



Arkansas- Louisiana West Gulf Coastal Plain Conservation Delivery Network

Orange above shows the boundary of the AR-LA CDN within the Joint Venture.



AR-LA Conservation Delivery Network "CDN" Steering Committee

David Breithaupt, Co-Chair
Bubba Groves
Dan Weber
Jeff Fore
David Hayden
Jeremy Everitts
Ryan Diener



Ricky Chastain, Co-Chair
Rob Smith
Darren Spinks
Bill Holimon
Pat Stinson
Rick Williams
Amanda Mathis

Arkansas – Louisiana Conservation Delivery Network

AR-LA CDN

Annual Report 2022 - 23

Conservation Delivery in Action – Communication is Important

AR-LA 10 Aug 2022 Steering Committee Meeting: The AR-LA Conservation Delivery Network Steering Committee met in Monticello, AR on 10 Aug 2022 to discuss the progress of the RCPP project for Open Pine. The agenda covered our first-year roll-out of the RCPP, initial sign-up, and areas where improvements could be made. With 40 people present, discussion was robust; recommendations were fine-tuned for review in the draft meeting notes, to be circulated to all Steering Committee members. The group concluded the day by visiting a specific RCPP project site to observe both a treated (previous project) and an untreated pine stand. In the pictures below, Bubba Groves and Ricky Chastain (both AGFC) described the process for evaluating a site, and practices that would be used to gain results – such as restoring Northern Bobwhite habitat – with partners like NRCS Amanda Mathis, QF Austin Klais, KIITF Charley Williams, and many others in adjacent stands of “before-and-after” treatment



Numerous field visits in 2022 with CDN partners and private landowners were a significant focus of the AR-LA CDN, and specifically the RCPP effort. Seeing and grasping the issues among CDN partners regarding Open Pine practices, we continue to improve new and better ways to communicate a successful project concept to forest landowners.

Videos developed by Quail Forever and conservation partners in collaboration with private landowners in Arkansas and Louisiana:

Video: [Glen Melton - Active Forest Management Benefits Forest Health and Economics \(LA\)](#) (5 min)

Video: [Miles Goggans - Active Forest Management Benefits Wildlife \(AR\)](#) (4:40 min)

AR-LA RCPP Open Pine Annual Report 2022

Executive Summary

The Arkansas-Louisiana (AR-LA) Conservation Delivery Network (CDN) Partnership was awarded 5.9 million dollars, over five years in 16 counties and parishes, to restore 30,000 acres of open pine habitat. In Year #2 (2022), NRCS **Financial Assistance of \$596,225 was awarded** through contracts, with plans to restore or enhance **2,456 acres of open pine habitat (8% of our target)** through 15 Arkansas and Louisiana landowner projects. In 2022, total partner **contributions of \$4,344,590 and 28,053 acres** far exceeded expectations; when including Year #1 contributions (13,584 acres and \$1,723,841), we have almost met our 5-year obligation for both financial and habitat contributions. Going into 2023, our partners continue to be very optimistic. Our financial assistance to landowners is planned to be almost twice that available in 2022, with expected contracts projected to be at or over 30, and habitat commitments planned for approximately 5k-7k acres. The coordinated effort of our Delivery Team, or ITA responsibilities, of this Open Pine project is to continue regular meetings of partners to communicate and coordinate efforts between the two states. Along with our Communications Team, Social or Human Dimensions Team, and a Monitoring-Science Team, we are moving forward with a truly science-based outreach and education effort that will assist us in understanding the many social elements of private landowner incentive programs. A key to the Open Pine project's success continues to be the significant contributions from 19 partners, including private industry. American Bird Conservancy will continue to serve as grantee for this complex partnership effort, which will continue through 2026.

Project Overview – Progress, Successes, and Milestones

The Open Pine 2319 RCPP project was initiated in earnest upon execution of the Supplemental Agreement 12/15/2021. Between January 1, 2022 and December 31, 2022, the Arkansas-Louisiana (AR-LA) Conservation Delivery Network (CDN) Partnership convened approximately 32 meetings (both in-person and virtual) of the CDN Steering Committee, Implementation Teams, and Science and Communications “enhancement” Teams, and all 19 partners. In addition to outreach meetings, advertisements, field days, one-one contacts, mailings, and PSAs, allowed us to connect with many landowners in all 16 counties and parishes. AR & LA partner meetings, NRCS, and Collaborators (KIITF) meetings were also used to evaluate sign-up and initial outreach for the Open Pine 2319 RCPP. A major avenue initiated in 2022 is the RCPP-dedicated website used to share meeting and project information with both partners and landowners: <https://www.lmviv.org/ar-la-rcpp>. Several pre- and post-sign-up public awareness documents were sent to local news outlets and disseminated via partner news media. This communication effort resulted in 261 contacts from partners; the Social Communications and Outreach Teams made 134 contacts, and other activities connected with Private Landowners

(241 contacts). These Working Groups were successful in their outreach and communication within the RCPP area, for a grand total of **636 landowner/producer contacts in 2022**. This **outreach resulted in a substantial number (10-12%) of first-time landowners**, who were encouraged to participate in the Open Pine RCPP. The CDN also continued their development of other partner working groups – a formal Implementation Delivery Team (ITA or Technical Advisory), and Social and Communications Teams (ETA) – that will consistently evaluate progress and improve performance. Our pool of applicants was much larger than anticipated; with FSA support, managing that number was handled successfully. Ranking process worked remarkably well, with some adjustments identified and applied successfully for Year #2. Contracting of 15 selected applicants was completed on time and with no issues or concerns.

Project Challenges Year #1 – Year #2

With COVID-19, collaboration in a traditional sense was challenging during Year #1, but with virtual platforms available, and strategic planning early and consistently, our partners and their agencies/organizations managed this difficulty through virtual forums and public platforms like agency commission meetings and webinars. Familiarization with the new portal items kept ABC busy through the Proposal, PPA, and SA; as we began implementation in Year #2, the process and procedural elements became much more familiar and increased our efficiency. Particularly challenging was volume of applicants and funds available for contracts; of 62 applications that were formally evaluated, ranked, and scored, funds were available for only 15 contracts. This issue challenges us to keep those initial contacts open to future project involvement, but we anticipate landowner disappointment and a lack of interest towards submitting new applications. Continual communication among partners, NRCS staff, and landowners must be stressed. Other specific items that we had to overcome, and find efficiencies for, included:

- NRCS 2022 Project timeline (2/10/22 NRCS Bulletin) – The jump from an executed Supplemental Agreement (SA) on December 15, 2021, to the RCPP sign-up closing on February 18, 2022, was a challenge that we handled, albeit at the cost of changes in holiday plans. Some November refinements to the Fact Sheet map were also challenging, but using best boundaries to connect priority areas allowed us to proceed.
- Navigating the Portal requires training and continual use for proficiency; small organizations and partnerships struggle with access and understanding due to its complexity. ABC has developed expertise and a close working relationship with Lead State office to make access and navigation in the Portal easier.
- NRCS procedures – (a) Consistency between states (practice specifications, interpretations, and payment rates) caused some issues with initial contracts. This discussion has continued during preparation for 2023 sign-up; (b) Confidentiality – open sharing of data with 19 partners can be challenging. Our primary partners (ABC, QF) cannot share information outside of ABC; avenues to display our outreach and conservation efforts with the other 17 contributing partners is improving, with clarifications to confidentiality and mapping that is not property-specific.

- A full understanding of the intent of this RCPP, and the responsibility of the 19 contributing partners in this effort, may not be completely understood by agency personnel (NRCS and Agency/Organization partners). We must strive to ensure NRCS and partner ITA delivery team members fully grasp the focus of this RCPP. Because staff changes and new personnel are a constant, we know that continuous communication and coordination is needed. Regular communication can easily and preemptively deal with personnel clarity. Key elements of the PPA and SA should be reviewed to achieve this clarity – in most cases, ITA/ETA partners work well with NRCS field staff, and consistent communication will ensure all parties are on the same page.

Major milestones achieved in 2022, and anticipated 2023 Project outlook

Project outlook continues to be very optimistic. Coordination among ABC, NRCS, and the other 17 partners is open and honest; we have found ways to forge ahead and shore up any questions or issues that arise. Initial sign-up exceeded expectations; our first-time and/or underserved landowner (HU) contacts comprised approximately 25% of our applicants in both states. In 2022, this resulted in 47% HU contracts (almost half), which is considered exceptional. We had been concerned that selection bias would reduce opportunities for smaller landowners, due to ranking of larger landowners (receiving higher scores); with assistance from NRCS staff, our ranking process proved quite successful. Some of the highest-ranked projects contracted had the smallest acreage, and most of the HU applicants were awarded contracts. **Another important point – our contributions continue to be at a high level**, with over \$5mil of our projected \$7mil obligation completed by Year #2. Our ability to communicate, coordinate, and adapt has proven invaluable, and we will utilize adaptive management throughout the life of the project.

Summary of 2021-2022 Open Pine RCPP Project Outcomes

In Year #1, our strategy for the Open Pine RCPP was to begin conservatively, evaluate the process, landowner connections, and outreach; then in Year #2, adjust practice, outreach, and TA to improve our focus, build ITA skills, and improve practice-ranking understanding and processes. Of the 5.9 million dollars allocated, the Year #1 budget was approximately \$309,000 per state; we found this limited the number of contracts initially estimated for Year #1, due to high overall costs per contract. Since each contract has multiple practices over 5 years, the cost was averaging \$30k-\$50k per contract. The cost per contract should be less of an issue, as allocation of funds in Years #2 and #3 will be higher. Other coordination issues should also be smoother; after convening, evaluating, and communicating with NRCS, staff adjustments were identified, and several ranking, priority area, and field-level coordination and training adjustments were implemented during Year #2. In summary, we believe the larger allocated budget in 2022-23, along with targeted ETA outreach, better ranking, practice technical assistance (ITA), and strategic adjustments, will enhance improved sign-up and contracting efforts. The Open Pine 2319 RCPP Project is ahead of schedule.

Arkansas-Louisiana CDN Open Pine Landscape Restoration RCPP

2022 Partner Contribution Report

Contributions during 2022 were substantial in both Implementation Technical Assistance (ITA) and Enhancement Technical Assistance (ETA). Contributions for land management efforts, provided through in-kind efforts by partners in the 16 counties and parishes, totaled **28,053 acres** and 3,003 miles of right-of-way corridor; preliminary outreach and coordination reached approximately **636 landowner contacts** through a variety of means. In 2022, the total value of partner contributions was approximately **\$4,344,590**.

American Bird Conservancy

Contact: Bill Bartush Contribution: \$26,325 (In-Kind)

Lead Partner was engaged in all aspects of project planning for implementation and management; convened working group meetings for inventory, data gathering, and evaluations. Disseminated information to NRCS/Partners, participated in project ranking, managed partner strategy, coordinated project supervision, and communications. Significant was administration of agreements, communications, and reporting to partners.

Arkansas Forestry Division

Contact: Darren Spinks Contribution: \$33,071 (In-Kind)

As an Active Partner, AR Forestry Division (AFD) worked closely with the lead partner to plan project implementation and management. Collaborated with partners during working meetings, and participated in communications for implementing RCPP activities with field staff. Assisted with HU outreach through Evette Browning's contacts with "Keeping it in the Family" and UAPB. AFD manages almost 24,000 acres of "open pine" habitat through the implementation of sustainable forestry practices on state-owned, other public, and WMA lands. Managing these areas includes the contribution of over 300 hours of in-kind staff time – based on projections of \$30/hour for forester salary, fringe and supplies, this would amount to \$45,000 in leverage over the five-year project period, or approximately \$9,000 annually.

Arkansas Game & Fish Commission

Contact: Ricky Chastain Contribution: \$20,000 (cash); \$113,170 (In-Kind); 654 habitat acres

As a primary Active Partner, AGFC worked closely with the lead partner to plan project implementation and management, collaborated with partners during working meetings, and participated in communications for implementing RCPP activities with field staff. In addition to the close collaboration, AGFC provided \$20k in cash contributions to bolster incentives of future landowner efforts in the region.

Through the implementation of sustainable forestry practices on three public WMAs within the project area, AGFC manages over 100,000 acres of "open pine" habitat. Management of open pine habitats on Big Timber, Poison Springs, and DeGray Lake WMAs included the same targeted management practices that will be implemented on private lands in the project area: prescribed fire, commercial timber harvest, and timber stand improvement (chemical and mechanical). Over 654 acres were treated in 2022, at an average cost of \$150/ acre, totaling \$113,170 of in-kind contributions. In addition, the implementation of these treatments include the contribution of in-kind staff time of forester staff (Habitat Biologist, Area Biologist, Area Manager) and HQ staff to plan and develop outreach efforts. Assisted with major outreach through several hosted meetings at AGFC Headquarters, and through state-wide platforming of Commission Meeting announcements.

Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission

Contact: Bill Holimon

Contribution: \$20,763 (In-Kind); 305 habitat acres

As a Contributing Partner, ANHC participated in planning meetings, and provided in-kind accomplished habitat work on a number of natural area "open pine" habitats. ANHC planned conservation, oversight, and implementation of sustainable forestry practices on these natural areas during this period. The involvement of ANHC allows a better definition of high value landscapes across the project area.

South Central Arkansas Electric Cooperative

Contact: Kyle Armstrong

Contribution: \$150,000 (In-Kind); 936 habitat acres

As one of our Private Sector Partners, South Central Electric Cooperative of AR is a major Contributing Partner. Using Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) practices on existing rights-of-way, expenditures for Land Management were accomplished, promoting native herbaceous grasses and forbs for priority species by connecting over 974 miles, or 4,676 acres of habitat corridors, within the open pine landscape.

Ouachita Electric Cooperative Arkansas

Contact: Shawn Dorflinger Contribution: \$ 1,843,152 (In-Kind); 862 habitat acres

Ouachita Electric Cooperative of AR is a major Contributing Partner as one of our Private Sector Partners. Expenditures for Land Management were accomplished using Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) practices on existing Rights-of-Way to promote native herbaceous grasses and forbs for priority species by connecting over 2,700 miles or 6,757 acres of habitat corridors within the open pine landscape.

Claiborne Electric Cooperative Louisiana

Contact: Stephen E Faulk Contribution: \$ 250,749 (In-Kind); 3,462 habitat acres

Claiborne Electric Cooperative of LA is a major Contributing Partner as one of our Private Sector Partners. Contributed expenditures for Land Management were accomplished using Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) practices on existing Rights-of-Way to promote native herbaceous grasses and forbs for priority species by connecting over 700 miles or 8,500 acres of habitat, for a value of \$1,389,268 of conservation land management through IVM practices on existing Rights-of-Way during the five-year span of this project.

Enable-Midstream (Energy Transfer) of Arkansas and Louisiana

Contact: Connie Oslica Contribution \$424,883 (In-Kind); plus 2,964 habitat acres

Enable-Midstream was the company which originally committed to our partnership as a contributor for the RCPP during the project proposal phase. During 2021, Enable-Midstream was purchased by Energy Transfer, who has accepted the original commitment to contribute "In-Kind" work. Energy transfer expenditures for Land Management were accomplished using Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) practices on existing Rights-of-Way to promote native herbaceous grasses and forbs for priority species by connecting over 300 miles of managed ROW corridors will provide over 300 miles or 1,460 acres of habitat corridors (with a value of at least \$300,550) during the five-year span of this project.

Entergy of Arkansas and Louisiana

Contact: Brent Davis Contribution: \$1,105,044 (In-Kind); 14,165 habitat acres

Entergy is another private sector partner operating in both AR and LA, and has committed to provide \$1,900,000 value of conservation land management through Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) practices during the five-year span of this project. This focus on native

herbaceous grasses and forbs supports a host of priority species, with these "In-Kind" efforts connecting over 1,100 miles, or 14,750 acres, of habitat corridors within our planned open pine landscape project.

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Contact: David Breithaupt Contribution: \$7,500 (cash); plus \$30,000 (In-Kind)

As a primary Active Partner, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) worked closely in 2022 with the lead partner to plan project implementation and management; LDWF collaborated with partners during working meetings and participated in communications for implementing RCPP activities with field staff. LDWF has been a long-term partner of the LMVJV and our CDN and provides valuable outreach to its many private landowner connections in north Louisiana.

LDWF was instrumental in laying the ground work in north Louisiana with landowners and partners; with the lead partner field staff provided facilities and arranged meetings to plan project implementation and management. LDWF also collaborated with partners during working meetings, and participated in communications for implementing RCPP activities with field staff. Their assistance with outreach through hosted events was valuable.

National Wild Turkey Federation – Arkansas and Louisiana

Contact: Kacie Bauman Contribution: \$10,000 (cash) LA; (AR paid in full)

The Arkansas and Louisiana Chapters of the National Wild Turkey Federation are active and engaged in the RCPP. As a Contributing Partner, the NWTF Cash Contributions have been accepted by the lead partner; these funds will be foundational in our ability to establish incentives above and beyond the RCPP funds for FA. NWTF has already provided assistance in outreach, communication, and planning. Most importantly, the Arkansas Chapter paid their full \$50,000, five-year commitment in 2021, and the LA Chapter provided \$10,000 in 2022.

PotlatchDeltic

Contact: Kit Hart Contribution \$127,000 (In-Kind) plus 3,300 acres of habitat

PotlatchDeltic is another private sector partner operating in AR, and has committed to restore habitat for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker on over 17,000 acres managed as a wildlife and conservation area, in conjunction with other partners including ANHC, AFD, QF and AGFC. As a Contributing Partner, PotlatchDeltic performs land management practices that benefit native plant communities, and is setting a real-world example for local landowners on how to make

both conservation and "good business sense" go hand-in-hand. In addition to habitat work, they completed monitoring and banding of over 30 RCW clusters, and donated sub-adult RCW to ANHC for translocation to Pine Island WMA.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Arkansas

Contact: Jeff Fore

Contribution: \$87,182 (In-Kind)

In 2021, Arkansas TNC provided leadership in open pine management, especially through prescribed fire treatments in the project area. Arkansas TNC has worked closely with lead partner to engage in project planning, and is already working with other partners to essentially be engaged in field-level aspects of implementing and evaluating RCPP activities. Arkansas TNC has worked closely with the lead partner to support project planning in all eight counties, and is working with other partners to engage field aspects of implementing RCPP activities.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Louisiana

Contact: Dan Weber

Contribution: \$5,750 (In-Kind)

During the months of May-December, 2021, Louisiana TNC provided important support to the LA Natural Heritage Sites and the landowners who manage those sites; these are the benchmarks of the open pine concept. They have been a leader in open pine management and outreach across North Louisiana. Louisiana TNC has worked closely with lead partner to support project planning in all eight Parishes, and is working with other partners to engage field aspects of implementing and evaluating RCPP activities.

Quail Forever (QF)

Contact: Ryan Diener

Contribution: \$20,250 (In-Kind)

QF is the Primary Active Partner that is working closely with lead partner ABC to engage in all aspects of project implementation and management. In 2021 extensive planning, dissemination of information to partners, especially to NRCS for project ranking, was vital to development of the Fact Sheet and scoring effort of future projects. Field Staff worked endlessly to develop communications to landowners, and laid the groundwork for sign-up efforts in the 16 Parishes and Counties. QF has, and will continue to be, key to implementing RCPP-related activities.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service – Migratory Bird Joint Venture (USFWS-LMVJV)

Contact: Keith Mcknight

Contribution: \$10,228 (In-Kind)

The LMVJV is the umbrella organization/partnership of the AR-LA CDN. The science and strategic habitat planning for this project is founded on work by the "JV". As an active partner they have supported the science and provided material essential for the Lead Partner to operate in the RCPP area. The JV and ABC are working hand-in-hand for project supervision, essentially being engaged in all aspects of implementing RCPP activities: contracting and administration of third-party support service agreements, communications, and reporting.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS-PFW Arkansas)

Contact: Jonathan Baxter

Contribution: \$1,300 (In-Kind)

AR Partners for Fish and Wildlife field staff (PFW) was an Active Partner in 2022. PFW-AR engaged in planning and preparing for 2023 land management, and connecting with private landowners in the RCPP area to promote conservation practices on private lands in the project area to complement the RCPP.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS-PFW Louisiana)

Contact: Seth Bordelon

Contribution: \$5,081 In-Kind

LA Partners for Fish and Wildlife field staff (PFW) was an Active Partner in 2022. PFW-LA engaged in planning and preparing for 2023 land management, and connecting with private landowners in the RCPP area to promote conservation practices on private lands in the project area to complement the RCPP.

In summary, the 19 Contributors to the Open Pine RCPP far exceeded expectations.

- Contributions for land management: **28,354 acres** (includes 3,003 miles ROW corridor);
- Outreach and coordination reached approximately **636 landowner contacts**;
- Total value: approximately **\$4,359,590 of partner contributions**.