



# LEADERS ON THE LAND

**T**he Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMVJV) 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

Welcome to the first Leaders on the Land Newsletter! For over 30 years the **Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture** (LMVJV) has aspired to achieving meaningful wildlife habitat conservation through effective partnership. Some of the most important members of the LMVJV are private land stewards like you. Private lands are the fiber that makes the cloth of our landscapes whole, and as land managers and cooperators in our shared goal of improved wildlife habitat and land health, you are essential. In the **JV Partnership in Action**, we hope to show how collaboration among federal, state, and private organizations and programs is critical to benefiting landowners who desire to improve their stewardship, while **Hands-on Guidance** is designed to highlight useful information and **Opportunities** connects you with programs that can directly assist in achieving your stewardship goals.

The LMVJV itself is guided by a Management Board, with representatives from state, federal, and private conservation organizations, coordinated by a professional staff, and fueled by conservation professionals with expertise

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## Private Landowner Spotlight

The LMVJV’s Private Landowner Conservation Champions program recognizes the crucial role that private lands stewards play in conserving the natural resources we all treasure. Simply put, private landowners are key components of land conservation and essential to our partnership. In fact, they manage over 90% of wildlife habitat in the LMVJV region. Moreover, Private Landowner Conservation Champions significantly impact the opinions, behavior, and decisions of their neighbors. They may be early adopters or successful participants in many of our important conservation programs (WRE, CRP, EQIP, Partners for Fish & Wildlife, Conservation Easements, etc.), which depend on the investment, cooperation, and enthusiasm of private landowners. Finally, private landowners possess a unique and powerful voice in positively communicating with decision-makers at local, state, and federal levels. The PLCC program gives us all an opportunity to recognize and thank private landowners who go above and beyond for conservation.

Our 2020 Champions are Johnny & Karen Armstrong, Ed Justice, and White Rock Pasture’s Craig Whealy. You can get to know these Champions and get a taste of the great work they are doing by going to our **Private Lands Conservation Champions** page. In this issue we highlight the Armstrongs, and we’ll focus on our other Champions in future newsletters.

Private landowner and former Champion, David Daigle, in his longleaf pine stand in Louisiana.



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in wildlife management, wildlife and landscape science, and real experience in achieving “championship” success working with people. You will meet many of these conservation professionals in the **Meet Our Staff & Partners** section of this newsletter over the next several issues.

Finally, our **Conservation in the News** section is a regular round-up of stories—from the local to the national level and everything in between--about policies, programs, problems, and solutions related to land conservation that we think you’ll be interested in!

**Jeff Raasch**

LMVJV Management Board Chair



**Keith McKnight**

LMVJV Coordinator



## Johnny and Karen Armstrong

**D**r. Johnny Armstrong and Karen Armstrong have actively managed their 500-acre property in Lincoln Parish, located within the West Gulf Coastal Plain/Ouachitas of Louisiana, to maintain and enhance an old growth stand of shortleaf pine/oak-hickory woodland for the past 13 years. While they have received technical Assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), D' Arbonne Soil and Water Conservation District and other partners, the Armstrong family has personally conducted the majority of their stewardship work, including the following activities focused on native understory restoration:

- worked with US Forest Service to hand collect and plant the seeds of native understory species
- prescribed fire
- selective herbicide application
- understory establishment with native seed from Louisiana.

Dr. Armstrong has participated in NRCS programs such as **EQIP** and **CSP**, and a large portion of the property is enrolled in a voluntary conservation easement with The Nature Conservancy. The property is also part of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Natural Areas Registry.

The shortleaf pine/oak-hickory woodland community is critically imperiled in Louisiana and globally vulnerable. This community once covered an estimated 4-6 million acres in Louisiana, but, currently, less than 10 percent remains. Much of the remaining acreage in Louisiana is less than exemplary, and it is rare to find examples that have both high quality overstory and a well-developed herbaceous understory layer. The Armstrongs have succeeded in creating what is perhaps the best example of this community type in the state.

Their stewardship has also improved habitat for many game and non-game species. Their work enhancing riparian areas benefits both aquatic and terrestrial species. Prescribed fire maintains an open woodland ecosystem, creating excellent habitat for wild



Red-headed woodpeckers are among the priority species benefiting from this work.

turkey, northern bobwhite quail and white-tailed deer, but also for many grassland birds and other Species of Greatest Conservation Need (targeted for conservation by the state). These include grasshopper sparrow, Bachman's sparrow, red-cockaded woodpecker and pine snake.

Finally, the Armstrong family goes out of their way to share their property and experience to enhance conservation. Dr. Armstrong has given several guest lectures to conservation biology classes at Louisiana Tech University, sharing his restoration experience with undergraduate students. He has also allowed research projects on the property, which contribute to an enhanced understanding of this unique woodland community and the organisms that rely on it. Dr. Armstrong also shares his restoration expertise with nearby landowners who can benefit from his experience. Brant Bradley, District Conservationist with the NRCS in Lincoln Parish, summed it up well, saying, "It's easy to work with Dr. Armstrong because he already has the passion and desire to take conservation on his property to the next level."

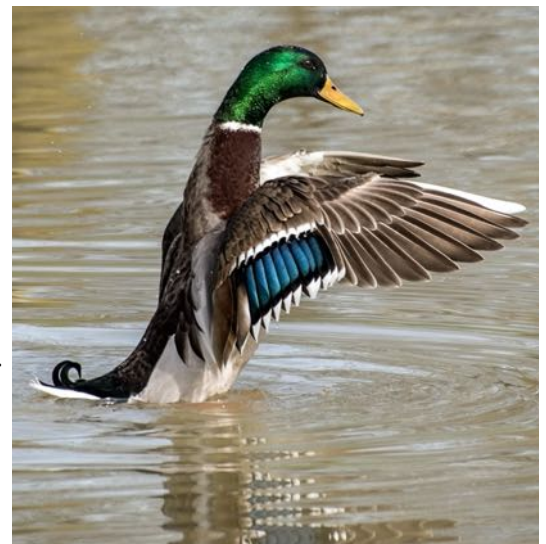
For their multiple contributions as conservationists and local stewardship leaders, Dr. Johnny and Karen Armstrong are model conservation champions for the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture.

## JV Partnership in Action

### Who is the LMVJV and What Do We Do?

Michael Jordan said, "Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships." The Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMVJV) partnership has been striving towards effective teamwork and application of intelligent science for better bird habitat conservation for nearly 35 years. The LMVJV was born out of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan ([www.nawmp.org](http://www.nawmp.org)), and has facilitated great success in waterfowl, wetland, and forest conservation. Today, the LMVJV partnership works across all habitats in its **geography** to ensure we achieve conservation success for all birds and the healthy landscapes they (and we!) depend upon.

The LMVJV works to coordinate the efforts of participating partners through the sensible development and application of science, for example by providing mapped databases and other tools for better communication and collaboration in delivering on-the-ground conservation. Our Conservation Delivery Networks (see "Habitat Incentive Program in Texas," p. 5) are but one practical tool that facilitates productive collaboration. Our science products provide practical guidance for targeting all-too-limited conservation resources and communicate our best understanding of regional habitat objectives and targets, which contribute to bird conservation on a continental scale. An example of one such science product, with direct utility and benefit to private landowners, is the First Entry Treatment Assessment Tool, highlighted below (see "Bottomland Hardwood Plantation Early Management Guide" on p. 7).



**Arkansas WRICE  
Private Landowners, State & Federal  
Resources Team Up For  
Conservation & Access**

The Arkansas Waterfowl Rice Incentive Conservation Enhancement (WRICE) program, administered by AGFC, promotes keeping waste rice available for ducks, geese and other migrating birds in winter. It was expanded last year to allow weekend permitted public waterfowl hunting opportunities on participating rice fields. Farmers operate and harvest their rice fields as normal, while receiving added income to leave stubble and flood fields during waterfowl migration, and to allow permitted public hunting opportunities. The program has grown from 11 hunting locations in 2019 to 42 in 2020 with 3,766 total acres enrolled! This is particularly relevant and encouraging for the LMVJV, as the success of this effort addresses both biological and human aspects of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

For more information go to the [Arkansas WRICE](#) web page, see p. 6, or contact Luke Naylor, AGFC at [luke.naylor@agfc.ar.gov](mailto:luke.naylor@agfc.ar.gov).



**Wetland Reserve Enhancement Projects:  
Partnership & Positive Impact**

Few programs have positively impacted more important habitat for wildlife in North America than the Wetlands Reserve Easement program (WRE; formerly “WRP”). Established in 1992 by the Farm Bill, Wetlands Reserve has restored and protected 3 million acres of wetland habitat on marginal farmland across the U.S. This great work has been especially prevalent and effective due to local leadership in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley (MAV) where more than 720,000 acres (and counting) have been restored. Part of the success of the program in the MAV has resulted from the long-standing collaboration of NRCS with other LMVJV partners. The Joint Venture has worked closely with NRCS to help apply the program in areas of high conservation value within marginal croplands in the region.

Much success in recent years has resulted from the LMVJV partners’ unified efforts to secure additional funds through the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP). Beyond the general state WRE allocation, WREP projects secure additional NRCS funds and apply them in strategically focused portions of a target landscape. Since 2015, LMVJV partners have focused more than \$83.5 MM in WREP funds on over 30,000 privately owned acres within the Mississippi Alluvial Valley! This work has increased habitat critical for forest nesting birds, served up food for at least 68,000 additional ducks each winter, and provided recreational and alternative income opportunities for opportunities for landowners.



Public-private partnerships have been a key ingredient to the LMVJV’s conservation approach from the beginning. Rest assured that we will continue to pursue similar opportunities into the future, especially through WREP - with private landowners and the wildlife they steward being the primary beneficiaries!



### Habitat Incentive Program Delivers for Landowners of Northeast Texas

Private landowners in northeastern Texas have a strong connection to the land. They appreciate the wildlife found within their forests, creek bottoms, and marshes and understand that the quality of the habitat is key. And while some have all the resources they need (knowledge, experience, equipment, funds) to achieve their land stewardship objectives, many recognize that they can use some assistance. Enter the LMJVJ’s Northeast Texas Conservation Delivery Network (CDN). Through coordination among multiple conservation agency staff and programs, the CDN is bringing more resources to landowners, strategically focused to benefit priority wildlife.

The CDN is now in its fifth year of providing the **Habitat Incentive Program**, which has augmented the technical guidance our partners traditionally provide to landowners with \$750,000 in funding for habitat restoration and management on nearly 11,000 acres. Because much of the wildlife benefit of forests in this landscape is greatly increased by regular burning, HIP has assisted with about 8,000 acres of prescribed fire. Controlling invasive species and establishing native vegetation also have been significant activities with HIP landowners. And the wildlife are responding!

HIP landowner:

“Saw a large (at least 10) flock of turkeys today on my Neches farm. I knew burns were good for turkey habitat, but sure didn't know it would work within a week, lol.”-



Landowners can increase turkeys through habitat management.  
Photo by CheepShot, Flickr CC



Prescribed fire on the Winston 8 Ranch in Texas, conducted by the landowner himself. Photo by Simon Winston

We also know that the birds are responding positively to these investments through **active monitoring with audio recording units**. CDN partners deployed 22 recording units on 5 properties to ensure that we are getting the breeding bird results expected—and make adjustments if we aren’t. Early feedback from the data tells us that burned areas host more species than unburned, including priority birds such as turkey, Bachman’s sparrow, and northern bobwhite.

Given the continued landowner interest and positive wildlife response, the LMJVJ will

continue to do all we can to ensure the CDN’s HIP program is available. Get more information on the **Northeast Texas CDN HIP**, or call our Partnership Coordinator, Bill Bartush, at 903-570-9626.

## Opportunities!

### Arkansas Waterfowl Rice Incentive Conservation Enhancement (WRICE) Program

Apply to enroll your land in Arkansas WRICE Voluntary Public Access Program. The program has expanded to include an opportunity for landowners who have Wetland Reserve Easements on their property. This new portion of the program will pay landowners \$50/acre to allow public access to their currently enrolled WRE properties for hunting and wildlife-viewing throughout the year.

Application Deadline June 1, 2021.

[Learn more here](#)



Youth hunt smiles. Photo by  
[Chuck Pyle, USFWS](#)

### Farm Bill's Feral Swine Eradication & Control Pilot Project

USDA is accepting applications from non-federal, not-for-profit partners for projects to help agricultural producers and private landowners trap and control feral swine, which is part of the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program (FSCP). Projects include swine removal by APHIS, habitat restoration, and assistance to producers for feral swine control. Deadline to apply Nov. 5, 2021.

[Learn more here](#)

### Texas Longleaf Conservation Assistance Program

Administered by the [Texas Longleaf Implementation Team](#), this program provides eligible landowners with financial and technical assistance for establishing, enhancing and managing longleaf pine. Approved conservation practices include prescribed burning, reforestation, site preparation and forest stand improvement.

Project Area: Angelina, Chambers, Cherokee, Hardin, Houston, Jasper, Jefferson, Liberty, Nacogdoches, Newton, Orange, Panola, Polk, Rusk, San Augustine, Sabine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Trinity, Tyler counties

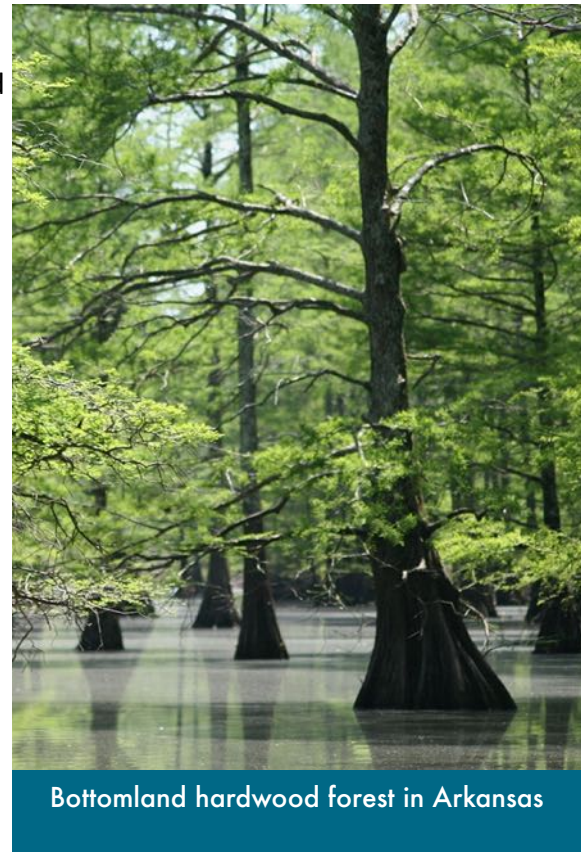
Details: Approved participants will receive cost share on approved practices based on ~50% of average industry rates.

[Learn more here](#)

### Free Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Course

Presented by Texas A&M Forest Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service, & Texas Longleaf Implementation Team. Location: Nacogdoches, TX- Alazan Bayou WMA- Outdoor Classroom When: May 17-20, 2021 (8:00 am to 5:00 pm, seating limited)

[Register here](#)



Bottomland hardwood forest in Arkansas

# Hands-On Guidance

## Bottomland Hardwood Plantation Early Management Guide

The great success of the Wetlands Reserve Program (Wetland Reserve Easements “WRE”) and other reforestation efforts have resulted in a Mississippi Alluvial Valley with a great deal of young developing bottomland hardwood plantations. As these stands mature, canopies close and understory vegetation becomes sparse. These conditions often last until competition causes tree mortality or the stand experiences catastrophic changes, such as wind-throw.

In addition, most plantations lack the species diversity, richness and structure evident in naturally regenerated bottomland hardwood forests. In many cases, active management may be warranted to improve these conditions, enhancing ecological values. Prescribed treatments within these developing stands may be necessary to ensure that management objectives (e.g., habitat for migratory birds, protection of native flora and fauna, protection and enhancement of open space and aesthetic quality, etc.) are met.

The *First Entry Treatment Assessment Tool*, developed by LMJV partners at the request of NRCS, provides straightforward guidance for landowners in evaluating young stands and reasonable next steps regarding thinning. It is intended primarily to support NRCS natural resource professionals and cooperating conservation partners, including landowners, in addressing wildlife habitat concerns in a way that is compatible with or furthers Wetlands Reserve priority wildlife and other objectives. The complete document and a less technical brochure are both available on the [LMJV’s WRE Plantation Management](#) web page.

When active management is determined appropriate, we recommend that stands be manipulated with the primary goal of creating [Desired Forest Conditions for Wildlife](#), such as increasing complexity of forest structure and diversity.



## Conservation in the News

### Bottomland Forest Management for Wildlife in Texas

Over the past six months, partners in northeast Texas have increased efforts to inform, evaluate, and develop better management guidelines that would allow timber harvest operations in Texas in accordance with a Forest Management Plan for Forested Wetland Conservation Easements, wildlife management areas, significant connecting private lands, and other conservation easements.

[Read more here](#)

### Private Landowner Videos Showcase Forest Management

New videos developed by Quail Forever & conservation partners in collaboration with private landowners in Arkansas & Louisiana focus on forest health, economics, and wildlife benefits.

1. [Glen Melton-Active Forest Management Benefits Forest Health and Economics \(LA\)](#) (5 minutes)
2. [Miles Goggans-Active Forest Management Benefits Wildlife \(AR\)](#) (4:40 minutes)

### 2021 Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership Awards in the LMVJV

Strength of partnership within the LMVJV is evidenced once again through the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) recent award of Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) projects within the Mississippi Alluvial Valley (MAV).

[Read more here](#)

### Texas Longleaf Implementation Team is a 2021 Texan by Nature Conservation Wrangler!

TLIT shared this honor with Audubon Texas, the San Antonio Zoo, and Texas Water Trade.

[Read more here](#)



**Lower Mississippi Valley**  
JOINT VENTURE  
www.lmvjv.org

## Meet Our Staff & Partners

### Steve Brock MAV Partnership Coordinator (staff)

Steve's primary role with the LMVJV is to advance bird habitat conservation delivery within the MAV. He works out of Ridgeland, MS. Contact:

steve\_c\_brock@fws.gov, 601-529-4235



### David Graves, AGFC Private Lands Biologist (partner)

David serves as Private Lands Biologist for eastern Arkansas, and leads the Arkansas MAV CDN as its Chair. He works for the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission out of Brinkley, AR.

Contact: David.Graves@agfc.ar.gov, 870-319-0668



### Acronyms

**AGFC** - Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

**CDN** - Conservation Delivery Network

**FWS** - Fish and Wildlife Service

**HIP** - Habitat Incentive Program

**JV** - Joint Venture

**MAV** - Mississippi Alluvial Valley

**NRCS** - USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

**WREP** - Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program

**WRICE** - Waterfowl Rice Incentive Conservation Enhancement

If you are reading a hard copy, you can access this newsletter and all its hidden links by going to the Private Landowner section of <https://www.lmvjv.org/past-newsletters> on the web.