	\$
Wooded, Wooded CRP, and Incidental Land	\$

Irrigated Cropland	\$
All Other Ag Land (excluding CRP)	\$
Wooded, Wooded CRP, and Incidental Land	\$

Note: in FY26 Arkansas utilized appraisals only for the entire state with payment rates being 80% of appraisal NTE \$5,000/ac. For FY27 changes will be made to the rates paid and will be based on the areas shown in the map and the land uses shown on the chart only.

Remainder Of State

80% of Appraisal, not to exceed \$5,000/ac.
Values shown are per acre units



Tangible Outcomes for Easement Programs

Have a rough game plan of how to get wildlife outcomes

Looking for input on other important metrics we should be tracking for:

- soil health
- water quality
- water quantity
- plant health – other than trees, but also trees
-



Who Can Help Me With Easements in Arkansas?

New ACEP-WRE Applications

We are using a more collaborative approach to intake and new applications.

All Applications Can Be Sent To:

Kim Covington – kim.covington@ar.nacdnet.net
Program Support Specialist
NRCS | Easement Team
Lonoke TSC

 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Natural Resources Conservation Service
215 West Front Street Suite C, Lonoke AR 72086
p: (501) 237-3135

Eligibility and Technical Determinations go to either Rich or JJ. They are dividing the state like this:



Here is how to reach them:

Rich Johnson - rich.johnson@usda.gov
Wildlife Biologist
NRCS | Easement Team
Lonoke TSC

 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Natural Resources Conservation Service
215 West Front Street Suite C, Lonoke, AR 72086
p: (501) 237-3141 | c: (501) 786-2152

Johnny (JJ) Abernathy Johnny.Abernathy@usda.gov
Wildlife Biologist
NRCS | Easement Team
Jonesboro TSC

 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Natural Resources Conservation Service
3407 S. Caraway Rd., Jonesboro, AR, 72404
p: (870) 972-4671 ext. 4596 | c: (501) 510-3245

Monitoring , Rehab, & Stewardship

Chris has a team of partners and affiliates helping - but he is the first stop in all questions post restoration:

Chris Carneal - chris.carneal@usda.gov
WRE Stewardship Coordinator/ Wildlife Biologist
NRCS | Easement Team
Malvern FSC

 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Natural Resources Conservation Service
2300 Leopard Lane, Suite, Malvern, AR 72104
p: (501) 337-7381 | c: (501) 802-7485

On emails also copy his Administrative Assistant:

Elizabeth Middleton – Elizabeth.Middleton@ar.nacdnet.net
Program Support Specialist
NRCS | Easement Team
Malvern FSC

 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Natural Resources Conservation Service
2300 Leopard Lane, Suite, Malvern, AR 72104
p: (501) 337-7381 | c: (501) 802-7485

RCPP Easement and ALE applications

Send All Applications To:

Jessica Bruce - Jessica.Bruce@ar.nacdnet.net
Program Support Specialist
NRCS | Easement Team
501-802-1026

 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Natural Resources Conservation Service
2300 Leopard Lane (Suite T), Malvern, Ar 72104
p: (501) 337-7381

Eligibility and Technical Determinations:

Ronnie Potts – Ronnie.potts@usda.gov
Area Biologist
Southwest Area
Arkadelphia Service Center

 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Natural Resources Conservation Service
640 S 6th St, Arkadelphia, AR
p: 870-345-3357 ext. 3353 | c: 501-802-7481

Easement Questions

Any questions you have that don't fit into one of these categories, if you don't understand the categories and want more help, or if you have more general programmatic questions, or need to elevate anything - Alexis is always available for phone calls and emails.

Assistant State Conservationist for Easements :

Alexis Cook – alexis.cook@usda.gov
Assistant State Conservationist for Easements
Arkansas NRCS
State Office

 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Natural Resources Conservation Service
700 West Capitol Ave., Room 3416, Little Rock, AR 72211
Office Number 5009
p: (501) 301-3166 | c: (501) 398-6937

On emails also copy her Executive Assistant:

Jessica Smith – jessica.smith@ar.nacdnet.net
Executive Assistant / Wetlands Specialist
NRCS | Easement Team
Jonesboro TSC

 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Natural Resources Conservation Service
3407 S. Caraway Rd. STE 5, Jonesboro, AR, 72404
p: (870) 819-4593 | c: (870) 408-9957



Contact

Alexis Cook

Assistant State Conservationist for Easements

700 West Capitol Ave.

Room 3416

Little Rock, AR 72201

Phone: (501) 301-3166.

Email: alexis.cook@usda.gov

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Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

2026 Working Land Programs Updates

Clyde Williams
Assistant State Conservationist-Programs
NRCS-Arkansas



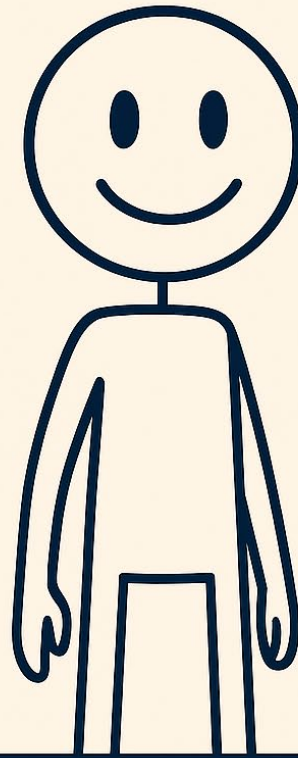
FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

2026 Program Streamlining Efforts

- States were instructed to have no more than five ranking pools per program for FY26.
- Enhancement codes are no longer used in Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contracts

2026 Program Streamlining Efforts

HOW IT STARTED



HOW IT'S GOING



How it started:

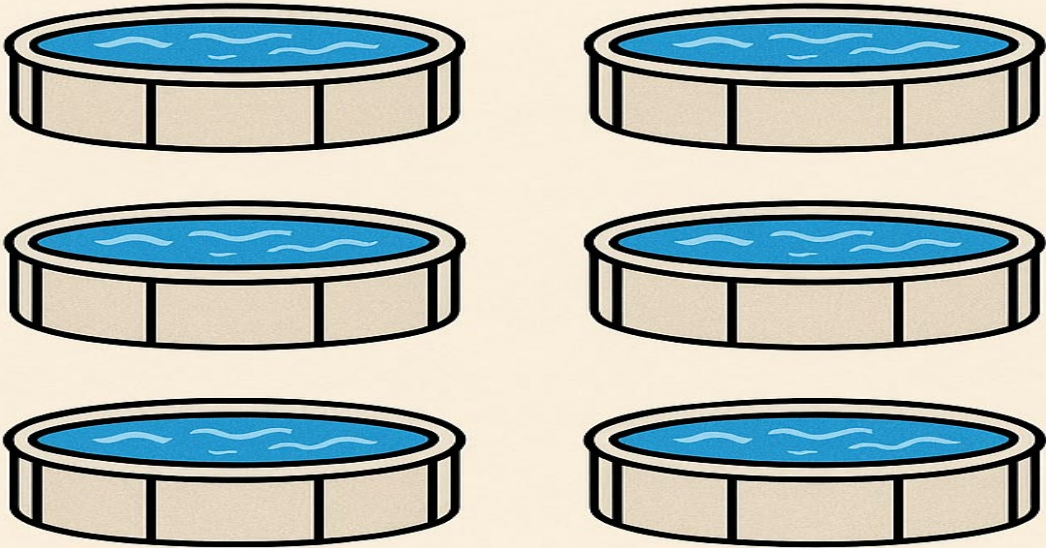


100+ ranking pools

- In the past, AR has had more than 100 ranking pools for both EQIP and CSP during one fiscal year
- The large number of pools aided in allocating funds appropriately to specific priorities



How it's going:



6 ranking pools

- For FY26, AR has four EQIP pools and two CSP pools
- Though the number of ranking pools significantly decreased, we are still able to address priorities through ranking pool categories



FY 2026 EQIP Ranking Pools

NW Area Ranking Pool

- Each NW Area County
- MRBI
- SDFR
- BFR
- Energy
- Regenerative Pilot Program

SW Area Ranking Pool

- Each SW Area County
- SDFR
- BFR
- Energy
- Regenerative Pilot Program
- WLFW

NE Area Ranking Pool

- Each NE Area County
- MRBI
- SDFR
- BFR
- NWQI
- Regenerative Pilot Program

SE Area Ranking Pool

- Each SE Area County
- MRBI
- SDFR
- BFR
- AGWI
- Regenerative Pilot Program

FY 2026 CSP Ranking Pools

General (AgLand)

- Each County
- SDFR
- BFR
- ORGANIC
- MRBI
- Regenerative Pilot Program

NIPF

- Each County
- SDFR
- BFR
- Regenerative Pilot Program



HOW IT'S GOING(Ranking Pools)

Field Office Perspective

Less time to rank assessments/applications

Adjustment to "lower" ranking scores

No more "Partially-funded" applications



HOW IT'S GOING(Ranking Pools)

State Office Perspective

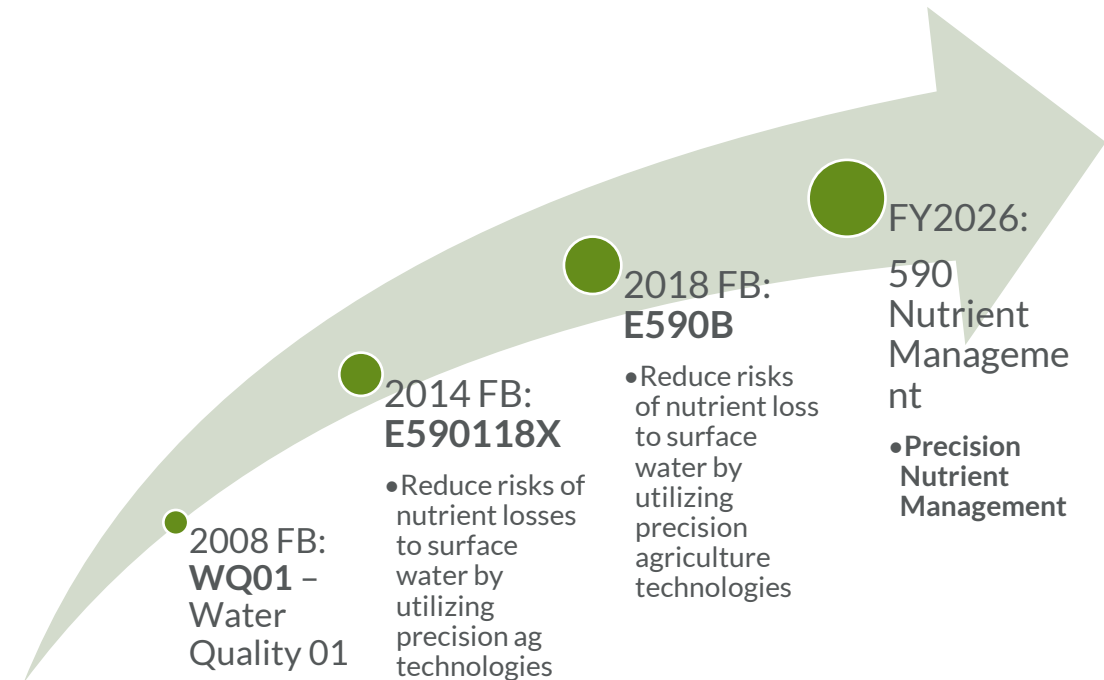
It now takes more time to select applications for funding

Adjustment to balancing funds/fund codes

No more "Partially-funded" applications

CSP Activities

- Unique enhancement codes (“E” codes) no longer used.
 - Allows program neutral planning and CART assessment.
- **Old:** Enhancement
- **New:** Enhancing practices and the operation Conservation Practices



HOW IT'S GOING(CSP Practices)

Overall Perspective

With now utilizing only conservation practices in addition to EAP being capped/limited to \$4000, beginning to see more additional activities being planned instead of X acres of only EAP planned.

Some challenges differentiating EQIP vs. CSP

Managing contracts with enhancements scheduled vs. managing new contracts with only practices scheduled





Contact

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Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

Fax: (202) 690-7442; or

Email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP)



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

Regenerative Pilot Program

Regenerative agriculture is a conservation management approach that emphasizes natural resources through improved **soil health, water management**, and natural vitality for the productivity and prosperity of American agriculture and communities. The Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP) is a farmer-first, outcomes-based approach to conservation designed to return the agency to its core mission, helping people help the land, by addressing whole-farm resource concerns through support for voluntary regenerative agriculture Conservation Plans.

NRCS website

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/regenerative-pilot-program>

Regenerative Pilot Program Requirements

- Whole Farm Assessment
- Primary Practices
- Soil Health Testing
- Minimum 5-year contract



Whole Farm Assessment

Defined for Regen Program Pilot

- EQIP Regen - EQIP policy supports a subset of land under control of the customer to be part of the application, therefore in conjunction with input from the customer the planner will determine the extent of the whole farm.
 - Logical factors such as multiple farming enterprises (row crops, orchard, livestock, owned verses leased lands etc.), or extensive geographical separation of land could determine separate whole farms.
- CSP Regen - follows CSP policy requiring all land that the operator has control of for 5 years to be a part of the application and thus the whole farm assessment.

Environmental Quality
Incentives Program (EQIP)

Conservation Stewardship
Program (CSP)

Assessment - Resource Concerns

- **Whole Farm Assessment:** A complete assessment of all resource concerns is required, with the goal of establishing a whole farm plan before the end of the contract period. At a minimum, whole farm plans must meet NRCS planning criteria in the soil and water resource categories. These plans may be developed by NRCS staff, partners, or technical service providers.

A complete assessment of all resource concerns is required

- All applicable Resource Concerns and corresponding Components will be evaluated

with the goal of establishing a whole farm plan before the end of the contract period.

- By the end of the contract period all Soil and Water resource concerns will be met, Planned Condition
 - CSP – On at least one land use (of range, pasture, crop, forest)
 - EQIP – can be subset of all land units based on client objectives



Add Resource Concerns

Select Resource Concern Components to add to the selected land units. Components that are not applicable to all the selected Land Uses.

Resource Concern Categories

- > ☐ Air (Air quality emissions)
- > ☐ Animals (Aquatic habitat)
- > ☐ Animals (Livestock production limitation)
- > ☐ Animals (Terrestrial habitat)
- > ☐ Energy (Inefficient energy use)
- > ☐ Plants (Degraded plant condition)
- > ☐ Plants (Fire management)
- > ☐ Plants (Pest pressure)
- > ☐ Soil (Concentrated erosion)
- > ☐ Water (Field pesticide loss)
- > ☐ Water (Source water depletion)
- > ☐ Water (Storage and handling of pollutants)
- > ☐ Water (Weather resilience)

CANCEL

ADD SELECTED

Documentation of Planned Condition

- Whole Farm Assessment:** A complete assessment of all resource concerns is required, with the goal of establishing a whole farm plan before the end of the contract period. **At a minimum, whole farm plans must meet NRCS planning criteria in the soil and water resource categories.** These plans may be developed by NRCS staff, partners, or technical service providers.

At a minimum, whole farm plans must meet NRCS planning criteria in the soil and water resource categories.

- Documenting planning criteria has been met is accomplished through CART by meeting or exceeding a Resource Concern’s threshold, as calculated on the Results page.

Table ViewGraph View

Results

Category	Resource Concerns	Components	Existing Conditions	Existing Practices	Existing Total	Planned Practices	Planned Total	Threshold
Soil (Concentrated erosion)	Soil Erosion (Classic gully erosion)	Classic gully erosion	1	0	1 ▲	50	51	50
	Soil Erosion (Ephemeral gully erosion)	Ephemeral gully erosion	51	30	81	75	156	50
Soil (Soil quality limitations)	Soil Health (Aggregate instability)	Aggregate instability	0	55	55	25	80	40
	Soil Health (Compaction)	Compaction	1	40	41	20	61	30
	Soil Health (Concentration of salts or other chemicals)	Concentration of salts or other chemicals	51	35	86	20	106	1
	Soil Health (Organic matter depletion)	Organic matter depletion	51	50	101	20	121	50
	Soil Health (Soil organism habitat loss or degradation)	Soil organism habitat loss or degradation	6	50	56	25	81	50
	Soil Health (Subsidence)	Subsidence	51	0	51	0	51	1
Water (Field pesticide loss)	Water Quality (Pesticides transported to groundwater)	Nonpoint pesticide leaching loss	60	20	80	25	105	60
	Water Quality (Pesticides transported to surface water)	Nonpoint pesticide surface loss	70	30	100	55	155	30

Conservation Plan

Required

- Conservation Plan must span a minimum of 5 years
- A minimum of one primary Regen Practice
 - Existing
 - Planned
- Soil Health Testing 216 planned beginning and end of plan/contract
- Soil and Water Resource Concerns planned condition must meet or exceeded threshold

Optional

- Supporting and other practices are eligible
- CPA199 supports the client hiring a certified TSP to write the conservation plan.
- CEMA 217 Soil and Source Testing for Nutrient Management

Eligible Practices and Activities

The following table identifies primary regenerative management practices by land use. Conservation plans and contracts under the RPP must incorporate at least one primary regenerative management practice which is either already being implemented by an eligible producer or planned for future implementation. The practice must meet all general and additional criteria of the applicable conservation practice standard to address targeted resource concerns within the pilot program. Conservation plans and contracts developed under RPP may also include supporting practices as well as other practices and activities.

Conservation Practices

Code	Asset Name	Crop	Forest	Pasture	Range
328	Conservation Crop Rotation	Y	N	N	N
330	Contour Farming	Y	N	N	N
331	Contour Orchard and Other Perennial Crop	Y	N	N	N
340	Cover Crop	Y	Y	Y	N
554	Drainage Water Management	Y	Y	Y	Y
511	Forage Harvest Management	Y	Y	Y	Y
666	Forest Stand Improvement	N	Y	Y	N
449	Irrigation Water Management	Y	Y	Y	N
484	Mulching	Y	Y	Y	Y
590	Nutrient Management	Y	Y	Y	N
595	Pest Management Conservation System	Y	Y	Y	Y
528	Prescribed Grazing	Y	Y	Y	Y
329	Residue and Tillage Management, No Till	Y	N	N	N
345	Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced	Y	N	N	N
585	Stripcropping	Y	N	N	N

Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities

Code	Asset Name	Crop	Forest	Pasture	Range
CEMA 216	Soil Health Testing	Y	Y	Y	Y
CEMA 217	Soil and Source Testing for Nutrient Management	Y	Y	Y	Y

Conservation Planning Activity

Code	Asset Name	Crop	Forest	Pasture	Range
CPA 199	Conservation Plan	Y	Y	Y	Y

Excerpts from NI 440 307.14 Regenerative Dec. 2025

Primary Regenerative Management Practices

- Conservation Crop Rotation (328)
- Contour Farming (330)
- Contour Orchard and Other Perennial Crop (331)
- Cover Crop (340)
- Drainage Water Management (554)
- Forage Harvest Management (511)
- Forest Stand Improvement (666)
- Irrigation Water Management (449)
- Mulching (484)
- Nutrient Management (590)
- Pest Management Conservation System (595)
- Grazing Management (528)
- Residue and Tillage Management, No Till (329)
- Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced (345)
- Stripcropping (585)

Practice Implementation Requirements

Eligible Practices and Activities

The following table identifies primary regenerative management practices by land use. Conservation plans and contracts under the RPP must incorporate at least one primary regenerative management practice which is either already being implemented by an eligible producer or planned for future implementation. The practice must meet all general and additional criteria of the applicable conservation practice standard to address targeted resource concerns within the pilot program. Conservation plans and contracts developed under RPP may also include supporting practices as well as other practices and activities.

Within the Conservation Practice Standard, the general and additional criteria that align with Soil and Water resource concerns must be incorporated in the Implementation Requirement document provided to the client.

Planning CEMA 216 Soil Health Testing

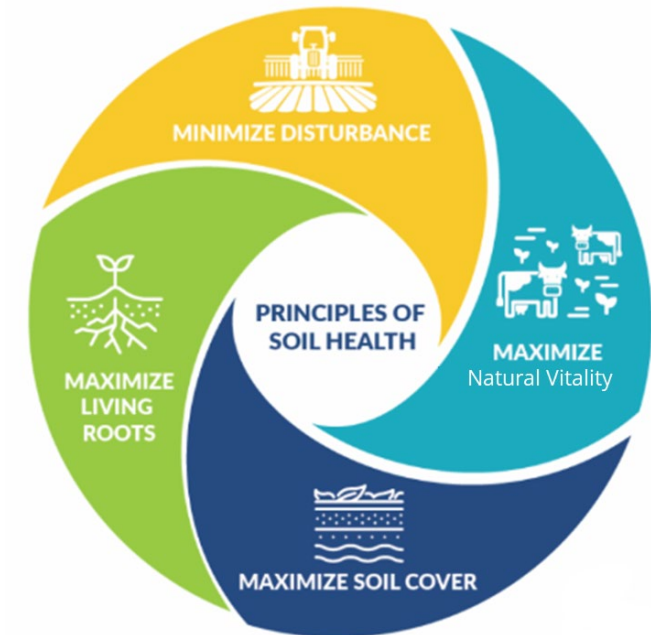
Through the planning process customers should be encouraged to plan Soil Health Testing to provide a sampling protocol that provides comprehensive results of their whole farm. At a minimum Soil Health Testing must be planned on one planning land unit.

Extent will depend on the client's operation in combination with the client's objective.

- Crop Rotation
- Soil variability
- Livestock vs no livestock
- Nutrient sources
- Client's desired extent of testing
- Etc.

When does Soil Health Testing need to be planned?

- Minimally at beginning and end of the conservation plan / contract



Soil Health Testing

Participants must agree to perform **Soil Health Testing** in the first and last year of the contract (at a minimum) to establish a starting baseline and to record the resulting changes.

Financial assistance for **Soil Health Testing** will be available to both producers who have not previously completed soil testing and producers who are already testing their soil.



United States Department of Agriculture

CEMA 216 - Page 1

Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activity

Soil Health Testing

CEMA 216

DEFINITION

Quantitative testing for biological, chemical, and physical characteristics of soil and constraints using approved laboratory methods.

APPLICABLE LAND USES

All Land Uses.

REQUIREMENTS

Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities

Code	Asset Name	Crop	Forest	Pasture	Range
CEMA 216	Soil Health Testing	Y	Y	Y	Y
CEMA 217	Soil and Source Testing for Nutrient Management	Y	Y	Y	Y



Regenerative Pilot Program - Ranking

- Category within CSP and EQIP Ranking Pools
- Only assessments that meet the pilot's requirements may be ranked in the category

Conservation Plan Done!

Regen EQIP

EQIP

To qualify for Regen Pilot Program:

- All land that encompasses the “whole farm” will be evaluated
- All Resource Concerns evaluated
- Minimum 5-year contract

and

At least one land unit in the assessment must meet the following:

- One Primary Regen Practice planned or currently being implemented
- Soil and Water RC thresholds are at met condition by end of contract
- Soil Health Testing beginning and end of contract

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Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Watershed Program Update for Arkansas 2026



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

Public Law 83 – 566 Program

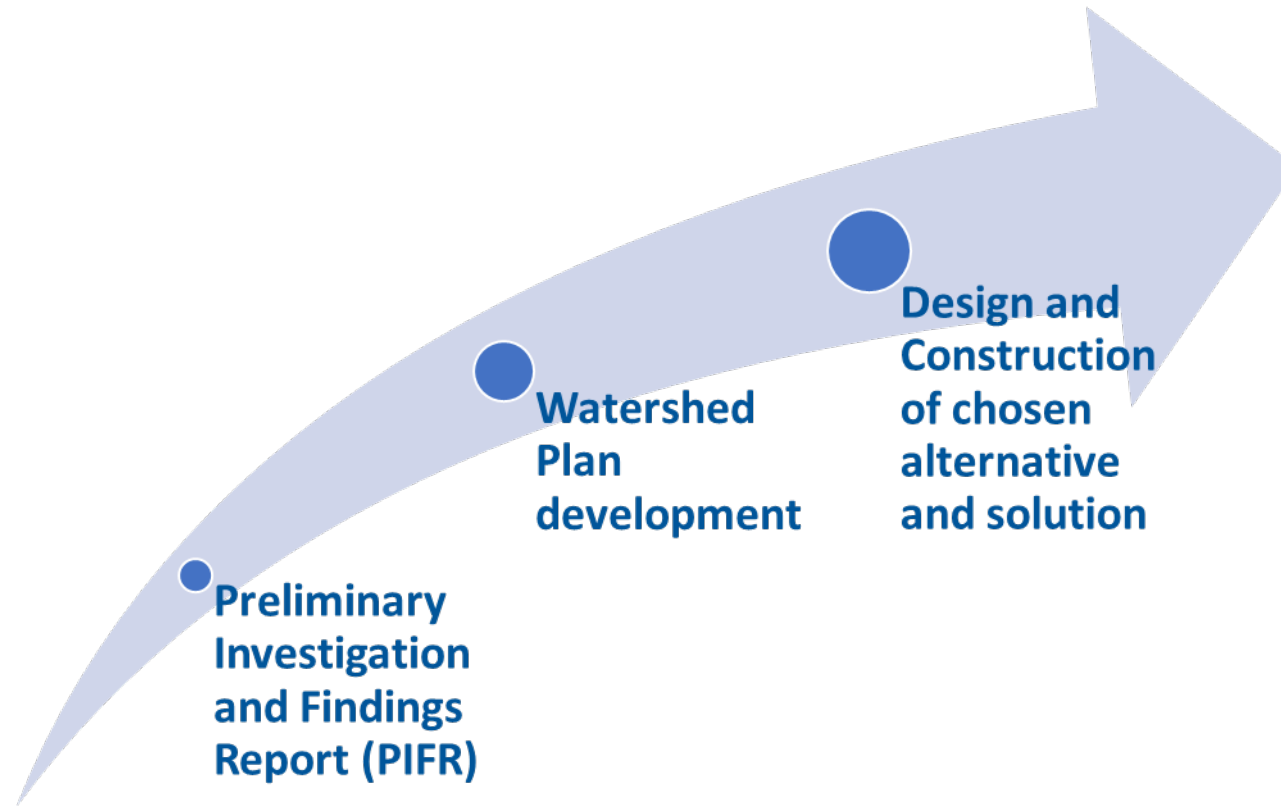
- **Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program (WFPO)**
- **The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (PL 83-566) specifically focuses on small watersheds, up to 250,000 acres**

Authorized Watershed Project Purposes

- **Primary Purposes**

- Flood Prevention/Reduction
- Watershed Protection
 - Erosion and sedimentation
 - Water quality
 - Flood control
- Agricultural Water Management
- Public Recreation Development or Public Fish and Wildlife

Phases of PL 83 – 566 Projects



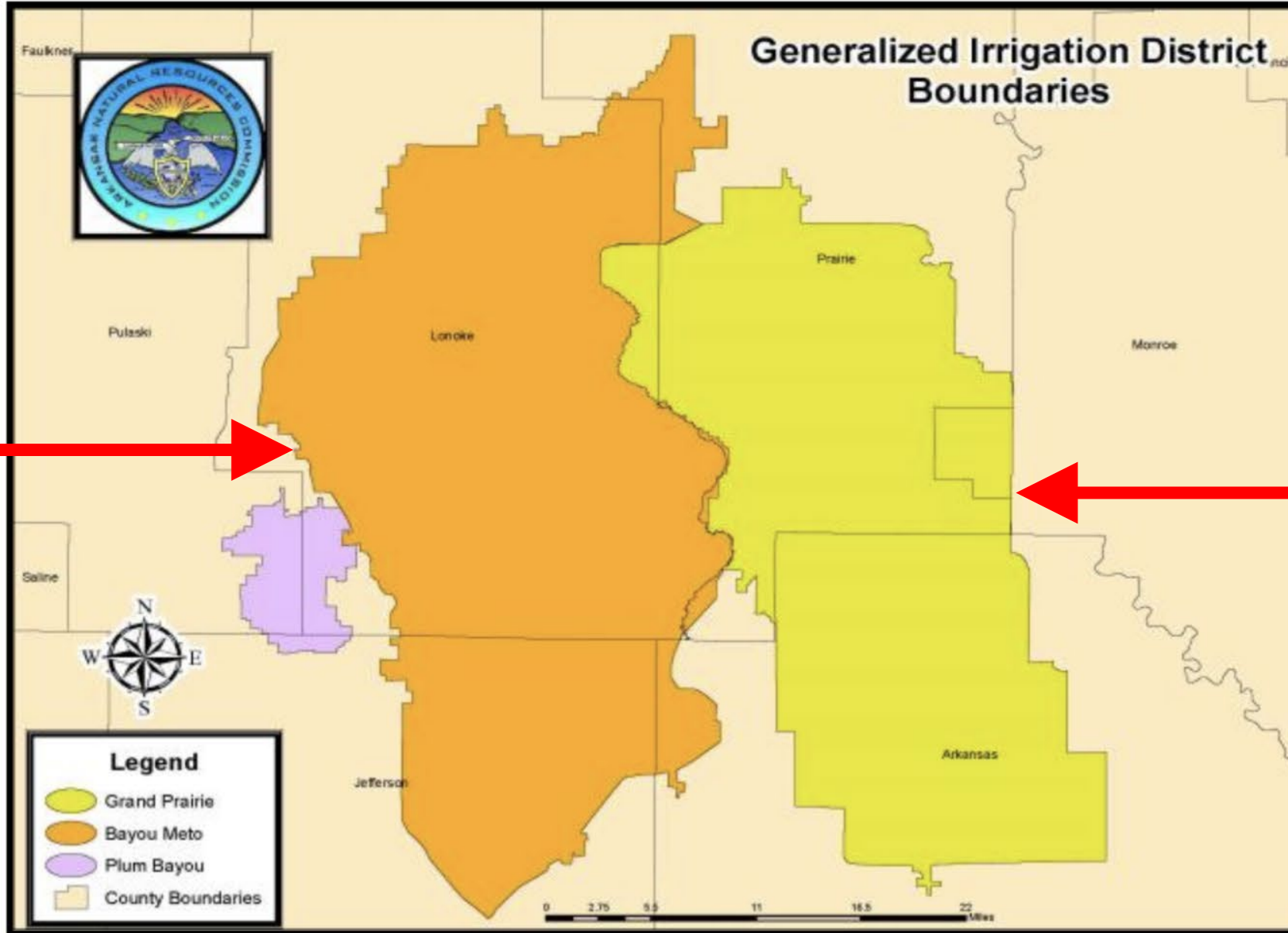


Current Watershed Projects in Arkansas

- **30 projects in various phases
(PIFR completed, Planning, Design,
and Construction)**



Current Watershed Projects	PIFR Phase Completed	Planning Phase	Design Phase	Construction Phase
City of Cotton Plant	✓			
City of Fountain Hill	✓			
City of Fulton	✓			
City of Menifee	✓			
First Creek – L'Anguille Rive Watershed	✓			
City of Blytheville	✓			
Osage Creek – Illinois River Watershed	not started			
Cities of Stamps and Lewisville		✓		
City of Altheimer		✓		
City of Dumas		✓		
City of El Dorado		✓		
City of Eudora		✓		
Cities of Hughes and Jennette		✓		
City of Madison		✓		
City of Turrell		✓		
City of Wilmot		✓		
Lake Bennett Watershed		✓		
Bayou Bartholomew (Pine Bluff)			✓	
Caney Bayou (Pine Bluff)			✓	
City of Camden			✓	
City of Forrest City			✓	
City of Haynes			✓	
City of Marianna			✓	
Lick Creek – Big Creek Watershed (W. Helena)			✓	
Long Lake Bayou – Little Bee Bayou Watershed (W. Helena)			✓	
Big Slough Watershed			✓	
West Fork White River Watershed			✓	✓
Bayou Meto Irrigation Project			✓	✓
Grand Prairie Irrigation Project			✓	✓
Departee Creek Watershed				✓



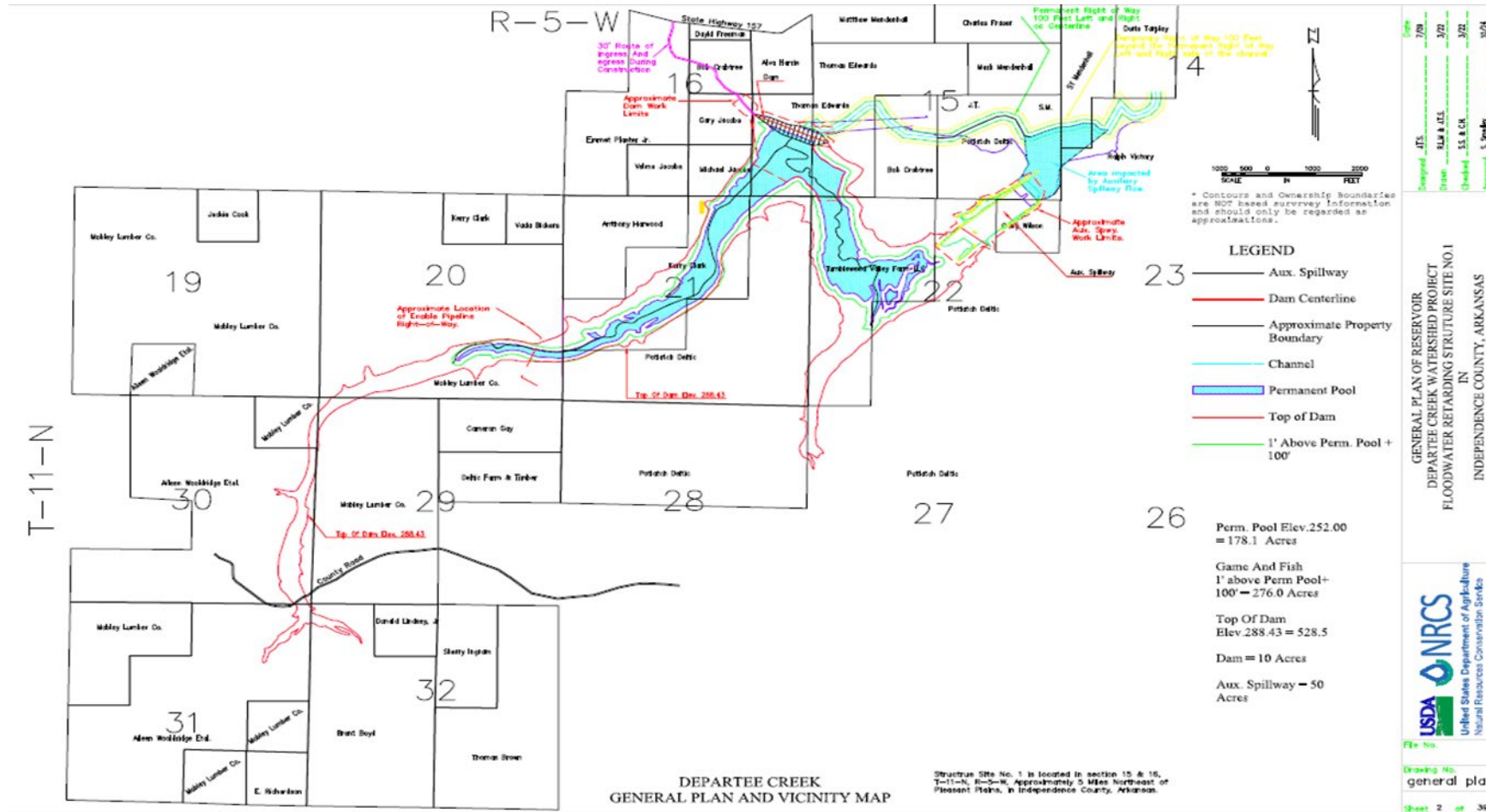
Bayou Meto
265,561 acres of
irrigated cropland

Grand Prairie
247,556 Acres
of irrigated
cropland

2027

2027

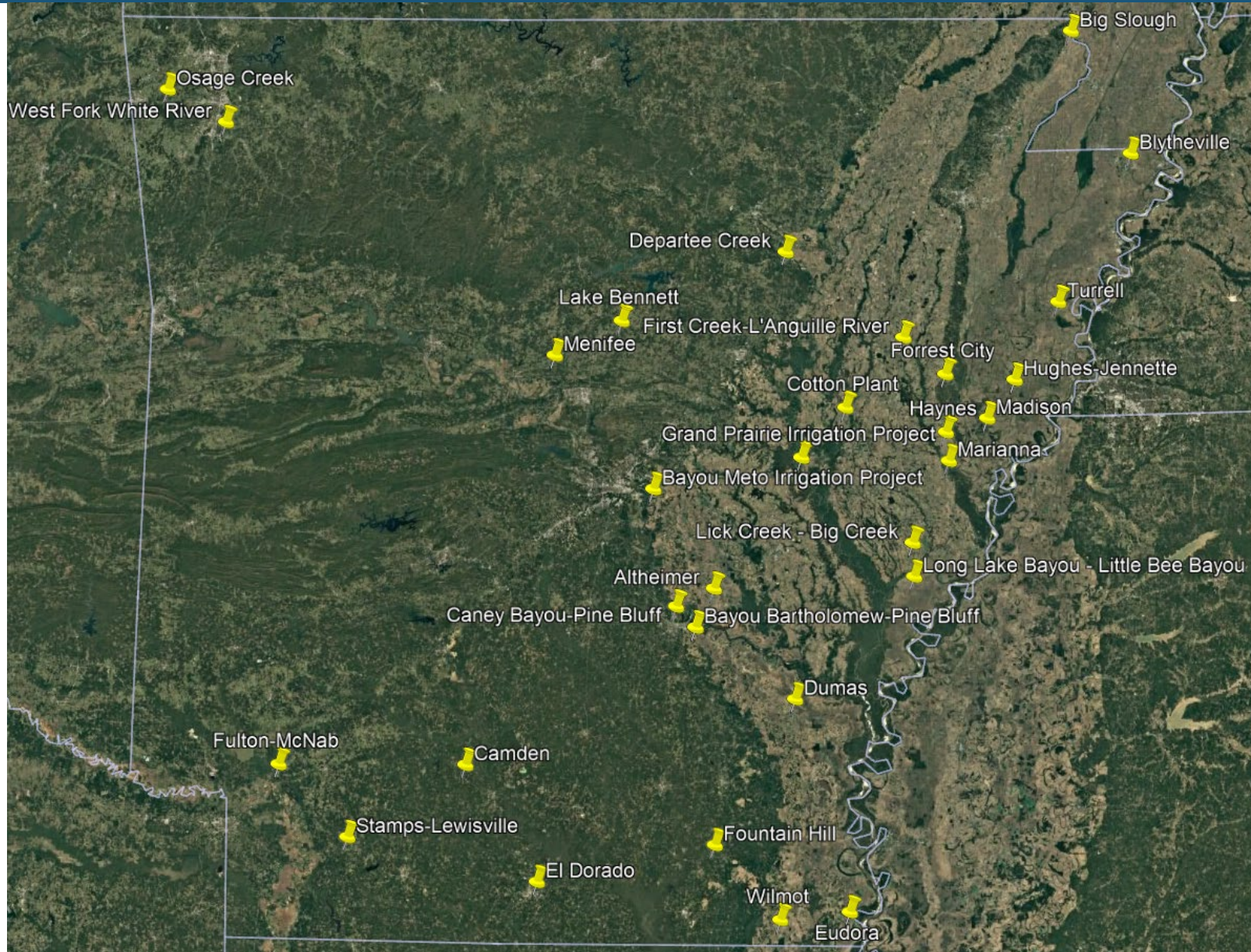
Departee Creek FRS



West Fork White River

- Streambank stabilization





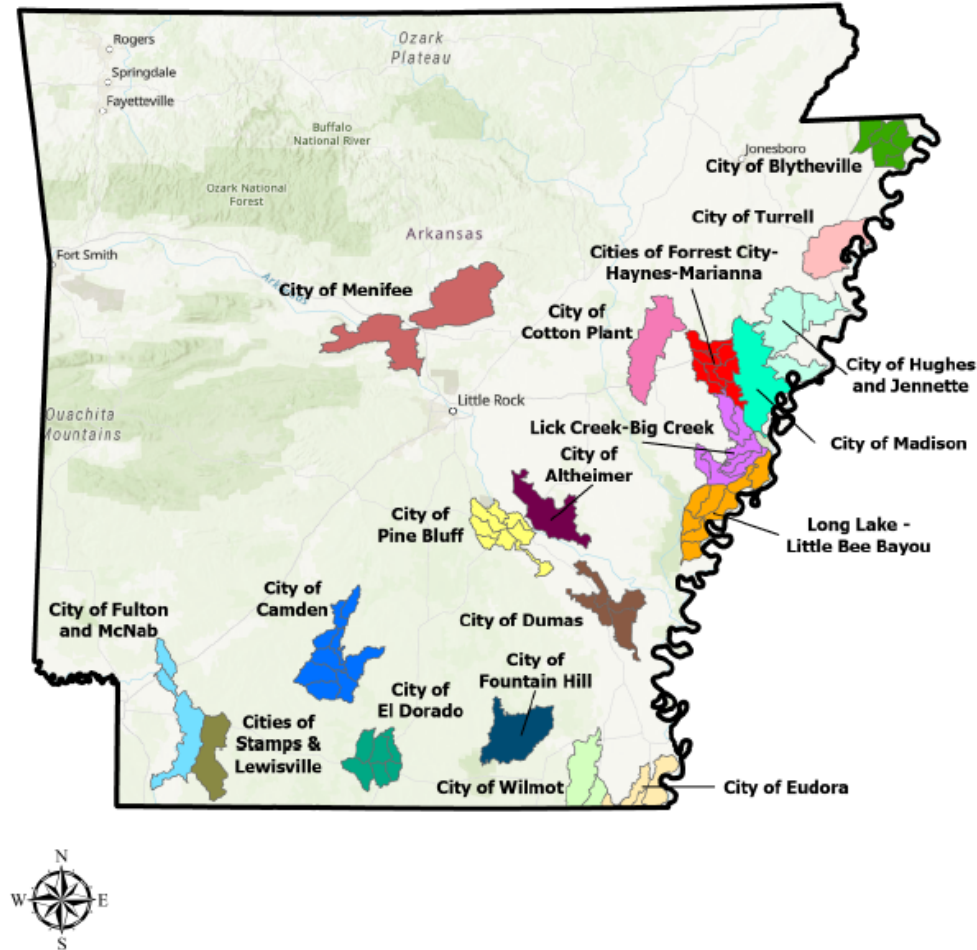
AR-NRCS entered into two Cooperative Agreements with the ABMA in September of 2022

- **All Phases Agreement (planning, design, & construction) covering 8 projects for \$104,387,736**
- **Planning Only Agreement covering 9 projects for \$10,833,726**

17 ABMA Projects are in various stages

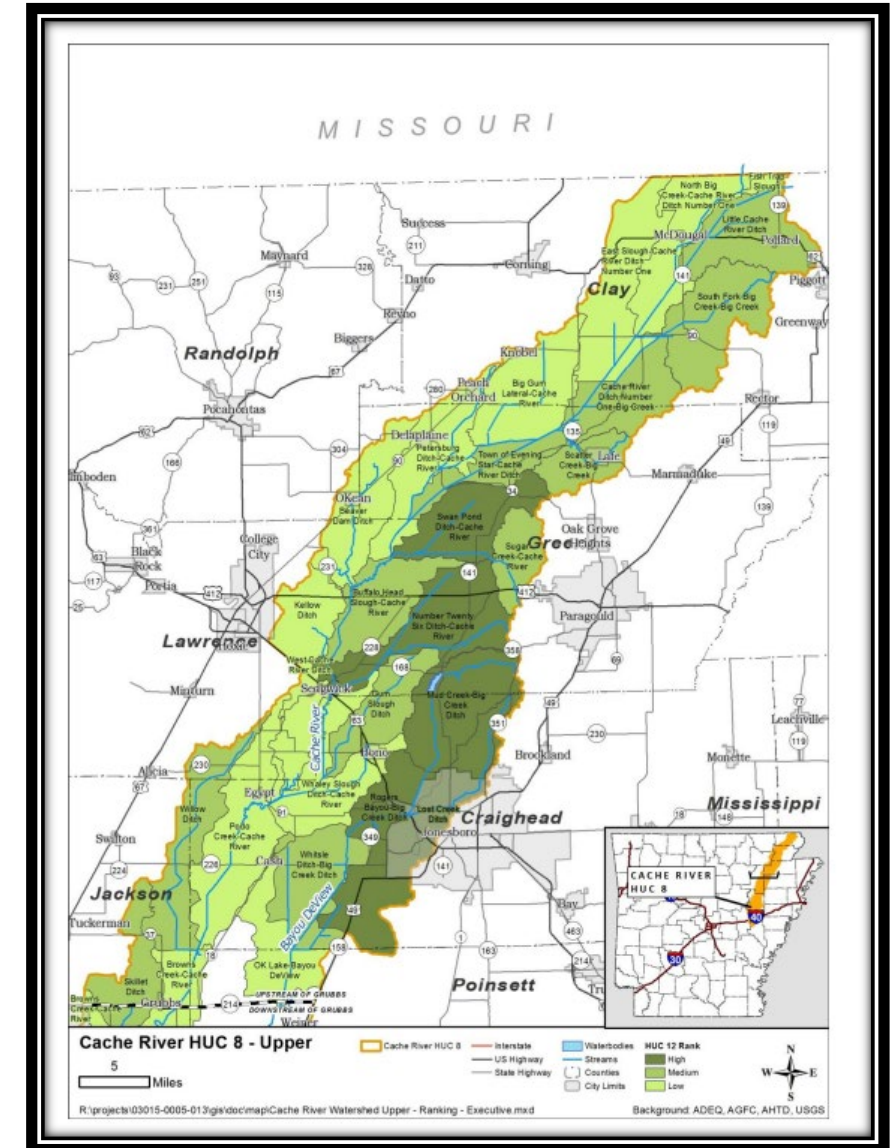
- **8 projects have Authorized Watershed Plans and are currently in the design phase**
 - 30% Designs submitted
- **9 projects are in the planning phase**
 - 2 plans programmatic review complete & ready for public review
 - 1 plan undergoing programmatic review
 - 5 plans at NWMC under technical review or addressing comments
 - 1 plan under State Review

Watershed Projects Requested In Arkansas



- **Cache River**

- Execution of existing practices
- 1 to 2 years – Two Stage Ditches
- 2 to 3 years – MRBI
- 3 to 4 years – Easements
- 5 to 7 years – PL-566



Emergency Watershed Protection

- Stone County EWP – Agreement executed, bidding in process (\$274K)
- War Eagle Clifty EWP – Construction completed. (\$400K)
- Pumpkin Hollow EWP – Agreement executed. (\$85K)
- Coon Creek EWP – Agreement executed. (\$79K)





Thank You

Questions?

Bill Kinkaid – Resource Conservationist
NRCS Watershed Planning Team
Office: (501) 301-3127
E-mail: william.kinkaid@usda.gov