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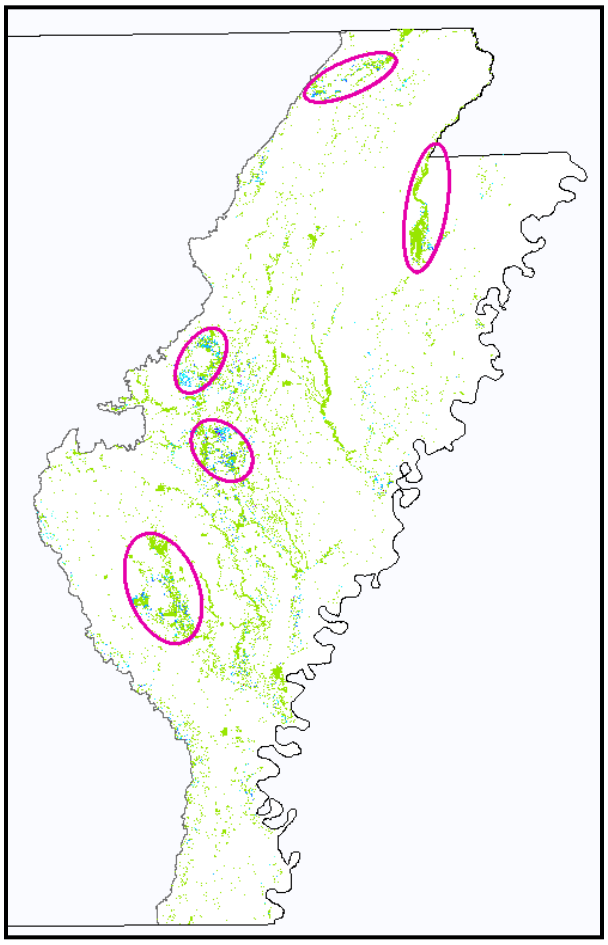
AR MAV CDN – Developing an Approach to Prioritizing Conservation Actions



In order to facilitate partner collaboration and set direction for the newly established Arkansas Mississippi Alluvial Valley Conservation Delivery Network (CDN), its member participants first recognize the need to develop an effective approach to identify and prioritize conservation actions in the Arkansas MAV. CDN members agreed that any approach to defining conservation priorities should be foundationally based on the goals and objectives set by the LMVJV but also consider the collective institutional priorities of CDN partner organizations in a logical manner that would most benefit areas that were known to be of greatest restoration priority. The group also agreed that the methodology should be scientifically justifiable and clearly demonstrate concerted thought and planning on the part of the CDN partnership. Numerous "priority conservation area" maps from various partners were reviewed and considered in relation to the broader CDN goals and objectives, but there was a need for additional clarity. There was general consensus that all available conservation objectives could not be considered a priority, or integrated into a functional delivery planning tool. But it was generally deemed important to try to include as many spatially explicit priorities as possible to aid the group in targeting conservation actions, ranking project objectives to respond funding opportunities, and for coordination of conservation delivery activities among partners.

To develop this approach, the CDN formed a Delivery Planning Working Group. Through assessing and evaluating available priority maps and models, the group agreed that utilizing the most spatially explicit information available. This approach would allow the CDN to capitalize on existing wetland and reforestation planning models to in essence "*prioritize the priorities" allowing CDN partners the opportunity to work cooperatively* in areas where their organizations conservation priorities and objectives jointly overlap existing conservation priority layers (i.e. areas that a specific agency has already indicated they prefer to work based on organizational mission).

The Working Group ultimately settle on four such spatially explicit conservation decision support models (DSMs) – 1) Ducks Unlimited Wetland Restoration Suitability Model, 2) Forest Breeding Bird Reforestation Decision Support Model developed by the LMVJV Partnership, 3) Arkansas Multi-Agency Wetlands Planning Team Priority Model, and 4) Ducks Unlimited Easement Protection Priority Model. Each of these models was designed to protect and/or restore wetland habitat and functions to the

landscape of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley area of Arkansas. While they do utilize some similar data and there is overlap in applications, each model was designed for a unique purpose and has distinct output products. Further, the methods and design of the models are fully documented and some have been rigorously peer-reviewed.

An approach to evaluating the integrated model is only in its initial phase. In the first draft of this approach, the DSMs were then combined equally to produce a model that demonstrates where the collective models indicate areas in greatest need of restoration. Areas of greatest concentration from the unified model output are displayed on the map above. The concentrated priorities produced by the model will serve as a foundational tool for the CDN to target areas of collaboration and cooperation in the months ahead.

As part of a second refined iteration of the model, HUC -12 watersheds will be incorporated into the model to potentially improve the delineation of focal area boundaries. In addition, National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) data will be used to further refine the areas of greatest restoration need.