

LEADERS ON THE LAND

The Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMJVJ.org) exists to collaborate in the protection, restoration, and management of birds and their habitats in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley and West Gulf Coastal Plain/Ouachitas regions.

From the Joint Venture Coordinator and Chair

The arrival of Spring is evident all around. And while we could do without quite so much pollen, many of us would not want to live without turkeys gobbling, buds breaking, and the arrival of that first flycatcher or swallow. In this issue we celebrate our 2021 Private Landowner Conservation Champions - landowners emblematic of a host of land stewards who ensure that the table is set for all our favorite harbingers of Spring.

In **Private Landowner Spotlight**, we particularly highlight the work of Walker Morris, in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley of Arkansas. In the **JV Partnership in Action**, you'll learn about partnership efforts in northeast Texas. Our **Hands-on Guidance** highlights a brand new video series that provides management guidance for forest and shallow wetland habitats.

The LMJVJ partnership works because of the dedication of a vast array of partner staff who serve on our Management Board, Steering Committees, Conservation Delivery Networks, and Working Groups. Get to know a few of these individuals in the **Meet Our Staff & Partners** section.



A group of conservation practitioners touring the Walker Morris property during a field tour and workshop focused on quail habitat

2021 Champs

The Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture partners recognized two exemplary private landowners in 2021 for the long-standing commitment to wildlife habitat stewardship on their properties. These Private Landowner Conservation Champions are Walker Morris of Crittenden County, Arkansas, and Harvey Kieffer of Beauregard Parish, Louisiana. Both of these land stewards have actively managed their properties for decades in the interest of habitat diversity and landscape health. Find out more about all of our Conservation Champions on the Private Landowner Conservation Champion page on the LMJVJ web site. (<https://www.lmvjv.org/plcc-main>)

We hope you enjoy getting to know the LMVJV a little better in this issue, and we especially hope you enjoy this Spring outdoors!



Jeff Raasch

LMVJV Management Board Chair



Keith McKnight

LMVJV Coordinator & *Leaders on the Land* Editor

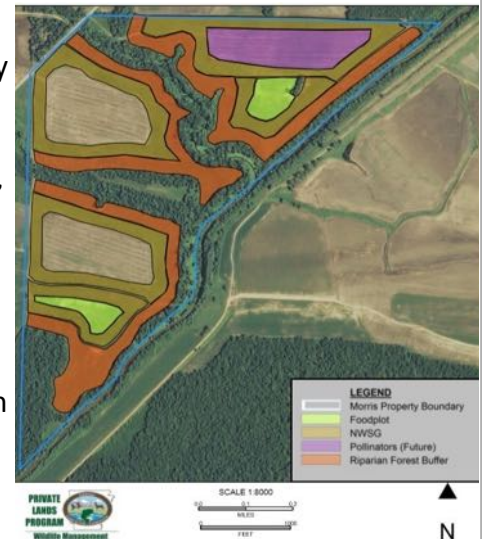


A prescribed burn on the Walker Morris property

Mr. Walker Morris Conservation Champion

Walker Morris has been a long-standing advocate of quail and quail habitat conservation. He has transformed his property, west of Memphis, TN, from an all row-crop farm to a wildlife friendly agricultural landscape. On his property, he has implemented three CRP practices: CP22 – Riparian Forest Buffers (65 acres), CP33 – Wildlife Habitat for Upland Birds (45 acres), and CP42 – Pollinators (16 acres). Mr. Morris plays an active role in the management his CRP habitat with a very extensive prescribed burn rotation. He also is involved with many other wildlife friendly activities around his property, including prescribed burning, strip-disking, herbicide application, brushy cover planting, and Egyptian Wheat food plots. He has also paid for and planted additional plots of Native Warm Season Grasses (NWSG) out of his own pocket to supplement the habitat that he established on his property through CRP.

Mr. Morris not only has a great piece of property, but he is very enthusiastic about recruiting more landowners into the various conservation programs, actively working with surrounding landowners to help make their properties more wildlife friendly. Mr. Morris has co-hosted workshops on his property with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) Quail Program. His property served as a field tour site to help biologists and other conservation workers from NRCS and FSA better understand the specific Farm Bill conservation programs that are beneficial to quail. His long-standing dedication to quail habitat, his use of these beneficial programs, and his desire to properly manage the habitats made his property the perfect example to showcase these programs to conservationists.



In 2015, the CRP program celebrated its 30th Anniversary. With this milestone, the national FSA office wanted to do something special, publishing 30 CRP success stories from around the nation. With the help of Diana Colvard, the Agricultural Programs Specialist for Arkansas Farm Service Agency, AGFC wrote an article about Mr. Morris and his property as a nomination. His success story was chosen for publication for the event and was the only one published from Arkansas! Due to the extensive work on his property and his enthusiastic encouragement for other landowners to get involved with wildlife conservation, Mr. Morris is an exemplary conservation landowner - a Conservation Champion!

JV Partnership in Action

Partners' Private Lands Investments in Northeast Texas

As one of the original Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, the LMJV's list of stalwart partners is long and distinguished. Certainly, all the founding partners in 1988 hoped for a better, more coordinated way to "do conservation," but no one could have imagined how Strategic Habitat Delivery would come to life, grow, and evolve. And this is as true as anywhere in northeast Texas.

The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) has been an active and influential partner in the LMJV since the first days of the partnership. From providing science and management expertise, to funding and leadership, TPWD has been a key player in numerous efforts across Northeast Texas (and across the JV). One such effort is the East Texas Wetlands Project (ETWP), a private lands wetland conservation program initiated in 2001 through cooperation among TPWD, Ducks Unlimited, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service, and over 100 private landowners. Our own Bill Bartush, current West Gulf Coastal Plain Partnership Coordinator (see Sept. 2021 Leaders on the Land), was the first ETWP Coordinator! Through ETWP, over 6,400 acres of emergent marsh, bottomland hardwood, and moist soil habitat were restored, enhanced, and managed across East Texas to the benefit of



Longleaf Pine - Keith McKnight

wetland wildlife and the people who appreciate them most. The program harnessed \$1.3 million in state, federal, private, and North American Wetland Conservation Act funding to come alongside landowner investments in the future of East Texas wetlands. Although the program ended in 2008, the solid legacy of cooperation and leadership by key partners was established, and persists today.



American Kestrel - James D. Childress

In more recent years, our NE Texas partners have focused on conservation of fire-influenced, open pine habitats (e.g., Longleaf Pine, Shortleaf Pine) that support a long list of priority bird species such as Northern bobwhite, Eastern wild turkey, Bachman's sparrow, and American kestrel. To the south, the Texas Longleaf Team has worked with landowners throughout the historic range of longleaf pine to restore and enhance over 30,000 acres of longleaf pine woodland. Partners like the Texas A&M Forest Service, TPWD, USFWS, Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute, International Paper, National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), Texas Forestry Association, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and

National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, have brought over \$1.3 million to these projects. And just this year, the Texas Longleaf Team secured tangible funding from private industry with additional financial assistance from H-E-B Grocery Co. (and soon to be others) – dollars that will enable more landowners to do more good work!

The Northeast Texas Conservation Delivery Network (NETX CDN) was formed in 2012 to focus conservation efforts north of the Longleaf pine region, targeting private lands conservation through its Habitat Incentive Program (HIP) since 2017. Once again, TPWD was (and continues to be) integral in both providing leadership within the CDN, and in providing substantial funds for HIP landowner assistance payments. TPWD’s early state contributions leveraged a grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, and program delivery is being carried out by an array of partners, notably NWTF, TAMU Forest Service, American Bird Conservancy, USFWS and a host of others. The result has been a thriving partnership across NE Texas providing critical incentive payments to landowner cooperators on over 16,000 acres and counting, where prescribed fire, invasive plant control, and other key practices are improving habitat for our highest priority birds and other wildlife in open pine forest. And the work continues!



Prescribed fire, a cost-effective best practice for managing open pine - Arkansas Department of Agriculture Forestry Division

It’s safe to say the partnership is alive and well in NE Texas. We’re confident that the habitats and wildlife we all treasure are reaping the benefits!



NORTHEAST TEXAS
H·A·B·I·T·A·T
INCENTIVE PROGRAM



**CONSERVATION
STEWARD**

This habitat conservation work is made possible by the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture partnership through the Northeast Texas Conservation Delivery Network.

To Learn More go to LMJV.org/ne-texas-cdn

Hands-On Guidance

Managing Wetlands Reserve Habitats – Videos Now Available

Few habitat restoration efforts have had greater or more widespread positive impacts than Wetlands Reserve. Originally the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), this popular Farm Bill program became known as the Wetland Reserve Easements program or “WRE” in 2014. Whichever name you prefer, WRE is arguably the most significant and successful habitat restoration effort ever established in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley (MAV). WRP/WRE provides important habitat for birds, bears, bees and myriad other wetland wildlife species in the form of emergent wetlands and bottomland hardwood (BHW) forests. In fact, over 1,000,000 marginal cropland acres have been restored to functioning wetland habitat in the MAV of Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee.

The tremendous success of WRP/WRE has, however, created a significant need for support in managing its shallow wetland and BHW forest habitats. In BHW plantations for example, natural plant succession results in canopy closure and sparse understory vegetation. These conditions often persist until competition-induced mortality occurs or the stand



Wetland Reserve Easement under restoration



Hooded Warbler - James D. Childress

experiences catastrophic changes, such as wind-throw. Forest treatment (e.g., commercial or non-commercial thinning) may be needed in many stands to meet WRP/WRE program and landowner habitat objectives. Along with forest stand considerations, shallow wetland habitats established on these easements also require management, such as periodic disturbance, to maintain conditions ideal for waterfowl, rails, shorebirds and other wetland wildlife.

To assist private landowners with ongoing management challenges on their easements, the Tri-state Conservation Partnership (lmvjv.org/tristate-conservation-partnership) with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) produced a 7-part Video Series - Managing Your Wetland Reserve Easement. The video series can be found at the AR, LA, and MS NRCS YouTube channels.

The series includes:

- Introduction to WRE
- Landowner Opportunities
- Habitat Succession
- Managing Moist Soil Impoundments
- Managing Other Wetlands
- Managing Your WRE Timber
- Forest Management Planning & Treatment

We encourage you to visit the LMVJV’s Wetlands Reserve Management Page (lmvjv.org/wrp-wre-management) to learn more and access these videos.



Blue-winged Teal and American Wigeon - Bill Stripling

Conservation in the News

Senate Committee Advances the Recovering America's Wildlife Act

On Thursday, April 7, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works marked up and passed S. 2372, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) of 2021, by a vote of 15-5. The bill, as amended and passed by the Committee, would provide dedicated annual funding to state fish and wildlife agencies to implement their state wildlife action plans and conserve species of greatest conservation need. Funding for states would begin at \$850 million for FY22 and increase year-over-year to reach \$1.3 billion for FY25 and for each fiscal year thereafter. S. 2372 would provide an additional \$97.5 million each fiscal year to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for Tribal governments' fish and wildlife conservation.



Northern Bobwhite - Ben Robinson

America the Beautiful Challenge, NFWF Grants Announced

Through the America the Beautiful Challenge, the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) will leverage initial Federal commitments (\$440 million) from the Department of the Interior (DOI), Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Department of Defense (DOD) to raise additional philanthropic and private support over the next five years. The 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is a major source of these initial Federal funds.

NFWF, a Congressionally-chartered entity, has nearly 40 years of experience in developing and managing competitive grant programs. The America the Beautiful Challenge will offer states, Tribes, territories, local groups, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and others the opportunity to apply for multiple grant programs managed by NFWF. The America the Beautiful Challenge will seek to advance conservation and restoration projects that are consistent with the principles outlined in the Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful report and that focus on at least one of the following core areas of need:

- Conserving and restoring rivers, coasts, wetlands, and watersheds
- Conserving and restoring forests, grasslands, and other important ecosystems that serve as carbon sinks
- Connecting and reconnecting wildlife corridors, large landscapes, watersheds, and seascapes
- Improving ecosystem and community resilience to coastal flooding, drought, and other climate-related threats
- Expanding access to the outdoors, particularly in underserved communities

The request for proposals is expected in early May 2022.



Lower Mississippi River - Quapaw Canoe Co.

Are you subscribed yet? [SIGN UP](#) for *Leaders on the Land* quarterly by email at bit.ly/LeadersOnTheLand

If you are reading a hard copy, you can access this newsletter and all its internet links by going to www.lmfvj.org/leaders-on-the-land on the web.

Meet Our Staff & Partners

CC Richmond, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF)

As a Private Lands Biologist, CC is a cornerstone for working among landowners for LDWF. CC's interest in conservation comes from a long-line of conservation-minded family members. She grew up on Sabine National Wildlife Refuge, where her father was the refuge manager. She received a degree in wildlife management from McNeese State University and has set her roots deep in Longleaf pine country. Her knowledge and pleasant personality have opened many doors and allowed her to provide valuable technical assistance while effectively building partnerships with landowners to increase and enhance the diminished longleaf pine landscape. Actively working in the southwest portion of the state, she has successfully advanced the restoration of longleaf pine and is a leader in promoting and implementing prescribed fire as a valuable tool for private landowners. CC is based in Lake Charles, LA and can be reached at 337-491-2575 or 337-764-4822.

crichmond@wlf.la.gov



David Breithaupt, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries



David, Currently Farm Bill Coordinator, has been with LDWF since 2003. David received his B.S. in Forestry from Louisiana Tech University and has worked with LDWF in several roles, including WMA and Private Lands field biologist and Private Lands Program Manager, before serving in his current role as Farm Bill Coordinator/USDA Liaison. David is responsible for providing private lands outreach and technical assistance across the state, with an emphasis on conservation delivery of USDA NRCS programs. In addition, David has been a very active part of our JV delivery efforts: he serves as chairman of the LA-MS MAV CDN and co-Chair of the AR-LA CDN. David lives in Jena, LA with his wife Laney and their three sons where they enjoy gardening, raising chickens, and spending time with family. David is based in Alexandria, LA and can be reached at 318-473-7761.

dbreithaupt@wlf.la.gov

If you are reading a hard copy, you can access this newsletter and all of the links by going to our Leaders on the Land page, <https://www.lmvjv.org/leaders-on-the-land>, on the web.

LMVJV
11942 FM 848
Tyler, TX 75707



Meet Our Staff & Partners (Continued)

Blaine Elliott, Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture GIS Applications Biologist

Blaine is a go-to for mapping and spatial information and is the longest tenured LMVJV Staffer, at 25 years and counting! He is the backbone of our partnership's spatial strategic planning and data management. He received his undergraduate degree from Huntingdon College in Alabama, and Masters from the University of Arkansas. Blaine is based in Jackson, MS, and can be reached at blaine_elliott@fws.gov.



Acronyms

AGFC - Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

CDN - Conservation Delivery Network

CP - Conservation Practice

CRP - Conservation Reserve Program

DOD - Dept. of Defense

ETWP - East Texas Wetlands Project

FSA - Farm Service Agency

JV - Joint Venture

LDWF - Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries

LMVJV - Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture

MAV - Mississippi Alluvial Valley

NETX CDN - Northeast Texas Conservation Delivery Network

NRCS - USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

NFWF - National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

NWSG - Native Warm Season Grass

NWTF - National Wild Turkey Federation

TAMU - Texas A&M University

TPWD - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

USDA - U.S. Dept. of Agriculture

USFWS - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

WRE - Wetland Reserve Easement

WRP - Wetland Reserve Program