



Arkansas Waterfowl Rice Incentive Conservation Enhancement (WRICE)





WRICE Program Background

- 1) Winter-flooded rice fields and managed seasonal wetlands can provide similar wetland functions for waterfowl and other wildlife.
- 2) Food for ducks in rice fields has been substantially reduced due to changes in production methods and rice varieties. Fall tillage has also reduced waste rice and other foods available to ducks.





Drivers of Duck Abundance

Use AGFC aerial survey data to examine landscape impacts

Covariate	Effect on Dabblers		Effect on Mallards	
	Presence (+/-)	Abundance (+/-)	Presence (+/-)	Abundance (+/-)
Rice Field	23/0	18/0	20/0	18/0
Surface Water	23/0	17/0	23/0	21/0
Open Water	24/0	2/0	17/0	1/1
Fallow Field	21/0	1/0	20/0	0/0
Soybean Field	20/0	7/0	10/0	3/0
Wetland	10/0	0/0	25/0	0/3
WSI	3/17	7/1	5/12	12/0
Corn Field	--	--	0/1	0/0



Drivers of Duck Abundance

Dabblers	Total Highest Mean/SD	
	Presence	Abundance
Rice Field	7	10
Surface Water	14	7
Open Water	0	0
Fallow Field	2	1
Soybean Field	0	2
Wetland	1	0

Mallards	Total Highest Mean/SD	
	Presence	Abundance
Rice Field	6	6
Surface Water	12	12
Open Water	1	0
Fallow Field	0	0
Soybean Field	0	0
Wetland	5	1

How often a covariate was the most important during a survey



Drivers of Duck Abundance

KEY FINDINGS

- 1) Duck presence and abundance most influenced by coverage and distribution of surface water in combination with rice fields
- 2) Mallards use a mosaic of habitats, and extensive surface water is necessary to sustain large populations of mallards
- 3) Mallards use soybean fields due to abundance (31–34% of total extent) compared to rice fields (10–17%)



Drivers of Duck Abundance

MANAGEMENT ACTION

- Managed habitat anchors complexes and must be maintained
 - Focus on priority landscapes
- Surface water driven by natural flooding is critical
 - Predictive models useful if habitats reduced and hydrology altered
- Agriculture land is important over a large landscape
 - Work with private landowners to improve management for waterfowl



Goals of WRICE-VPA Program

AGFC is partnering with NRCS through the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program to:

- 1) Help farmers increase waterfowl food in harvested rice fields without financial burden.
- 2) Provide permitted waterfowl hunting opportunities on rice fields.
- 3) Offer public hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities on Wetland Reserve Easement/Program properties.





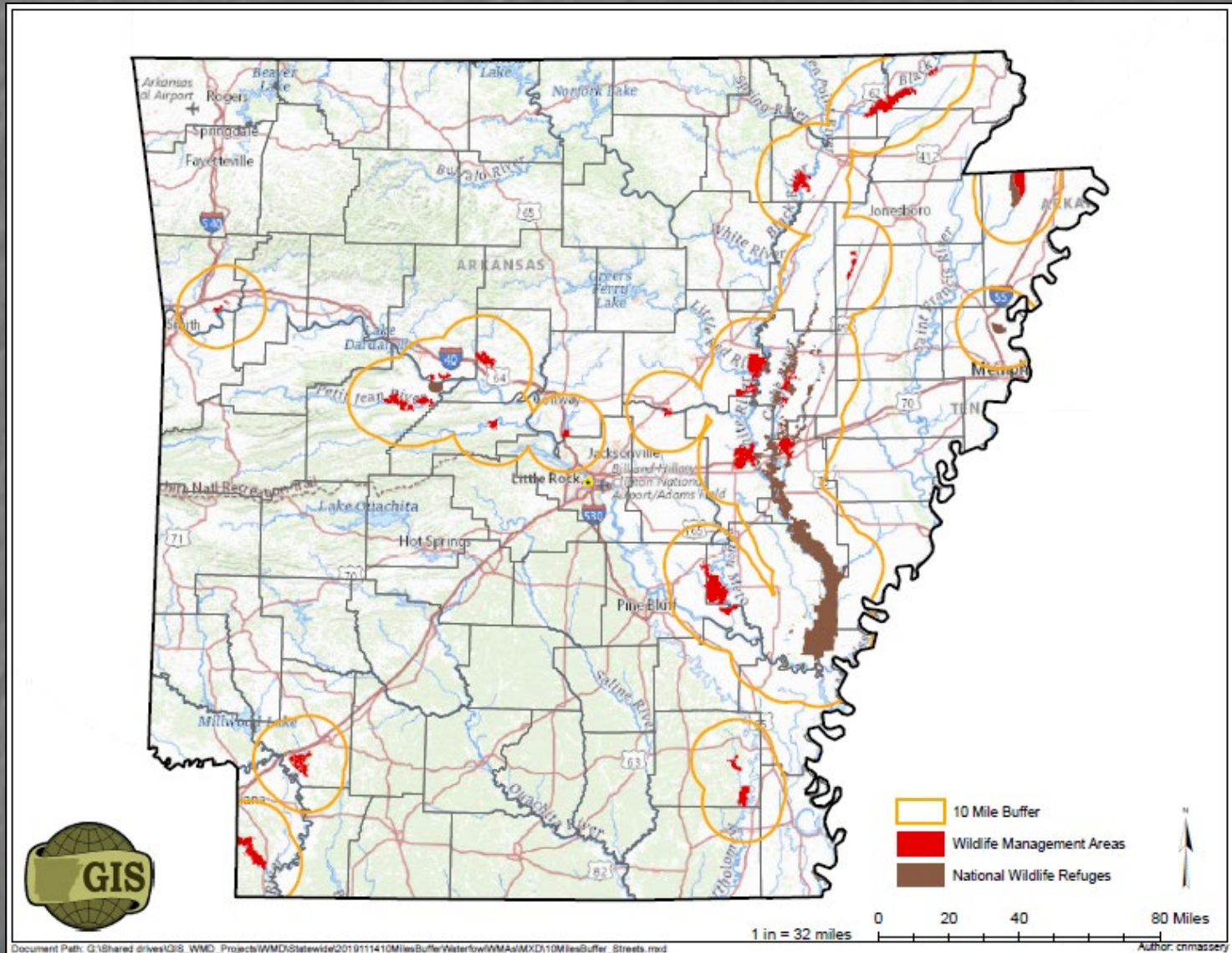
WRICE Program Requirements

Farmers or landowners receive incentive payments for the following activities:

- 1) Provide shallow water throughout the waterfowl wintering period on harvested rice fields within 10 miles of waterfowl-focused Wildlife Management Areas and National Wildlife Refuges.
- 2) Allow permitted waterfowl hunting and wildlife viewing on rice fields through Feb. 28.
- 3) Offer public hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities on Wetland Reserve Easement/Program properties.



WRICE Focus Areas





WRICE Program Outreach

Arkansas Waterfowl Rice Incentive Conservation Enhancement Voluntary Public Access Program

The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and Natural Resources Conservation Service are offering financial incentives to rice producers through the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program to allow public access to their land for hunting and other wildlife-dependent recreation. Winter-flooded rice fields and managed seasonal wetlands provide many of the same wetland functions for waterfowl and other wildlife. However, food for ducks in rice fields has been substantially reduced due to changes in production methods and rice varieties. Fall tillage also has reduced waste rice and other foods available to waterfowl.

The WRICE program seeks to:

- ▶ Help farmers increase waterfowl food in harvested rice fields without financial burden.
- ▶ Provide permitted waterfowl hunting opportunities on rice fields within the Mississippi Alluvial Valley (MAV), Arkansas River Valley (ARV) and Red River corridor.
- ▶ Offer public hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities on Wetland Reserve Easement/Program properties within these same regions.

Program Requirements

- Participating landowners and farmers will receive incentive payments for the following activities:
- ▶ Providing shallow water throughout the waterfowl wintering period on harvested rice fields within 10 miles of waterfowl-focused wildlife management areas and national wildlife refuges (see map).
 - ▶ Allow permitted waterfowl hunting and wildlife viewing through Feb. 28.
 - ▶ Offer public hunting and wildlife-viewing opportunities on Wetland Reserve Easement/Program properties.



www.agfc.com/habitat

Program Specifics for Rice Fields

- ▶ Suspend fall tillage (choose one or more post-harvest options: A-C)
 - A. Leave stubble standing
 - B. Roll stubble with a flat or created roller
 - C. Conduct patchy burns
- ▶ Shallow-water development (choose option A or B)
 - A. Rainfall dependent (\$25/acre)
 - Ensure fields are capable of holding water at an average depth of 6-18" Oct. 15 (Aug. 15 option for additional ranking points)-Feb. 15
 - B. Surface-water pumping (\$50/acre)
 - Surface water must be readily available for flooding Nov. 1-Feb. 15. Ensure fields are capable of holding water Nov. 1-Feb. 15. Pump surface water as needed to ensure flooding at an average depth of 6-18" from Nov. 1-Feb. 15
- ▶ Permitted waterfowl hunting and wildlife viewing (\$100/acre)
 - Allow walk-in hunting by randomly selected parties of four hunters or less each weekend of the waterfowl season.
 - AGFC staff will post fields as special waterfowl hunting areas and implement a permitted hunt program.
- ▶ Monitoring and payment
 - AGFC staff will monitor enrolled fields weekly during the contracted flooding period to determine flooding status.
 - Payment will be made in two installments.
 - 50% of the contract total following successful flood up.
 - Up to 50% of the contract total at the end of contract based on contract performance.
 - For example, if an enrolled field is flooded during 80% of monitoring visits, payment will total 80% of the contract total.

Program Specifics for Wetland Reserve Easements

- Public hunting and wildlife viewing (\$50/acre)
- Allow walk-in hunting during specified hunting seasons.
 - Allow walk-in wildlife viewing during specified dates.
 - AGFC staff will post fields as special walk-in hunting and wildlife viewing areas.

Additional Information and Webinars Available at www.agfc.com/wrice.
You can also contact Luke Naylor, AGFC Waterfowl Program Coordinator at 501-913-5872, or visit www.agfc.com/habitat to reach a Private Lands Biologist in your area.

To apply, please fill out the following application and email it to the Private Lands Biologist in your region by June 1, 2020

AGFC will notify successful applicants by July 15, 2020.

Applicant Name: _____ Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Applicant Address: _____

Field County: _____ Town Nearest Field: _____ Field Acres: _____

Field Latitude-Longitude or Legal Description: _____

Please include a copy of the developer proof of interest lease authority for the field(s) you are offering for enrollment with your application.

What is the anticipated cut date for the field(s) you are offering for enrollment? _____

Is the land you're wanting to enroll a rice field or Wetland Reserve Easement? _____

If it is a rice field, please answer these additional questions:

Are you willing to suspend post-harvest tillage (burning and rolling) are allowed? Yes No

Are you willing to allow permitted waterfowl hunting administered by AGFC? Yes No

Can you guarantee surface water availability to flood fields Nov. 1-Feb. 15? Yes No

Are you willing to ensure fields are capable of holding water Oct. 15-Feb. 15? Yes No

Would you be willing to initiate flooding by Aug. 15 or immediately following harvest? Yes No

Region	Private Lands Biologist	Contact Information
North Delta	Bo Reid	870-291-1281 james.reid@agfc.ar.gov
Central Delta	Daniel Greenfield	870-638-0831 daniel.greenfield@agfc.ar.gov
Central Delta	David Graves	870-319-0668 david.graves@agfc.ar.gov
South Delta	Bubba Groves	870-224-3334 bubba.groves@agfc.ar.gov
Arkansas River Valley	Michelle Farr	479-222-5894 michelle.farr@agfc.ar.gov
Red River Valley	Ricky Chastain	870-331-1297 ricky.chastain@agfc.ar.gov
Statewide/General Questions	Luke Naylor	501-913-5872 luke.naylor@agfc.ar.gov

WRICE Program Specifics

1) Suspend fall tillage

- A. Leave stubble standing
- B. Roll stubble with a flat or cleated roller
- C. Conduct patchy burns

2) Shallow-water development

- A. Ensure fields are capable of holding water at an average depth of 2-18" Oct. 15 -Feb. 15
- B. Surface-water pumping receives extra payment



WRICE Program Specifics

- Permitted waterfowl hunting and wildlife viewing (\$100/acre)
 - Reserve all hunting rights for AGFC
 - Hunting by randomly selected parties of four hunters or less each weekend of waterfowl season
 - AGFC staff post fields as special waterfowl hunting areas and implement a permitted hunt program.





WRICE Program Specifics

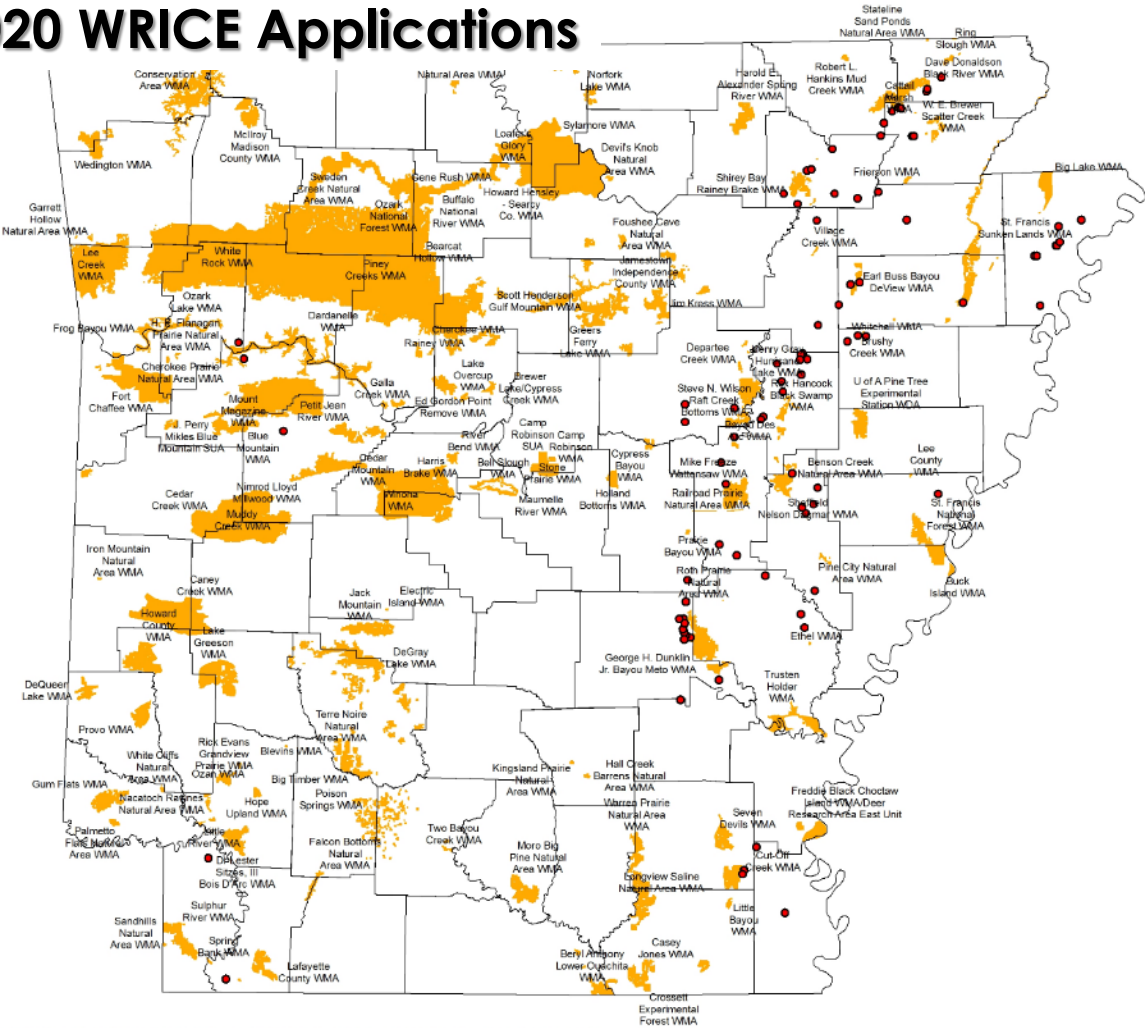
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 - 50% of the contract total following successful flood up.
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WRICE Applications

2020 WRICE Applications



➤ 2020-2021

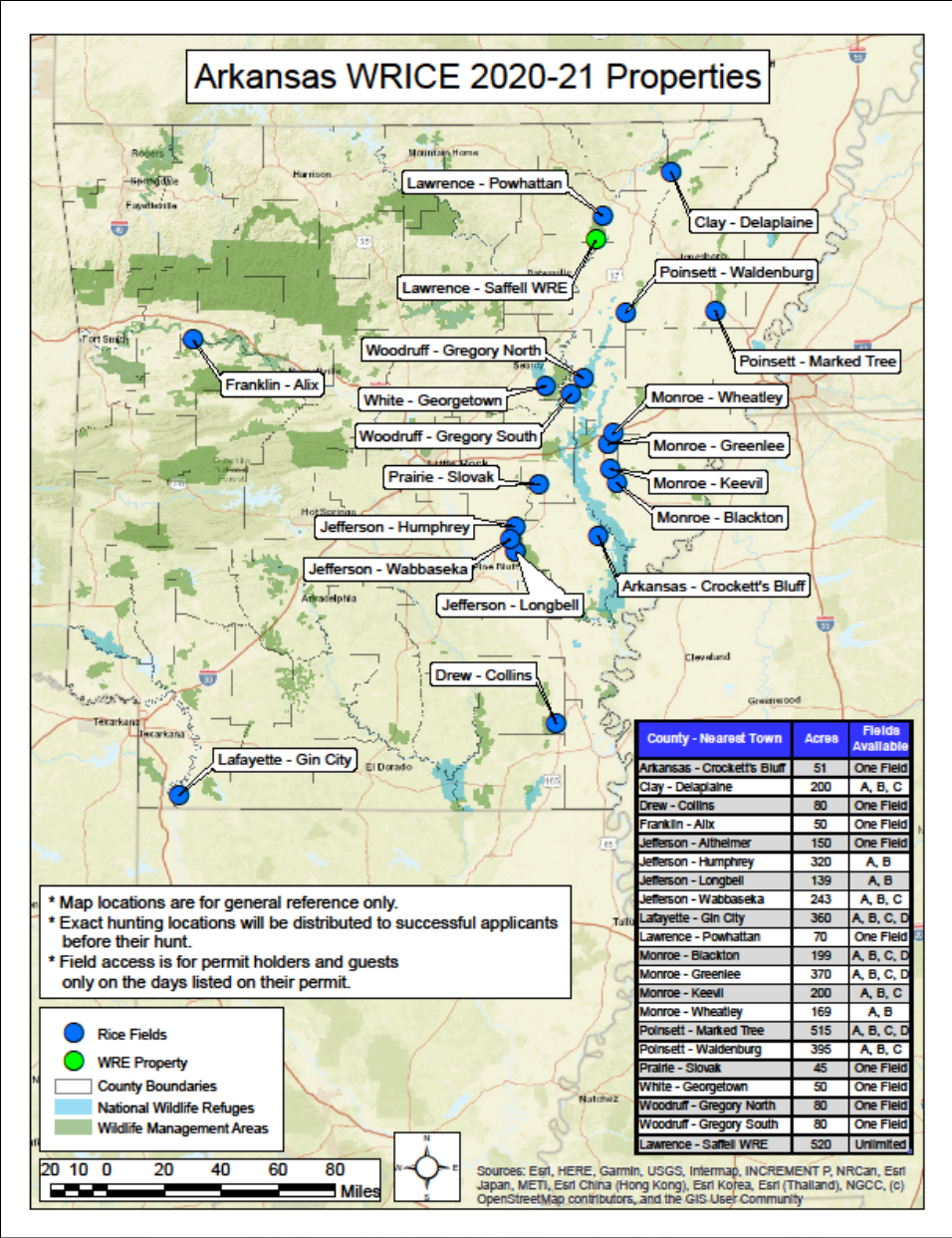
- 24,257 acres rice initially offered
- 835 acres WRE initially offered

➤ 2021-2022

- 2,898 acres rice offered for re-enrollment
- 9,079 acres rice offered for new enrollment
- 493 acres WRE offered for re-enrollment



2020 WRICE Properties

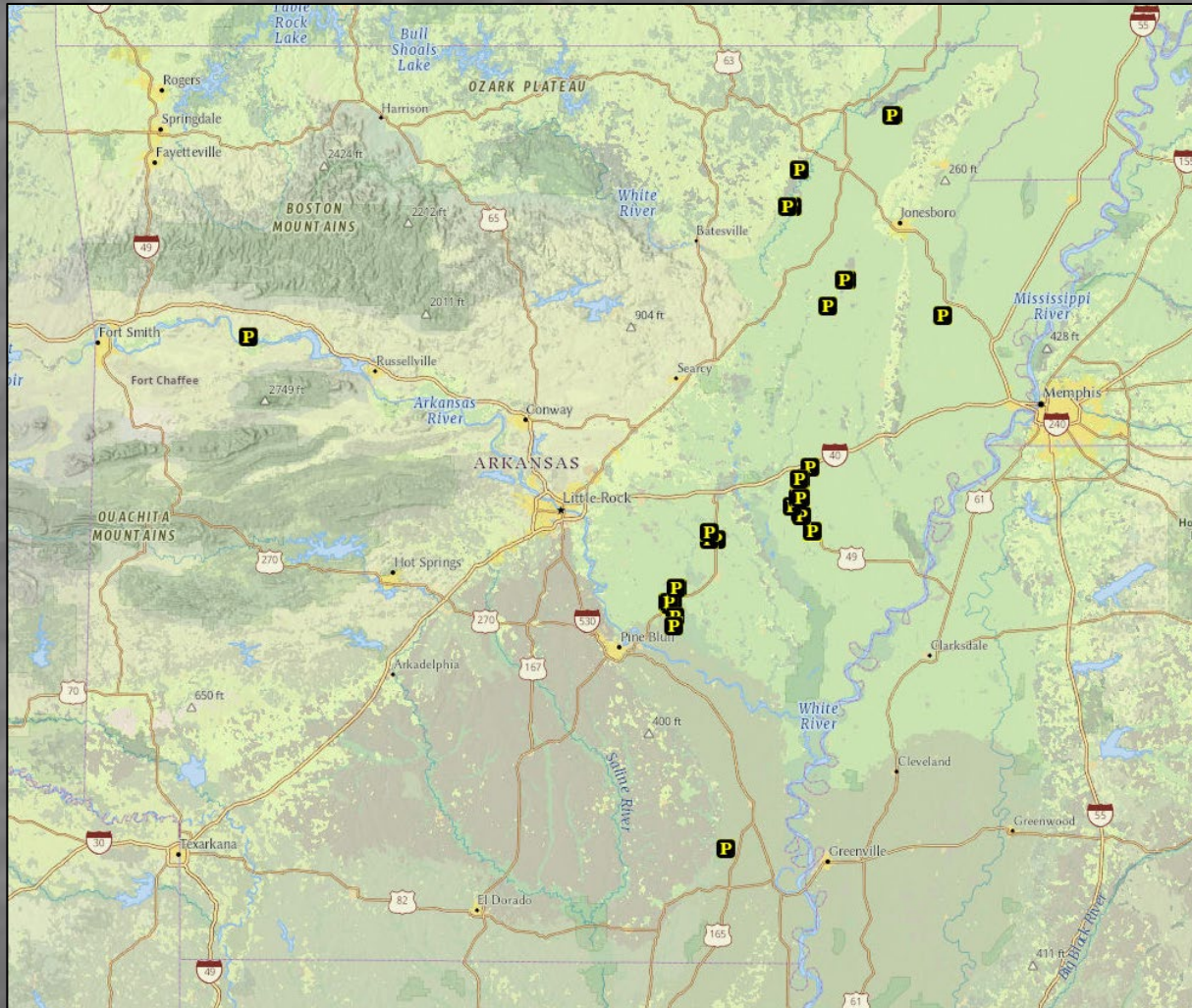


- 3,855 acres enrolled
- 520 acres WRE enrolled





2021 WRICE Properties



- 3,797 acres enrolled
- 493 acres WRE enrolled



WRICE Management





2020-21 Duck Season

- About 40 fields available each weekend of regular duck season and for two special youth hunts
- \$5 application fee per hunt period; applications taken Thur.-Sun. weekly
- 1,093 unique individuals applied for hunts
- 305 unique individuals randomly drawn to hunt



2020-21 Duck Season

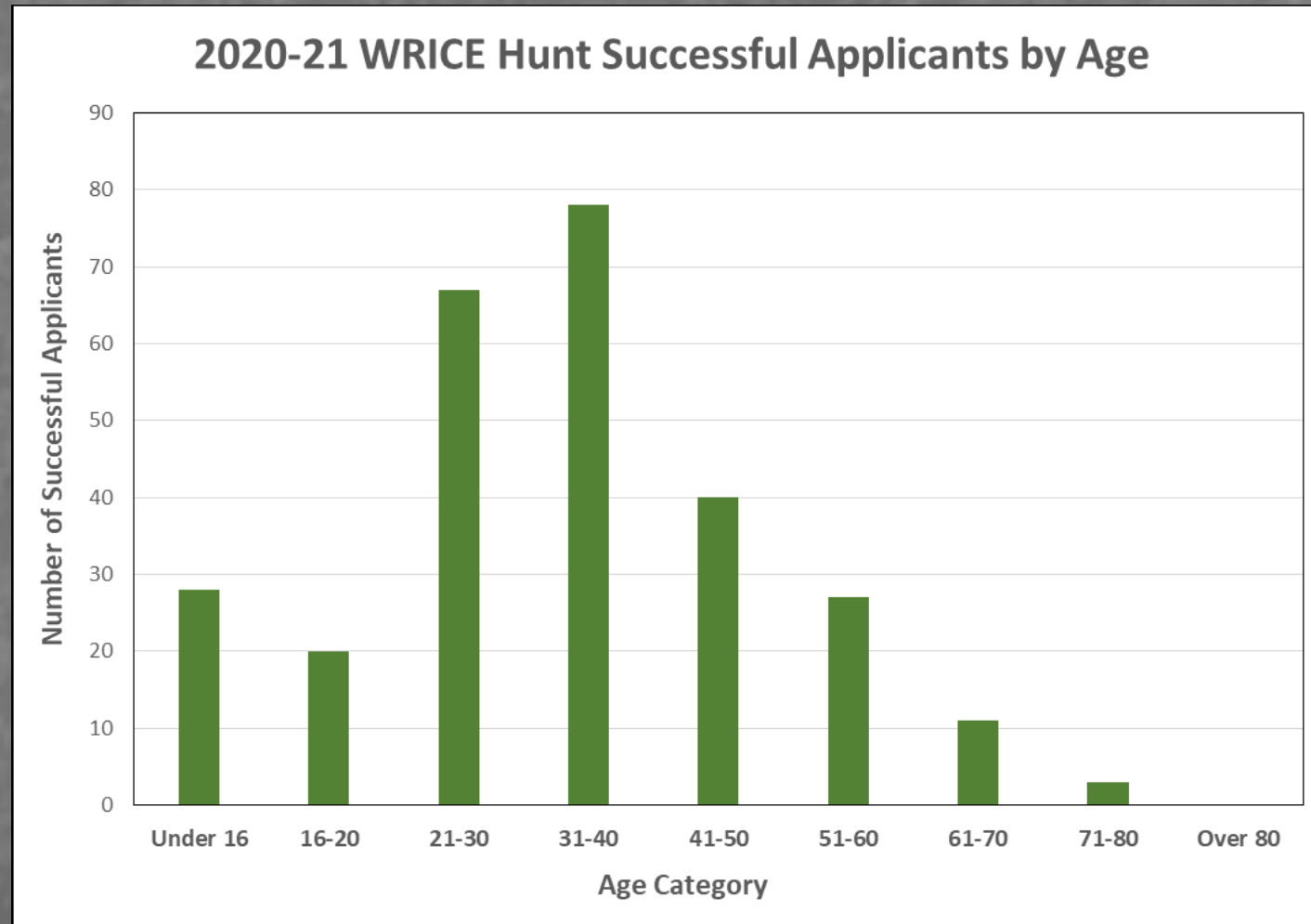
- Average applicants per week = 243
- Average applicants per week for each field: range 1-22
- Maximum applicants per week for a field = 31





2020-21 Duck Season

- Average age of successful applicants = 34





Looking Forward

- VPA-HIP grant active through 2022-23 wintering period
- Working to expand habitat impact with EQIP funds
- Planning to do farmer focus groups to refine program, payment rates, etc.
- Will continue past 2022-23, details TBD

