

Conservation Advancements Through Partnership

*Mississippi
2007*



A Note from Our State Conservationist . . .



The mission of NRCS in Mississippi is “Helping People Help the Land.” Our top priority is assisting private landowners and working with partners to conserve natural resources. Our accomplishments are amazing to me.

Year after year, our employees work hard to deliver conservation programs to thousands of Mississippi landowners. One NRCS success story for our Wetlands Reserve Program is a pair of Black Bear cubs that were born on WRP land this spring (the first cubs born in Mississippi in more than 30 years)! Other endangered species such as Bald Eagles and other migratory birds are also returning to the thousands of acres being restored.

In addition to the Farm Bill programs that are helping landowners reach their goals, our partnerships with state, local, federal and private entities are a valuable commodity to help us in the delivery system. Thanks to the “locally-led” process, input from local landowners and decision makers are helping to form the 2008 Farm Bill provisions for small and large farming operations as well as the conservation technical assistance that we have been providing since 1935.

This year we are beginning a new phase of meeting our customers’ needs. In October, we will implement our realignment plan for our field offices. To better serve you, the customers, and to be visionary for the future with the ever-changing federal budget, we will combine offices, expanding our services across county boundaries and continuing our locally-led assistance. Our mission, “Helping People Help the Land,” will continue to be our top priority. Please don’t hesitate to contact our staff across the state and let us know how we can help you.

Dr. Homer L. Wilkes

Mississippi landowners, working in partnership with NRCS, implemented some \$29,710,000 worth of conservation projects in 2006 that will safeguard water quality, conserve farmland, improve wildlife habitat and protect wetlands across the Magnolia State. NRCS programs provided cost-share assistance for the projects.

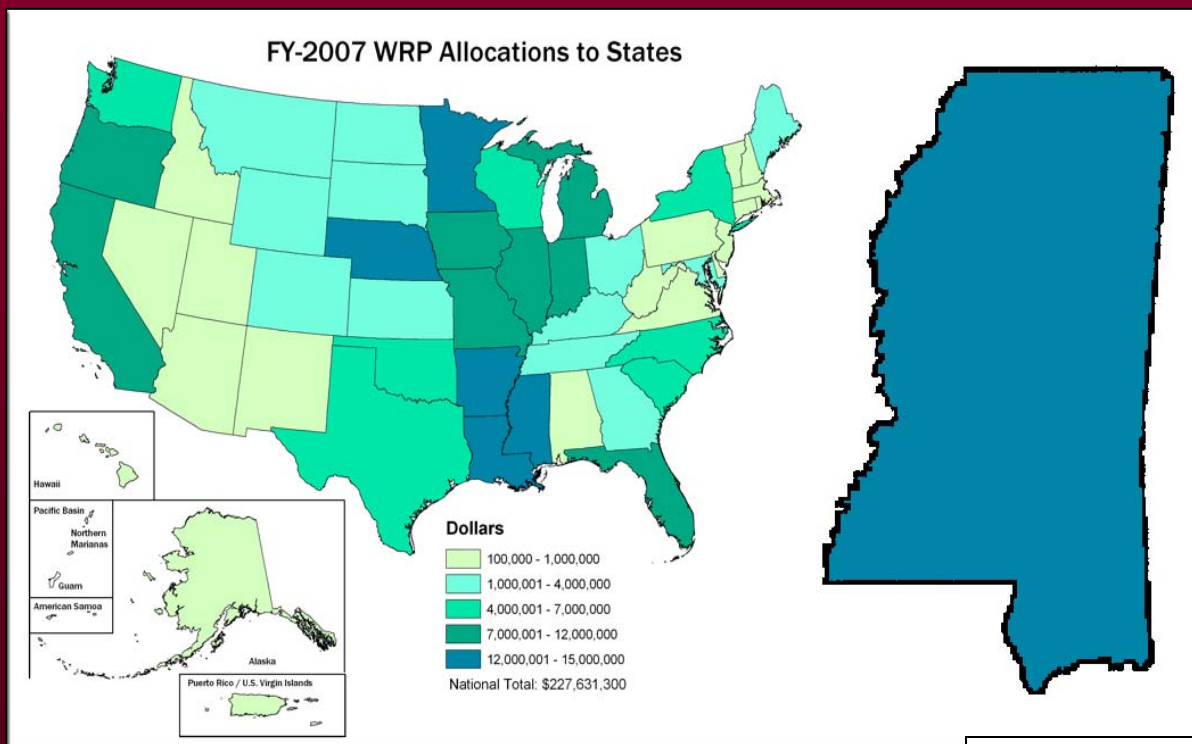
Wetlands Reserve Program

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their properties. The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service manages WRP and provides technical and financial support to help landowners who participate in the program. WRP offers landowners these options: cost share agreements, permanent easements, and 30-year easements.

FY 2006 results:

Acres Enrolled..... 11,655

Funding..... \$11,325,612



Of the 161,781 acres in the Wetlands Reserve Program in Mississippi, over 116,000 acres have been fully restored.

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First Bear Cubs Born in Mississippi's Delta in 30 Years

A research excursion conducted in the south delta region of Mississippi on private land enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) revealed the birth of two healthy female Louisiana black bear cubs – the first documented reproduction in the Mississippi Delta since the mid-1970's – more than 30 years. On March 2, 2007, a den check to gather data on the bears' vital statistics was conducted by Brad Young, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks' (MDWFP) bear biologist, with assistance from Shauna Ginger, biologist for United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), several other MDWFP personnel, the WRP landowner and family, and several other volunteer participants. The cubs were estimated to be 3 to 4 weeks old and each weighed 3.5 pounds.

Young has been keeping track of the sow bear via satellite GPS radio collar since July 2005 when she crossed the Mississippi River and made her residence in Mississippi. MDWFP is providing USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) with data obtained from her collar and collars from other bears across Mississippi that shows the extensive usage of lands where habitat has been restored through both WRP and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The cubs' 220-pound mother chose to give birth on a 10-year old WRP easement. Her den selection strongly supports the value of WRP and CRP as quality habitat for this federally listed species. "We knew that reforested land would grow to make valuable wildlife corridors, but discovering this productive den site in an early-successional WRP tract goes to show that bears are not just passing through this habitat, they're setting up house," said Shauna Ginger. She added, "This potential breeding population of Louisiana black bears in Mississippi moves us one step closer to recovery and delisting for this species."

NRCS biologists and the local district conservationist (in consultation with USFWS and MDWFP) assisted the landowner, Hunter L. Fordice, in developing a conservation plan to provide habitat restoration and management guidelines for the WRP easement area. Fordice expressed his feelings about the recent events, "As a landowner, it is extremely gratifying to see the habitat restoration efforts of WRP actually coming to fruition with the birth of these black bear cubs. The fact that the den site of the first black bear cubs born in the Mississippi Delta in over 30 years is situated in the middle of a WRP field is evidence that the habitat restored under this program is suitable for supporting these animals and I am proud to be a part of their return to this area."



Standing in the WRP tract where the bears were born, USFWS biologist Shauna Ginger presents the cubs for photos. Each cub weighed around 3.5 pounds. Photo credit: James Cummins, Wildlife Mississippi



ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

EQIP is the flagship program of NRCS. Through EQIP, farmers may receive financial and technical help with structural and management conservation practices on agricultural land. Funds are distributed across the state to address water quality and quantity concerns, erosion, animal waste and grazing land concerns.

FY 2006 results:

Applications received.....	3,779
Requested funding	\$20,075,620
Received funding.....	\$15,744,929
Contracts	2478



CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM (CSP)

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a voluntary program that supports ongoing stewardship of private agricultural lands by providing payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources. CSP identifies and rewards those farmers and cattle producers who are meeting the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations in selected watersheds.



Barton Farms-Canaan Plantation Lower Big Black Watershed

"We are really proud to be stewards of this farm," stated David Barton, Hinds County agricultural producer. "This land has been in the Barton family since 1937 and we now have the fifth generation of our family farming," further commented Barton as he signed the state's first CSP contract on Friday, July 29, 2005, on his farm in Hinds County. The Bartons have been no-tilling for 30 years. NRCS provided technical assistance on the 1,000-acre row crop farm of cotton, soybeans, and corn. To qualify for the Conservation Security Program, conservation practices, including overfall pipes, grassed waterways, and other measures such as no-till, were used to control

soil erosion. "We are proud of this place and want to preserve it for future generations."

FY 2006 results:

Contracts42
 Acres 18,583
 Total contract funding:
 \$435,120.00 (obligations)



WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM (WHIP)

WHIP provides technical and financial assistance to landowners who want to improve fish and wildlife habitat or restore natural ecosystems on their land.



FY 2006 results:

Applications Received 332

Requested Funding \$1,212,248

Received Funding..... \$770,349

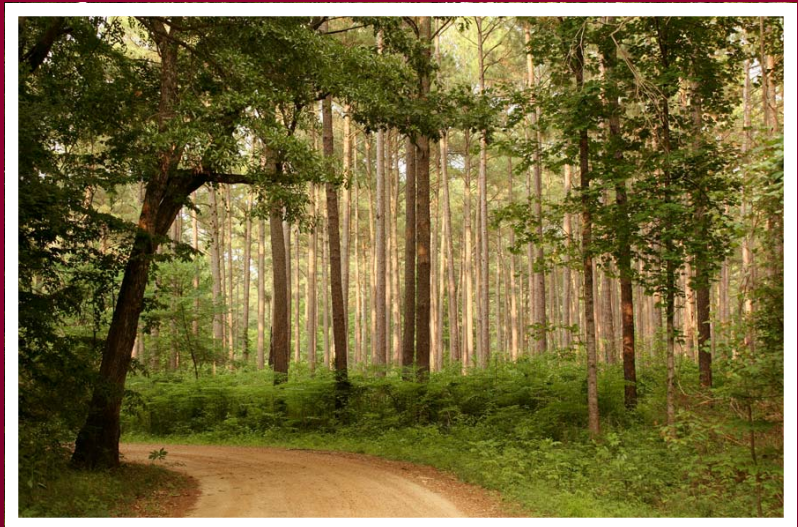
Contracts 182

HEALTHY FORESTS RESERVE PROGRAM (HFRP)

This program's purpose is to assist landowners in restoring and enhancing forest ecosystems to promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species, improve biodiversity, and enhance carbon sequestration.

FY 2006 results:

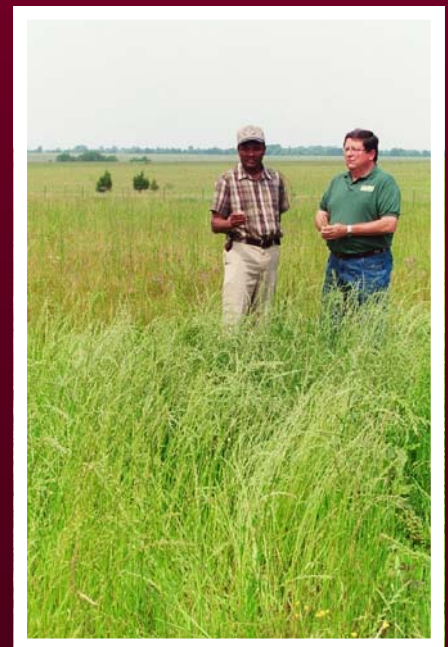
Applications Received 17
Requested Funding \$8,609,310
Received Funding \$952,731
Contracts 7



GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM (GRP)

This is a voluntary program that helps landowners and operators restore and protect grassland while maintaining the acres as grazing lands.

FY 2006 results: GRP has reached the authorization level. No new activity in 2006.



CONSERVATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (CTA)

CTA encompasses the majority of the work NRCS does. Work items such as the agency's infrastructure, training, accountability, technical references, state-specific Field Office Technical Guides and engineering are all part of CTA.



State/Area	2006 State Grantee (Entity Funded)	2006 Title of Proposal Funded	2006 Amount of Award	Brief Synopsis of Grant Purpose/Deliverables
Mississippi	MS Coastal Plains RC&D	Containerized Nursery Stormwater Mgt. and Irrigation Water Recycling Project	75,000	Containerized Nursery Stormwater Mgt.
Mississippi	Yazoo MS Delta Joint Water Management District	Precision Application of Irrigation Water with Center Pivot Sprinkler Systems	50,000	Precision Application of Irrigation Water
Mississippi	Southeast MS RC&D	Demonstration of Innovative Solar Energy Systems for Heating and Cooling Poultry Broiler Production Houses in Mississippi	75,000	Solar Energy systems for Poultry
Mississippi	Southwest MS RC&D	Solar Water Heaters for Dairy Farms	75,000	Solar Water Heaters for Eight Dairy Farms
Mississippi	J.B. White Farms	SilvoPasture Grazing System	75,000	SilvoPasture System to be Established by Planting Pines in Fescue
Mississippi	Wildlaw	Forest Stewardship Council Group Certification for Private Forestlands	25,000	Develop Manual for Forest Group Certification
Mississippi	Ben Burkett	Demonstration and Development of No-till Vegetable Production Systems	28,500	No-Till Vegetable Production
Mississippi	Southwest MS RC&D	Development of Farm Energy Use Self Audit Worksheets and Financial Incentives for Implementing Findings	75,000	Biomass Heating for Poultry

WATERSHED PROTECTION AND FLOOD PREVENTION

A watershed is the land that water flows over or under on its way to a lake, stream, river, gulf, or ocean.

NRCS administers watershed projects under Public Law 83-566, *the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954*. The projects help urban and rural communities protect, improve, and develop the water and land resources of watersheds up to 250,000 acres. Public law 83-566 projects can be multipurpose.

NRCS watershed projects provide:

- Flood control
- Irrigation water
- Conservation benefits
- Land treatment benefits
- Added recreational

benefits

FY 2006 results:

Contracts 4

Financial Assistance:

\$3,371,500



WATERSHED REHABILITATION

Many dams constructed through NRCS watershed programs are reaching their design life and pose a public safety issue. Through local sponsors, NRCS may provide up to 65 percent cost share for the rehabilitation of structures.

FY 2006 results: Plans have been completed on six structures for rehabilitation. Two sites in Adams County are ready for construction.

SOIL SURVEY AND SOIL SERVICES

Soil surveys provide a field-based scientific inventory of soils resources, including soil maps, data about physical and chemical properties of soils and information on the potentials and limitations of each soil.

The NRCS is the lead federal agency responsible for the National Cooperative Soil Survey mapping of private lands. Many other state and local agency partners also contribute both staff and money to the mapping effort.

TECHNICAL SERVICE PROVIDERS (TSP)

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized USDA to use TSPs. TSPs are conservation professionals from the private sector, non-profit organizations, or public agencies that can provide direct technical assistance and deliver conservation practices to landowners and others on behalf of USDA. By working with TSPs, NRCS is able to increase the technical assistance and services available to landowners.

FY2006 results: TSP obligations - \$1,345,143

Allocations supported NRCS Programs

1. EQIP 2. WRP 3. EWP 4. WHIP

Producers contracted with TSPs to provide assistance with tree planting and wildlife management.

Public sector funds were allocated to a number of public agencies and non-profit organizations including:

NOTE – list group and program they worked on. EX. MSWCC – (EQIP)

- Mississippi Soil & Water Conservation Commission (MSWCC) – provided administrative assistance with program implementation.
- ACES – provided technical assistance for program implementation.
- Ducks Unlimited – provided assistance with WRP restoration.
- Delta Wildlife – provided assistance with WRP restoration.
- Wildlife Mississippi - provided assistance with WRP restoration.
- Mississippi Association of RC&D Councils – assisted with downed timber removal.

THE EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM

The Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) was set up by Congress to respond to emergencies created by natural disasters. Administered by the NRCS, it is designed to relieve imminent hazards to life and property after storms. All projects are sponsored by a political subdivision of the state. NRCS personnel completed "Damage Survey Reports" to document specific damages.

FY 2006 results:

- Completed 195 DSR's
- Contracted \$14,805,670 of debris removal and bank stabilization
- Evaluated 1489 applications on 360,537 acres for downed timber removal with 297,460 acres eligible obligating over \$20 million.

Help After the Storm

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was granted authority under the Defense Appropriations/Emergency Supplemental Act to begin processing applications filed in the local USDA - NRCS Field Offices for cost-share assistance for removal of downed timber and debris under the (EWP) Emergency Watershed Protection Program.

The purpose of the Downed Timber Removal program includes mitigating wildfire hazard pursuant to Hurricane Katrina; improving forest stand health, improving or sustaining timber production, and improving wildlife habitat, recreation, aesthetics, and hydrologic conditions. Reimbursement provided to non-industrial forest landowners is based on 75 percent cost-share not to exceed \$150.00 per acre.

Mr. James B. Sykes, of Mendenhall, Mississippi, attests proof-positive that the NRCS EWP Downed Timber Removal Program is helping him to restore his family's source of livelihood to its pre-Katrina productivity.

Pines stand ages from about 10 to 22 years old. The oldest of his pines were established during the first Conservation Reserve Program sign up. Prior to establishing pines, the family produced soybeans on these same sites. Mr. Sykes has tended to his timber each day since the trees were planted.

Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc to the Sykes family's timber. Pine plantations that had recently been thinned and hardwood sawtimber in the bottoms were especially vulnerable to the horrific winds. The effects were devastating.

Mr. Sykes said it took several days of sawing felled trees just to drive to his gate. He began tending to his beloved timberland immediately, wasting no time in getting the chainsaws going. He later purchased a used hydro ax for felling snags and leaning trees; a hydraulic grapple for skidding felled timber from damaged stands with his tractor.

He assessed his timber damage, met with several registered foresters to develop a recovery plan and is working hard to ensure productivity of residual stems. Per the contract registered forester, Mr. Sykes was approved for 1747 acres of downed timber removal, 61,500 feet of firebreaks and 515 acres of prescribed burning.

“I’ve been working since the minute the winds let up and still have a long way to go,” Mr. Sykes confided. “The EWP downed timber program has been a real big help,” he said.

The mission of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is to provide national leadership in the conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources. The NRCS provides balanced technical assistance and cooperative conservation programs to landowners and land managers throughout the United States as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).



RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT (RC&D)

RC&D is a unique USDA program which helps rural areas promote wise use of natural resources, make community improvement, or stimulate economic development. NRCS administers the program providing a coordinator and administrative support. A local council of citizens sets their own priorities.

FY 2006 results:

North Central

Projects: 12
Funding \$1,193,800

Northeast

Projects: 8
Funding \$675,000

Central

Projects: 2
Funding \$74,800

Southeast

Projects: 19
Funding \$821,410

Southwest

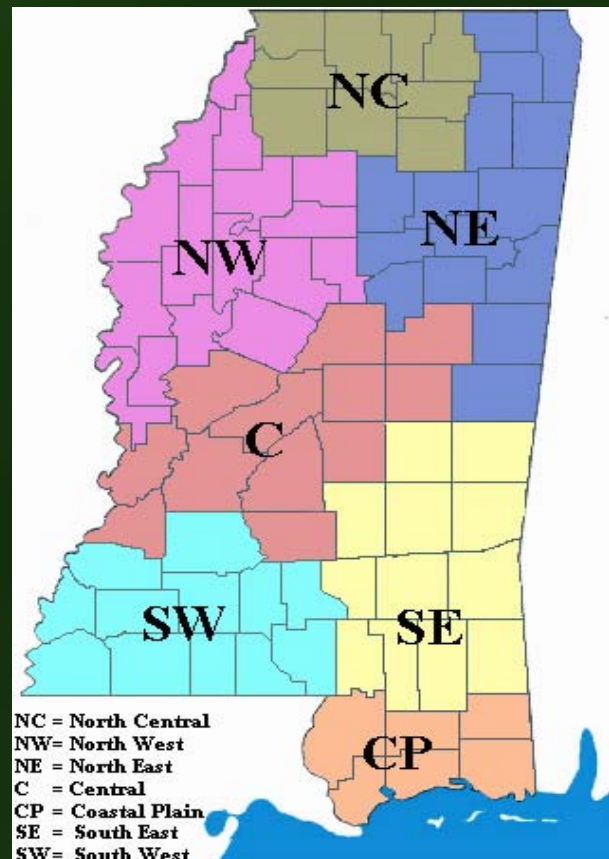
Projects: 14
Funding \$773,264

Northwest

Projects: 14
Funding \$1,108,700

Coastal Plains

Projects: 23
Funding \$585,449



SMALL LIMITED RESOURCE FARM PROGRAM

The purpose of this initiative is to improve technical service and program participation in all USDA programs through improved outreach efforts to Small Scale and Limited Resource Farmers. The target audience is defined as small farmers who have historically not participated in nor ever ranked high enough to be selected for a contract. The goal is to allow small farmers to select practices that are best suited for their particular operations while at the same time low enough in cost to be effective and practical for small farms to implement and maintain.



FY 2006 results:

Applications 468 for \$2,500,000

Contracts 189 for \$1,200,000

These contracts included practices for irrigation of alternative crops, grazing management and forest management.

PLANT MATERIALS PROGRAM

Jamie L. Whitten Plant Materials Center

Coffeeville, MS

<http://www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/JamieL.Whitten.html>

<http://www.plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/mspmc/>

In 2006, the Jamie L. Whitten Plant Materials Center (MSPMC) continued its mission of developing, producing, and applying plant materials to conservation needs (e.g. erosion and sediment control, pasture/hayland improvement, biofuels, wildlife). The basic work of the MSPMC is to produce plant material releases, a 10-15 year scientific effort per release, and currently 7 plant materials are in various stages of development in cooperation with Mississippi State University (MSU) Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station (MAFES).

The MSPMC also maintains production of its 11 current active releases. Activities related to plant materials production is coordinated with the Mississippi Crop Improvement Association and the MSU Mississippi Seed Technology Laboratory. Plant materials are provided to commercial growers through the MAFES Mississippi Foundation Seed Stocks.



New Native Grass Identification block at the Delta Conservation Demonstration Center, Washington Co., MS.

There are 16 active plant materials studies that involve cooperators such as MSU, MAFES, Agricultural Research Service National Sedimentation Laboratory, Memphis Zoo, and the



2006 crossing block (low-growing switchgrass) for plant development.

University of Memphis. These studies cover areas such as silvopasture, alley cropping (both of which are important in post-Katrina redevelopment of land uses), vegetative barriers, cover crops for sweet potatoes, cultural practices for release production, increasing waterfowl habitat, rivercane propagation, and sunflower variety and herbicide trials.

In the area of technology transfer, the MSPMC developed 10 publications during the year including: newsletters, Technical Notes, Field Office Technical Guide Job Sheets, Seed and Plant Vendors Guide, Report of Activities,

newspaper articles, and Annual Technical Report. These and other publications can be viewed at the links above.

Additionally, training was conducted for NRCS and District Field Office employees at a warm season grass planting on a Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) site. The MSPMC is working cooperatively with the Delta Conservation Demonstration Center (DCDC) in advancing the knowledge and utilization of conservation plant materials to the landowner. The MSPMC has installed a native warm season grass identification block at the DCDC and has used it to demonstrate these materials to participants in the NRCS Orientation for New Employees course held at the DCDC several times per year. Additional plantings for evaluation and demonstration are anticipated to be conducted at the DCDC.

The annual Wildflower Tour drew a crowd of over 250 individuals to the MSPMC. This tour (and other activities throughout the year) is cooperatively sponsored by the MSPMC, Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission, MSU Extension Service, Holley Springs National Forest U.S. Forest Service, and the Yalobusha County Soil and Water Conservation District.

The MSPMC also assisted the First Tee of Memphis (an inner city youth education program) effort by providing plant materials technical advice, plant materials, and planting assistance. The MSPMC may assist in the future with a plant materials outdoor classroom that First Tee can utilize with a local middle school.



Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI)

The Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative is a voluntary effort to enhance private grazing lands through NRCS technical assistance. It is a nationwide partnership.

America's private grazing lands provide habitat to two-thirds of our wildlife, water for urban and other users, and visually appealing to open space. Properly managed grazing lands provide food for grazing animals that convert it to food (meat and milk) for human consumption. Healthy grazing lands means less erosion and cleaner water.

Mississippi Grazing Lands Specialists provided training to 1521 people last year.

Eighteen training and or education/awareness activities such as grazing workshops, seminars, tours and field days were held throughout the state.

There are currently 40 active Demonstration Projects on grazing lands. Twelve operating units are involved in the demonstration projects.

FY 2006 results: Mississippi NRCS partnered with Northeast Mississippi RC&D Council, Inc., Northwest Mississippi RC&D Council, Inc., Central Mississippi RC&D Council, Inc. and the South Area Soil and Water Conservation District. The GLCI Steering committee provided \$20,000.00 to each partner for the establishment of four (4) grazing efficiency demonstration sites in their areas. These demonstration sites will be established to illustrate, promote, and educate landowners and

the public in MS on the benefits of making improvements to prescribe grazing systems that lead to economic sustainability. The prescribe grazing systems will be designed and managed for the production of forages that require less inorganic fertilizers, the effectiveness of recently



released (five years or less) herbicides/combinations, demonstrating technology for converting stands of infected fescue to more desirable forages, and demonstrating forage quality improvements with new forage varieties such as native grasses, and chicory. The coalition is also evaluating the biological control of Kudzu by grazing small ruminants.

In addition 800 forage grazing sticks were purchased as tools for grazing lands owners to evaluate pasture swords. One GLCI exhibit was purchased to promote the concept of healthy forage lands through conservation.





NRCS is an equal opportunity employer and provider