

# LEADERS ON THE LAND

**T**he Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture ([LMVJV.org](http://LMVJV.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 Holidays are here! Hopefully, this newsletter finds you someplace warm and comfortable inside, peering out at a cool and crisp breeze outside, and already having enjoyed outdoor pursuits with family and friends—with more to come!

In this issue we celebrate a true conservation champion in the **Private Landowner Spotlight**. You'll get to know two outstanding conservation collaborations by LMVJV partners, serving tens of thousands of private lands acres in our **JV Partnership in Action**. Landowners with an interest in the use of prescribed burning will be particularly interested in this issue's **Hands-on** section. Our **Conservation in the News** brings to you several recent accomplishments and partner efforts making some waves. Finally, you'll want to get to know a few more of the professional staff making great things happen for landowners and their resources in **Meet Our Staff & Partners**. Enjoy the season, and thanks to you for all you do on the land!



## Private Landowner Spotlight



Mr. Ed Justice receiving his 2020 Private Landowner Conservation Champion award plaque, flanked by his son (left) and Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries biologist, John Hanks (right).

## Mr. Ed Justice - Conservation Champion

**B**ayou Bartholomew is held as a natural treasure to the people who live and recreate within its watershed and to all of the conservationists dedicated to its health. Considered the longest bayou in the world, Bayou Bartholomew winds its way lazily for over 360 miles along the western edge of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley in southeastern Arkansas and northeastern Louisiana. One of the many reasons for its high conservation value is the fact that it seasonally spills over its banks and into the floodplain, much as it has for centuries. These seasonal floodwaters nourish the bottomland hardwood forests,

**Jeff Raasch**

LMVJV Management Board Chair



**Keith McKnight**

LMVJV Coordinator & *Leaders on the Land* Editor



shallow wetlands, oxbows, and sloughs that bless the Bayou Bartholomew floodplain with an abundance of wildlife. One of the special places that welcomes those flood waters is Mr. Ed Justice’s Tri Delta property in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana. Tri Delta, located along a two mile stretch of the bayou near Log Cabin, Louisiana, includes mature bottomland hardwood forest, young restored bottomland hardwoods, a greentree reservoir, several permanent wetlands, mature mixed pine-hardwood forest, and grassland.

Natural resource professionals from many partner organizations have been welcomed here over the last 18 years. The property has been enrolled in the Deer Management Assistance Program for many years, providing valuable deer harvest data for this region. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), US Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, Quail Forever and others have been engaged to provide technical assistance, and Mr. Justice has implemented practices such as grassland restoration, prescribed burning, wetland management, and invasive species control.

Mr. Justice has also implemented various conservation practices through NRCS programs such as EQIP, CSP, WRP and ACEP-WRE. Many of the practices that have been installed not only provide great wildlife habitat but have been designed to provide other benefits, including water quality improvement of Bayou Bartholomew, wildlife corridors, and establishment of pollinator habitat. A total of 350 acres have been restored and permanently protected with Wetland Reserve Easements, and the whole property is recognized and enrolled in the Forest Stewardship Program.

The foundation for all these investments and activities is Mr. Justice’s drive to increase the diversity of plants and animals that utilize the property. The active management employed on his land supports habitat for waterfowl and wading birds, as well as forest interior birds, whose habitat is enhanced by careful timber management. Recent efforts to create habitat for the monarch butterfly and other pollinators have also enhanced the same acreage for bobwhite quail. All of this results in ensuring that Mr. Ed Justice achieves his ultimate conservation goal of leaving the land better than he found it. All the while, he continues to gain the most enjoyment from others experiencing the bountiful resources that his property has to offer.

For his multiple stewardship contributions as a private landowner conservationist, his dedication to landscape health, and his heart for sharing the bounty with others, Mr. Justice is a model conservation champion for the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture.



One of the many wetland habitats found on the Ed Justice Tri Delta property (see article at right).

# JV Partnership in Action

## Tri-state Conservation Partnership

Can focused and committed collaboration among conservation organizations benefit private landowners? The answer is an emphatic yes, particularly in the case of the [Tri-state Conservation Partnership \(TCP\)](#).



The TCP is a unique forum of conservation organizations aimed at improving collaboration among the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and its partners within the Lower Mississippi River Valley of Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. The TCP was established in 2013 to enhance delivery of Farm Bill program priorities, particularly the Wetland Reserve Easement program (WRE). If you are not familiar with WRE, it is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners to protect, restore, and enhance forested and shallow water wetlands in exchange for retiring eligible land from agriculture. It was first established as the Wetland Reserve Program in 1990 and is well known by its acronym—WRP. In recent years, the program has been revamped and renamed to WRE. To date, Wetland Reserve has restored and protected more than 725,000 acres of permanent wetland habitat in the three states. The volume of WRE acres enrolled in this region clearly reflects the strength of private landowner interest in the program, comprising more than 25% of the total 2.8 million acres enrolled nationwide.

Since its formation, the TCP has enjoyed a number of successes including bringing more than \$67,000,000 in additional funding to the Lower Mississippi Valley through the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership program, or WREP. The cumulative impact of this funding is the restoration of wetlands on 18,322 acres of marginal croplands. Note that these funds are additional to the annual WRE programmatic funding allocations for each state. Beyond this, the TCP has developed an abundance of helpful information that supports private landowners, including a [landowner guide](#) for improving bottomland hardwood plantations on WREs, a [tool for assessing and treating WRE hardwood stands](#), as well as state-specific guides to Understanding WRE Easements in [AR](#), [LA](#) and [MS](#). The TCP has also supported private landowners through new WRE enrollment outreach to thousands of landowners in the three states (great information in the most recent flyers - [AR](#), [LA](#) & [MS](#)). Most recently, the TCP released a series of videos that assist WRE landowners with managing forest stands and shallow wetland habitat on their easements. The video series has been posted by the NRCS in each of the three states on their YouTube pages, but they are not unique to each state. Here is a link to the [WRE Management Video Series](#).

If you are a private landowner with property that contains marginal agricultural land (i.e., wet fields with a cropping history), you may find that WRE is a program worth learning more about. In addition to the multiple WRE program links provided above, you are encouraged to contact your local NRCS Service Center (links: [AR](#), [KY](#), [LA](#), [MO](#), [MS](#), [OK](#), [TN](#), [TX](#)).



## More Bird Habitat, Quality Public Hunting, and Cleaner Water on Private Land: What?!

What if we could increase habitat for ducks, geese, shorebirds, and other wildlife species by keeping agricultural fields flooded in winter; vastly improve downstream water quality; provide opportunity for quality hunting and wildlife viewing to the public; and financially reward farmers for the effort – all at the same time? Wouldn't that be great? Well, yes it IS! All this is happening through a partnership among Arkansas Game & Fish Commission (AGFC), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), farmers, and program participants in Arkansas.

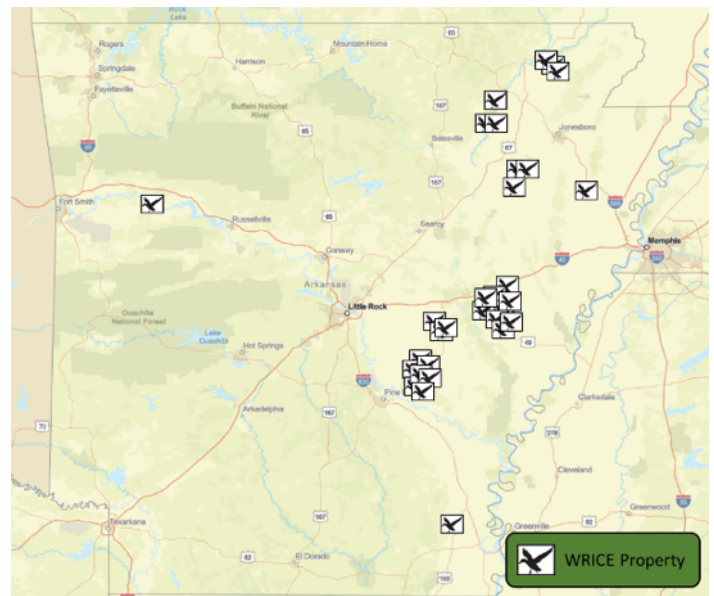


Youth hunt on a WRICE field in Arkansas.

We know that flooded rice fields can offer abundant food to waterfowl and numerous other wetland wildlife in winter. However, only 20% of the roughly 2 million acres of rice planted in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley typically are flooded at that time. Arkansas's **Waterfowl Rice Incentive Conservation Enhancement Program (WRICE)**, initiated by AGFC, works with rice farmers to hold shallow water on their harvested rice fields. Partnering with the NRCS's Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program, WRICE offers waterfowl hunting on these fields through limited public draws during the hunting season, and walk-in wildlife viewing September 1-February 28, outside the hunting season. Participating farmers agree to suspend fall tillage and are compensated \$25/acre to ensure fields are ready to hold rainfall, or \$50/acre to ensure pumped surface water if necessary, and an additional \$100/acre to allow AGFC-

administered walk-in public hunting and wildlife viewing. A recent twist provides for a \$50/acre payment to landowners for access to Wetlands Reserve Easement habitats. The program clearly is growing and the results are impressive.

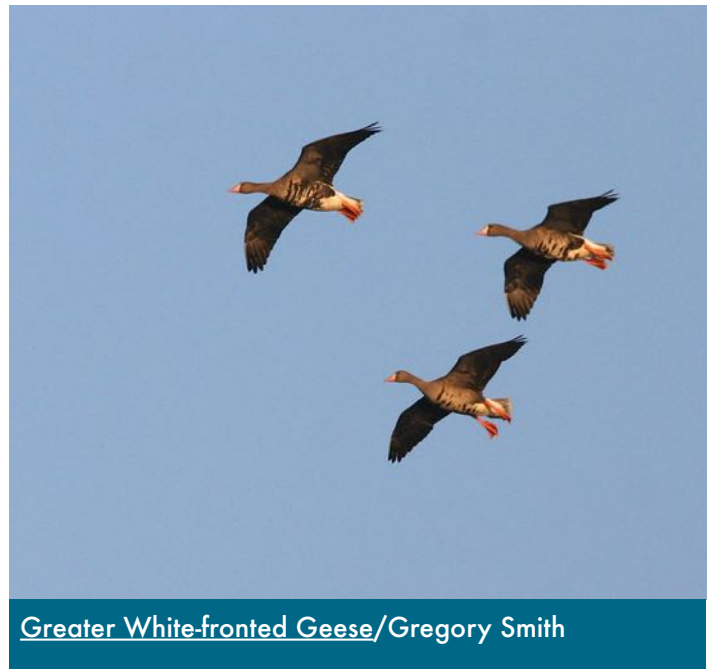
WRICE has expanded to about 4,000 acres of participating properties, with access opportunities distributed across the Mississippi Alluvial Valley and Arkansas River Valley. For the 2021-22 season, a dozen of these fields were harvested and flooded in time for the early teal and white-fronted goose season hunts. In addition, AGFC staff have worked with the landowners to enhance pits and blinds on several of the areas. WRICE areas are providing significant hunting opportunities to seasoned hunters and rookies alike. In fact, 25% of participants surveyed after the 2019-20 season indicated that at least one member of the hunting party was on his or her first waterfowl hunt! These quality opportunities are critical to the recruitment and retention of waterfowl hunters, and their ultimate support for the conservation of species and habitats we all treasure.



WRICE properties in 2021.

The program is easy to access, as indicated by AGFC State Waterfowl Program Leader, Luke Naylor. Naylor explains, “We have all locations listed on an interactive map, so hunters can see where these fields are and where blinds and pits may be on the property to make more informed decisions about where they will apply.” This information and more can be found at [agfc.com/wrice](http://agfc.com/wrice).

WRICE is addressing a number of the conservation needs recognized by the LMJV partnership—waterfowl, wading bird, and shorebird habitat; enhanced opportunities for the public to access and enjoy these resources; improved water quality; and innovative ways to accomplish these on working lands. This is just one more example of our partners working effectively for wildlife resources and people.



Greater White-fronted Geese/Gregory Smith

## Hands-On Guidance

### Hands-on: Rx Fire Primer for Newbies & Knowledgeable Neighbors

*By Bill Bartush, West Gulf Coastal Plain/Ouachitas Partnership Coordinator for the LMJV*

Let’s talk fire—prescribed fire to be exact. Prescribed fire is a well-planned and organized effort that takes into consideration many human, weather, and equipment factors. In contrast, burning garbage behind your house is not a prescribed fire, nor is the impulsive firing of brush piles on a foggy morning on your back forty (not realizing that the cold front about to hit—bringing high winds and low humidity—may be a problem). These unplanned, mostly impulsive fires lack a well-formulated plan and are the ones that turn up on the 6 o’clock news.

This article is not for the seasoned prescribed burner; it’s for those who have not taken the initial step to manage their land with fire and are hesitant for whatever reasons. Over the last 30 years, hundreds of articles have touted prescribed fire for conservation management on forests, woodlands, and grasslands. Fire is a cost-effective management tool. Fire is a fundamental tool because it is an ecological process, essential for most species of native plants and animals in North America. The scientific literature is replete with the validation of this truth (see the



Prescribed fire/Arkansas Department of Agriculture Forestry Division

resources compiled at the [LMJV Prescribed Fire page https://www.lmvjv.org/rx-fire](https://www.lmvjv.org/rx-fire)). Fire is effective in managing desired and undesired vegetation, returning much-needed nutrients to the soil, and facilitating proliferation of the native species, especially grasses and forbs so important as wildlife habitat.

This article summarizes the basics of prescribed fire for land managers of both grazing lands and forests, and in all cases, managers of wildlife.

### **Prescribed fire is the oldest, the best, and yet the most under-utilized conservation practice employed by private landowners. . . Why?**

If fire is supported by science and touted so often, why has it not caught fire (pun intended)? How many landowners spend thousands of dollars on mechanized or chemical land management activities? Compared to mechanical and chemical treatments, fire is dirt cheap. Maybe that's part of the answer—it can't be sold at the store or on Amazon. It's hard to capitalize on a few cents worth of matches, whereas millions are made by selling machinery and gallons or sacks of product. Maybe the reluctance to use fire is fear (aka Smokey Bear), perpetuated by those who find it easier to avoid the issue altogether. It can be an uncomfortable subject and easy to deflect. Who knows?

What I can tell you is that prescribed fire reaps the most bang for the buck, hands down! I hope you'll find plenty of resources here that help you find the answers to these questions. For those who have already figured out the "why and how" to burn to improve your property in such a way that you won't go broke, stay with us—you can now help a neighbor.

#### A Great Source of Fire Information

Good places to find fact sheets, and read about the science of fire, are on the Joint Fire Science networks—our region includes Southern, Oak Woodlands, and Great Plains fire exchanges.

[https://www.firescience.gov/JFSP\\_exchanges.cfm](https://www.firescience.gov/JFSP_exchanges.cfm)

### **Witnessing what works**

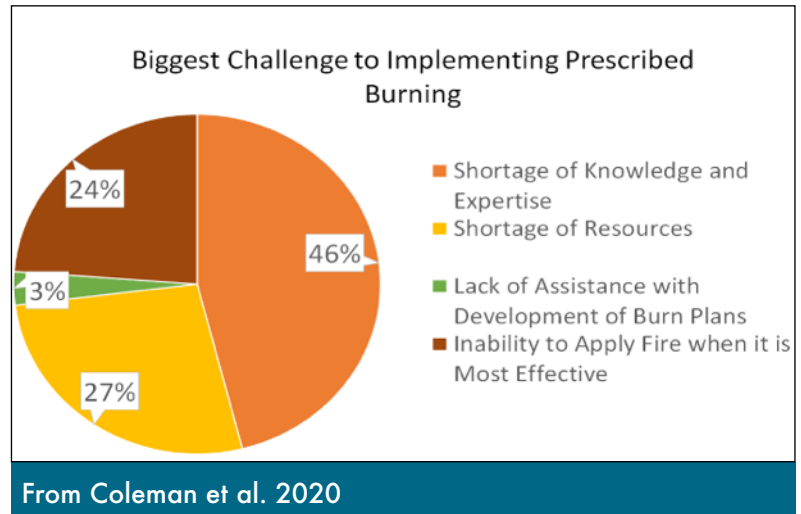
Those of us in the habitat conservation business have literally hundreds of "practical experience years" managing lands and providing sound technical assistance to private landowners. Having grown up farming and ranching, I spent more time on the spine of a tractor before I was 18 than most people do in a lifetime (truly an incentive to go to college). I had time to ponder land management principles for long hours on that old John Deere, so I have a confident feel for what works and what is pure baloney. Having cut, broadcast, grazed, sprayed, bladed, and plowed more hours and acres than I can count, I have an opinion on how best to manage forest and grasslands "reasonably." The most universal, cost-effective tool "hands down" is FIRE. I am not a teacher nor an academic, but have experienced this from many angles and in many ways. Like Nolan Ryan said, "It ain't bragging if you've done it."

Since leaving the home place on the Texas-side of the Red River in 1973, I have worked on public and private land throughout the Southeast and Midwest, and I've owned land. Over all these experiences and decades of providing assistance, the most often-asked question (and unresolved discussion) I hear is, "How can I, as a private landowner, improve my land and do it cost-effectively without going broke?" Whether your objective is for forest, or wildlife, or grasslands, or all three, my first and strongest answer is FIRE, almost every time. But don't take my word for it—listen to what a couple of landowners have to say. Both are successful managers; both actively manage the land; and both *always* incorporate fire: <https://bit.ly/AR-LA-fire>.

But they are not you, and experience confirms that every situation is unique, and every prescription must be tied to that unique operation. However, fire is foundational to achieving many common wildlife management objectives. It is one of the five basic elements described in Aldo Leopold’s conservation manager’s toolbox—the Gun, Plow, Cow, Axe and Match. Let’s get to some of the WHY fire is not more widely used, the HOW we can shift attitudes, and then WHAT to do to incorporate fire into the routine behavior of our landowners who are hungry to do the right thing.

**Why is fire not more widely used?**

Science is helping take the myths out of prescribed fire. A recent study found the primary reasons landowners did not apply fire on their land were insufficient resources, legal concerns, and lack of assistance with burn plan development. Another study indicated that almost 50% of landowners described the shortage of knowledge and expertise as a primary reason they don’t burn.



Fear of liability can be a major deterrent to using prescribed fire. However, evaluation of the risks from escaped fire does not support perceptions that applying prescribed fire as a land management tool is risky. Of thousands of prescribed fires that have been tracked, LESS than 1% resulted in any form of litigation or potential liability.

**How to shift attitudes with resources**



Brown-headed Nuthatch/James Childress

Prescribed burning should be a readily available option for any landowner, but the culture and support for fire are not consistent across states. States with well-developed laws, regulations, strategies, training programs, and local burn associations or cooperatives—along with agencies that support land management via fire—are very successful and literally log millions of acres burned annually. In contrast, states with restrictive regulations and shackled agency support are not there yet, but we are making progress. With conservation agency support, well-trained consulting burn managers are growing in number, and their communication and outreach are playing an increasingly important role in spreading the prescribed fire message. We are making progress but still have a long way to go.

**What should you, the private landowner, do to start using fire?**

So, where does that put you? My best advice: make contact. Get to know some of the local foresters, biologists, and prescribed burn professionals; let them help you

overcome the hurdles. The most successful prescribed fire landowners have personally connected with somebody or some group for hands-on experience, building the confidence to eventually proceed alone. It's best to find somebody nearby, and there is information online for every state (see the list of state resources at the [LMJV Prescribed Fire page](#)). This article is focused primarily on Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas, but the discussion applies throughout the Southeast and much of the Midwest. In each of these states, private lands professionals can help you get started with prescribed fire.

In Oklahoma, there are also many cooperatives or prescribed fire associations; find these and get involved. Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas have fewer co-ops, but they are growing in number. Take the lead and get one started for you and your neighbors close to home. Co-ops can be especially valuable to communities of landowners with relatively small holdings. Rural landowners



Managing grassland habitat with prescribed fire at Ed Justice's Tri Delta property in Louisiana (see "Private Landowner Spotlight" on page 1)



Northern Bobwhite/James Childress



## Conservation in the News

### Morehead Family Forest Initiative Partners Talk Forest Management on Good Morning Arkansas Show

Did you know that Arkansas has more than 19 million acres of forestland, most of it owned by private family forest owners? A recent 6-minute interview with leaders of the Arkansas Forestry Association and Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever can be seen at <https://bit.ly/ARforests>. They discuss what is forest land management, why do it, and where to seek assistance. They emphasize that a variety of techniques, but most importantly prescribed fire and thinning (whether commercial or not), are important to create healthy working forests that provide wildlife habitat, timber production, clean drinking water, and recreation values—making them less susceptible to conversion to other land uses. There are many organizations with programs designed to help landowners achieve their goals for their working forests, and a good place to start is <https://www.arkforests.org/page/mffi>.



"I wish I had known then – what I know now!"  
Jason Ellis describing what worked and what to do differently in establishing shortleaf.

### East Texas Shortleaf Pine Tour A Huge Success

Conservation professionals and landowners met in November at the I.D. Fairchild State Forest to advance shortleaf pine conservation and management.

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Highlights of the day included examples of establishing and managing young shortleaf pine (SLP) stands. Led by Jason Ellis of the Texas A&M Forest Service, experienced foresters, wildlife biologists, and landowners described techniques and applications that have been successful and also shared less successful applications that were learning events to be avoided in future efforts. Mike Black, Director of the Shortleaf Initiative, provided a great deal of insight from experiences with SLP around the Southeast.

[Read more and view all the photos](#)

### Successful Award – FY22 Tri-state WREP Proposal

The Tri-state Conservation Partnership (TCP) is celebrating the November 3 announcement of a \$5M award for its FY22 Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) project proposal.

[Get the WREP details](#)



Tree death at Hurricane Lake that will be addressed by restoring a more natural hydrologic function to the South Greentree Reservoir.

### Hurricane Lake WMA Glaise Creek II NAWCA Project Approved

The Hurricane Lake WMA Glaise Creek Enhancement II NAWCA project is the second critical phase of a multi-

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phase effort aimed at the protection, restoration, and enhancement of critical wetland habitats on public lands in the MAV.

[Read more about the project](#)



“Conservation Wrangler” still from video

**The Texas Longleaf Team is highlighted as “Conservation Wrangler” by Texan by Nature**

The [Texas Longleaf Team](#) was created to advance the establishment, restoration, and management of the longleaf pine ecosystem in East Texas. This occurs through work with public and private forest landowners across the historic range of the longleaf pine.

The longleaf pine ecosystem is one of the scarcest plant communities in the Southeastern United States. Yet, longleaf pine communities are essential for migratory birds, resident wildlife, and a host of rare and endemic plants and animals. Additionally, fire-maintained longleaf pine forests use 15 percent less water than fire-excluded systems due to their drought resilience and severe weather adaptations, and they sequester carbon longer than other southern pine systems due to their long life-span and associated understory plant community.

Sound stewardship of longleaf pine forests can create diverse sources of income for forest landowners through forestry products, hunting and recreational leases, carbon trading, and other mitigation programs.

Through broader messaging to foster awareness, the implementation team is expanding their work with industrial and family forestland owners and managers. View the video here: <https://vimeo.com/641321712>



Wild Turkey, courtesy of James Childress

**NWTF and TPWD are repopulating the Eastern Wild Turkey to its historic range**

Through the Eastern Wild Turkey Super Stocking Project, turkeys are being released on tracts of land that meet certain criteria, including a minimum of 10,000 acres of suitable, connected habitat. Working with adjoining private landowners to create and maintain optimal, contiguous habitat is the key to ultimate success.

[Read more](#)

**How Longleaf Pine Can Make Us More Resilient to Climate Change** (from NC but applies to all longleaf)

[Watch the longleaf-climate video](#)

**New Family Forest Carbon Program** enables family forest owners to access climate finance from carbon markets—empowering them to help address climate change while earning income from their land

[Learn more](#)

## Meet Our Staff & Partners

### Jake Spears, Ducks Unlimited

Jake has been with DU since September 2020. After earning his bachelor’s degree at Clemson University and master’s degree at University of Arkansas at Monticello, he moved to Jonesboro, AR to serve as DU’s Arkansas biologist. Here, he is responsible for providing private lands outreach and technical assistance across the state, supporting fundraising efforts, and helping to oversee DU’s various public lands projects in Arkansas.

[Jspears@ducks.org](mailto:Jspears@ducks.org)



### Michael McVay, Ducks Unlimited

Michael received a B.S. in Forestry and Wildlife Habitat Management from Louisiana Tech University and an M.P.S. in Marine Ecosystems Management from the University of Miami (FL). Michael's past experiences include forestry and wildlife consulting, water quality research, and fisheries and wildlife conservation and management. Michael currently serves as a regional biologist primarily responsible for Farm Bill conservation delivery in the MAV. [mmcvay@ducks.org](mailto:mmcvay@ducks.org)

### Dr. Anne Mini, LMJVJ

Anne serves as the LMJVJ’s Science Coordinator, ensuring that the partnership’s efforts spring from a biological foundation that is sound and current. She has a Ph.D. from Oregon State University where she studied the comparative foraging ecology and habitat selection of wintering Dusky Canada Geese and Cackling Geese; an M.S. from Humboldt State University studying the energetics and foraging behavior of Aleutian Cackling Geese; and a B.S. from University of California, Davis.

[amini@abcbirds.org](mailto:amini@abcbirds.org); 541-231-5188



### Best Wishes in Retirement!

All the staff and partners of the LMJVJ wish a happy retirement to our beloved Linda McHan, Office Administer for the LMJVJ for nearly 20 years. Linda has been an impeccable friend, colleague, source of valuable information, organizer for the disorganized, and provider of unbelievable desserts to many of us. She will be greatly missed at work, but we take solace in knowing she will soon have more time to spend with family – especially her grandchildren! Happy Retirement, Linda!!

#### Acronyms

**ACEP-WRE** - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program - Wetlands Reserve Easements  
**AGFC** - Arkansas Game and Fish Commission  
**CSP** - Conservation Stewardship Program  
**DU** - Ducks Unlimited  
**EQIP** - Environmental Quality Incentives Program  
**JV** - Joint Venture  
**LMVJV** - Lower Miss Valley Joint Venture  
**NRCS** - USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

**NAWCA** - North American Wetlands Conservation Act  
**NWTF** - National Wild Turkey Federation  
**Rx Fire** - Prescribed Fire  
**SLP** - Shortleaf Pine  
**TCP** - Tri-state Conservation Partnership  
**TPWD** - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
**WMA** - Wildlife Management Area  
**WREP** - Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program  
**WRICE** - Waterfowl Rice Incentive Conservation Enhancement



**Lower Mississippi Valley**

JOINT VENTURE

[www.lmvjv.org](http://www.lmvjv.org)

A decorative graphic of holly and pine branches with red berries, framing the central text on the right side.

**All of us here at the LMVJV  
wish you a very Merry  
Christmas & a safe and  
peaceful Holiday Season!!**

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

And feel free to share!