

Projects . Successes . Partnerships

 **NRCS** Louisiana
Conservation Update
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**Building
an "NRCS"
Fence**

**Landowner
Assists
With
Instructional
Video**

Bienville Parish



October 2012

**Seeing His
Grandfather's
Trees**

Beauregard Parish



**MBHI Habitat for
Whooping Cranes**
Avoyelles Parish

A cooperative partnership with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&D)

HELPING PEOPLE HELP THE LAND

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Irma Armstrong Branch grew up in a family full of women farmers; however, growing up she had no intention of carrying on the family business—she became a nurse. Today, she is rebuilding her family’s cattle operation and helping NRCS produce a video on fence building. Read more on pages 4 and 5.



USDA’s Commitment to Equality

USDA believes every farmer and rancher should be treated equally and fairly, and we are committed to resolving all cases involving allegations of past discrimination by individuals.

Referral Guide for USDA Settlements and Claims Adjudication Process

<p>Women and Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers Claims Adjudication Process</p> <p>If you believe that USDA improperly denied farm loan benefits to you for certain time periods between 1981 and 2000 because you are a female or because you are Hispanic, you may be eligible to apply for compensation. To request a claims package by telephone, call 1-888-508-4429. To request a claims package online, please visit www.farmerclaims.gov</p>	<p>Native American Farmer and Rancher Class Action Settlement (Keepseagle v. Vilsack)</p> <p>If you are a Native American who was denied a farm loan or loan servicing by the USDA between January 1, 1981, and November 24, 1999, you may be eligible for benefits from a Class Action Settlement. To request a claims package by telephone, call: 1-888-233-5506. To request a claims package online, or for more information, please visit: www.indianfarmclass.com</p>	<p>African American Farmer and Rancher Class Action Settlement (Pigford II)</p> <p>If you are an African American farmer (a) who submitted a request to file a late claim on or between October 13, 1999, and June 18, 2008, under the 1999 USDA settlement in the earlier class action known as Pigford v. Glickman (“Pigford”) and (b) who did not receive a merits determination on your discrimination claim, you may be eligible for benefits from a Class Action Settlement. To hear information by telephone, call 1-866-950-5547 or 1-866-472-7826. To find information online, please visit: www.blackfarmercase.com</p>
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Notes from the State Conservationist

American farmers and ranchers produce crops that feed and clothe the world. They love their land as they love their families, and they work hard to keep their farms and ranches healthy and productive . . . and sustainable for the next generation.

Pioneers of soil and water conservation faced many challenges in their quest to stop soil erosion and improve water quality. Being a “conservationist” was not always an easy road to travel—until neighboring farmers and ranchers started seeing results. The results they saw included less soil leaving the farm, better grass for cattle, abundant crops, cleaner water, more abundant water, lower production costs, sustained yields, healthier animals, and happier farmers and ranchers. It was enough to convince even the most skeptical.

In this issue, you will read about a young woman returning to the farm and discovering severe overgrazing problems—and finding a solution; a nearly extinct bird returning to Louisiana and finding an ideal habitat; and the revitalization of a threatened ecosystem. These success stories have one thing in common—conservation assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service through local soil and water conservation districts.

Are you having soil erosion problems on your farm or ranch? Are you concerned your animals are not receiving the nutrients they need? Is water quality or quantity an issue on your farm? Call the local Natural Resources Conservation Service or soil and water conservation district and invite one of our conservationists to visit your farm or ranch. Their telephone numbers and addresses are conveniently located on the last page of this *Conservation Update*. We can help you help your land.

Kevin Norton
State Conservationist
Louisiana



Quote of the Month

**“Two roads diverged in a wood and I -
I took the one less traveled by,
and that has made all the difference.”**

Robert Frost, American Poet
1874 – 1963

The **Conservation Update** is distributed monthly by mail and e-mail.

If you would like to receive monthly issues of the **Conservation Update**, please send your mailing address or e-mail address to:

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Life is full of twists and turns—and unexpected developments.



Irma Armstrong Branch grew up in a family full of women farmers; however, growing up she had no intention of carrying on the family business. She became a nurse in New Orleans.

However, life took one of those twists and turns. Eight years ago, her uncle passed away and left her 32 head of cattle in Bienville Parish. This unexpected turn forced her to take a close look at the three previous generations of women farmers in her family and decide whether or not she was going to become the fourth generation. She decided she was.

"It's a peculiar feeling being a young, black, woman farmer," said Branch. "I feel very proud to have come from such strong women, and I am excited to follow in their footsteps—even though I never thought I would end up here!"

Raising cattle comes with challenges—even for the most seasoned rancher. Seven years

into her ownership, Branch realized that the farm had been over-grazed and the land was declining. A neighboring farmer directed Branch to the local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office for help with her resource concerns.

Branch sold her cattle and began working with NRCS to get her soil healthy again before returning cattle to the farm.

"NRCS has been very helpful and supportive throughout the rebuilding of my operation," said Branch. "I am working with Bobbie Wall to install cross fencing through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program so I will be able to place my cattle on a rotational grazing schedule."

Rotational grazing will prevent over-grazing by allowing the cattle to only graze on a small portion of the land at a time, giving the rest of the pasture a chance to rejuvenate.

In the future, Branch has plans to work with NRCS to establish a pipeline to water her livestock, heavy use pads to protect the soil from constant traffic, and forage and biomass planting to nourish the cows.

Branch and her husband continue to reside in the New Orleans area, but Branch travels back to Bienville Parish regularly to work on the farm. The women who came before Irma Armstrong Branch would be proud of the way she is taking care of the natural resources of the land. And the women who come after her . . . well, they will have an opportunity to farm the land because of what she is doing today to care for her land.



Irma Branch



Conservationist



How to: Build an "NRCS" Fence (the movie)

Landowner Irma Branch volunteered to help NRCS produce a video demonstrating step-by-step how to construct a fence according to NRCS specifications. The fence-building video will be released in November 2012.

Preview of what will be discussed in the video . . .

1. Landowners work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to identify site specific resource concerns and identify conservation practices to address these concerns. In this case, cross fencing was identified as a conservation practice that would help the landowner implement a rotational grazing schedule.
2. To install a fence according to NRCS guidelines, the posts for H, Corner, and End braces must be set approximately three feet in the ground—no matter how hard the ground is!
3. A shallow notch for the cross post to sit in is not required by NRCS fence specifications; however . . .
4. A shallow notch makes construction of the brace assembly easier and ensures a tighter, more stable fit between the upright post and the cross post.
5. The brace assembly is the strength and the life of a fence.
6. A tightened, double loop of wire known as a brace wire, will draw all of the posts that make up the brace into a solid unit.
7. It is important to make a secure tie at the end of the double loop of the brace wire.
8. The metal T line post should be driven to a depth of approximately 15 inches.
9. Staples should be driven diagonally across the wood grain of the post at an angle that allows wire to slip as it expands and contracts with temperature changes.
10. A neat wrap of the end of a strand of barbed wire that has been tightened and attached to the brace assembly adds to the strength, durability, and appearance of the fence.
11. The bottom strand of a barbed wire fence is set less than or equal to 14 inches above ground level. The middle two strands are set at intervals less than or equal to 10 inches.
12. The fence building demonstration team at the end of the day: left to right: Kayla Deen, NRCS Soil Conservationist; Rick Adams, Soil Conservation Technician; Bobbie Wall, NRCS District Conservationist; Mike Turpin, NRCS Natural Resource Specialist; and Irma Branch, landowner.



**Whooping Crane
Reintroduction in Louisiana
Frequently Asked Questions**

Provided by State of Louisiana
Department of Wildlife and
Fisheries web page: <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/faq>

Q: Why are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) reintroducing a nonmigratory flock of whooping cranes to Louisiana?

A: Whooping cranes currently exist in three wild populations and within captive breeding populations at 12 locations. The only self-sustaining natural wild population nests in the Northwest Territories and adjacent areas of Alberta, Canada, primarily within the boundaries of Wood Buffalo National Park. It is possible that all or most of the populations of these endangered birds could be wiped out from a single event such as a hurricane, disease outbreak, toxic spill, or prolonged drought.

This makes the species vulnerable to extinction. The recovery plan identifies the need for three self-sustaining wild populations—consisting of 40 nesting pairs in the Aransas-Wood Buffalo Population (AWBP) and two additional, separate and self-sustaining, populations consisting of 25 nesting pairs each—to be in existence before the whooping crane’s status is considered improved enough for reclassification to threatened status. Those new populations may be migratory or nonmigratory.

Q: What are the objectives of this reintroduction?

A: The objectives of this reintroduction into Louisiana are to: (1) advance recovery of the endangered whooping crane; (2) implement a primary recovery action for a federally listed endangered species; (3) further assess the suitability of southwest Louisiana as whooping crane habitat; and, (4) evaluate the suitability of releasing captive and parent-reared whooping cranes, conditioned for wild release, as a technique for establishing a self-sustaining, nonmigratory population. The LDWF and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will collect information on survival of released birds, movements, behavior, and causes of losses, reproductive success, and other data throughout the project.

Ryan Hagerly/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative

Avoyelles Farm Provides Habitat for Endangered Whooping Cranes



Steve Hillebrand/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

MBHI

Whooping cranes are among our world’s most threatened species—there are reports of less than 600 in the world.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries began reintroducing whooping cranes to Louisiana in February 2011, by using young hatched birds from whooping cranes already in captivity at captive breeding centers. The goal of this project is to establish a self-sustaining whooping crane population in Louisiana. The birds are released at White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area south of Gueydan, Louisiana, in hopes that the birds will stay and nest there producing more whooping cranes. However, some of the birds have migrated to other parts of the state and are doing well.

The LSU AgCenter is conducting the research component of this project. As part of their

research, they are monitoring the birds and trying to understand how they use the landscape in their annual cycle. While monitoring the birds, researchers located seven of the released whooping cranes on Phillip Lamartiniere’s farm in Avoyelles Parish on land that is enrolled in the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative.

The Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (MBHI) was initiated during the Deepwater Horizon/BP oil spill to create habitat for migrating bird populations traveling towards the oil impacted areas of the Gulf of Mexico. Today, the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative is providing food and critical habitat for bird populations, much-needed water during drought, and new opportunities to improve wildlife management. The Natural Resources Conservation Service works with partners to deliver the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative to private landowners through the Wetlands Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program.

To learn more about the reintroduction of whooping cranes to Louisiana, visit:
<http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/whooping-cranes>

Seeing His Grandfather's Trees

Austin Arabie Realizes His Long-Time Dream

Longleaf Pine Initiative

Kody Meaux, Soil Conservationist
DeRidder Field Office

Austin Arabie was raised on the same land that he lives on today, and he recalls seeing his family's land transform over the years. Mr. Arabie can remember seeing vast fields of corn, soybeans, and watermelon patches, and now, it has grown into a pristine stand of longleaf pine. One stand in particular is now under transformation from a severely degraded longleaf plantation to a pristine longleaf pine ecosystem.

Three to four hundred years ago, Beauregard Parish was dominated by longleaf pine. Native Americans used the flatwoods longleaf pine forest for an abundance of resources. The longleaf pine ecosystem is the second most diverse ecosystem in the Americas, behind the tropical rain forests.

Historically, the longleaf pine trees were utilized for timber and fiber value, whereas the understory was utilized for forage and textiles. Through natural occurrence and human interaction with fire, wildfires shaped the landscape of Louisiana's flatwood grasslands, leaving behind vast stands of longleaf pine, with little to no mid-story vegetation and dominated by many species of native grasses and forbs on the forest floor.

Accounts from early settlers stated that "they could see nearly one mile through the native grass understory of these giant longleaf pines." Throughout the years, this vast landscape of open understory pines has diminished through fire suppression, agricultural development, and the planting of production pine species.

Mr. Arabie's longleaf pine was an exception. His goal was to have his land reflect the images he remembered as a child, and he wanted to improve the ecosystem his grandfather established. With technical assistance provided from the Natural Resource Conservation Service's (NRCS) DeRidder Field Office, Mr. Arabie has achieved his goal.

Corby Moore and I assisted Mr. Arabie develop a conservation plan with prescribed burning and forest stand improvement practices through NRCS's Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). NRCS now offers the Longleaf Pine Initiative program. This program offers special financial assistance to encourage landowners to implement conservation practices on their longleaf pine forest within the longleaf pine native range.

Mr. Arabie conducted prescribed burns on his longleaf pine, but due to a severe encroachment of invasive species such as Chinese tallow tree and Chinese privet, Mr. Arabie was losing his battle against invasives. Corby and I informed Mr. Arabie about the Longleaf Pine Initiative and the practices associated. Under the "Forest Stand Improvement"



conservation practice, heavy mechanical forest stand improvement was planned and implemented. This practice was completed with a mechanical rotary drum chopper mounted on an articulated frame tractor.

Upon completion of Mr. Arabie's forest stand improvement, he is now able to see one quarter mile through his longleaf mid-story, and he is extremely pleased with the product that NRCS provided.

"The mechanical forest stand improvement was an instant success and an almost overnight triumph of a long-time dream," says Mr. Arabie.

With the instant control of his mid-story invasive species, Mr. Arabie will now be able to better implement prescribed fire and spot herbicide treatments to maintain an open understory of grasses and forbs to benefit the red cockaded woodpecker, neo-tropical migratory song birds, white-tailed deer, and eastern wild turkeys—and enjoy the pure pleasure of having his own little piece of paradise.

To take this one step further, Mr. Arabie intends to utilize his open understory to graze sheep, a well-known yet dying practice once common in Beauregard Parish. The ability to use his longleaf pine forest in a multiuse management system is another benefit that makes Mr. Arabie's longleaf pine stand a valuable ecosystem.



Contact Our Offices

Parish	Field Office	Soil and Water Conservation District	Address	Telephone
Acadia	Crowley	Acadia SWCD	157 Cherokee Drive, Suite C, Crowley, LA 70526	(337) 783-5823, ext. 3
Allen	Oberlin	Allen SWCD	309 North 1st Street, Suite 1, Oberlin, LA 70655	(337) 639-4850, ext. 3
Ascension	Donaldsonville	Lower Delta SWCD and New River SWCD	2274 Highway 70, Suite C, Donaldsonville, LA 70346	(225) 473-7638, ext. 3
Assumption	Donaldsonville	Lower Delta SWCD	2274 Highway 70, Suite C, Donaldsonville, LA 70346	(225) 473-7638, ext. 3
Avoyelles	Marksville	Avoyelles SWCD	629 Tunica Drive West, Marksville, LA 71351	(318) 253-9445, ext. 3
Beauregard	DeRidder	Calcasieu SWCD	597 Mahlon Street, Suite B, DeRidder, LA 70634	(337) 463-8555, ext. 3
Bienville	Minden	Saline SWCD	216B Broadway, Minden, LA 71055	(318) 377-3950, ext. 3
Bossier	Benton	Bodcau SWCD	200 Burt Boulevard, Suite 101, Benton, LA 71006-4901	(318) 965-2185, ext. 3
Caddo	Shreveport	Caddo SWCD	1402 Hawn Avenue, Shreveport, LA 71107	(318) 676-3461, ext. 3
Calcasieu	Lake Charles	Gulf Coast SWCD	1400 Highway 14, Suite B, Lake Charles, LA 70601	(337) 436-5020, ext. 3
Caldwell	Columbia	Boeuf and Dugdeмона SWCD	7128 Highway 165 South, Suite 2, Columbia, LA 71418	(318) 649-2651, ext. 3
Cameron	Lake Charles	Gulf Coast SWCD	1400 Highway 14, Suite B, Lake Charles, LA 70601	(337) 436-5020, ext. 3
Catahoula	Jonesville	Catahoula SWCD	3545 4th Street, Jonesville, LA 71343	(318) 339-4239, ext. 3
Claiborne	Minden	D'Arbonne SWCD	216B Broadway, Minden, LA 71055	(318) 377-3950, ext. 3
Concordia	Ferriday	Tensas-Concordia SWCD	8331 Highway 84, Ferriday, LA 71334	(318) 757-2455, ext. 3
DeSoto	Mansfield	DeSoto SWCD	211 Washington Avenue, Mansfield, LA 71052	(318) 872-4949, ext. 3
East Baton Rouge	Denham Springs	Capital SWCD	2191 Tower Drive, Denham Springs, LA 70726	(225) 664-1430, ext. 3
East Carroll	Lake Providence	East Carroll SWCD	406 Lake Street, Suite C, Lake Providence, LA 71254	(318) 559-2604, ext. 3
East Feliciana	Clinton	Feliciana SWCD	9752 Plank Road South, Clinton, LA 70722	(225) 683-5496, ext. 3
Evangeline	Ville Platte	Evangeline SWCD	205 Court Street, Ville Platte, LA 70586	(337) 363-6602, ext. 3
Franklin	Winnsboro	Northeast SWCD	616 Riser Road, Winnsboro, LA 71295	(318) 435-6743, ext. 3
Grant	Colfax	Grant SWCD	510 Main Street, Colfax, LA 71417	(318) 627-9903, ext. 3
Iberia	New Iberia	Iberia SWCD	2617 Northside Road, Suite 600, New Iberia, LA 70563	(337) 369-6623, ext. 3
Iberville	Addis	Lower Delta SWCD	7747 Highway 1 South, Addis, LA 70710	(225) 687-2184, ext. 3
Jackson	Ruston	Dugdeмона SWCD	1412 Celebrity Drive, Ruston, LA 71270	(318) 255-3136, ext. 3
Jefferson	Boutte	Crescent SWCD	14246 US Highway 90, Boutte, LA 70039	(985) 758-2162, ext. 3
Jefferson Davis	Jennings	Jefferson Davis SWCD	2003 Port Drive, Jennings, LA 70546	(337) 824-0975, ext. 3
Lafayette	Lafayette	Lafayette SWCD	905 Jefferson Street, Suite 310, Lafayette, LA 70501-7913	(337) 262-6601, ext. 3
Lafourche	Thibodaux	Lafourche-Terrebonne SWCD	143 Laura Drive, Thibodaux, LA 70301	(985) 447-3871, ext. 3
LaSalle	Jonesville	LaSalle SWCD	3545 4th Street, Jonesville, LA 71343	(318) 339-4239, ext. 3
Lincoln	Ruston	D'Arbonne SWCD	1412 Celebrity Drive, Ruston, LA 71270	(318) 255-3136, ext. 3
Livingston	Denham Springs	Capital SWCD	2191 Tower Drive, Denham Springs, LA 70726	(225) 664-1430, ext. 3
Madison	Tallulah	Madison SWCD	1900 Crothers Drive, Tallulah, LA 71282	(318) 574-4158, ext. 3
Morehouse	Bastrop	Morehouse SWCD	9604 Marlatt Street, Bastrop, LA 71220	(318) 283-7626, ext. 3
Natchitoches	Natchitoches	Natchitoches SWCD	6949 Louisiana Highway 1 Bypass, Natchitoches, LA 71457	(318) 357-8366, ext. 3
Orleans	Boutte	Crescent SWCD	14246 US Highway 90, Boutte, LA 70039	(985) 758-2162, ext. 3
Ouachita	Monroe	D'Arbonne/Boeuf River SWCD	2410 Old Sterlington Road, Suite B, Monroe, LA 71203-2668	(318) 343-4467, ext. 3
Plaquemines	Boutte	Plaquemines SWCD	14246 US Highway 90, Boutte, LA 70039	(985) 758-2162, ext. 3
Pointe Coupee	New Roads	Upper Delta SWCD	180 East Main Street, New Roads, LA 70760	(225) 638-7746, ext. 3
Rapides	Alexandria	Rapides SWCD	3734 Government Street, Building C, Alexandria, LA 71303	(318) 473-7856, ext. 3
Red River	Coushatta	Red River SWCD	1311 Ringgold Avenue, Coushatta, LA 71019	(318) 932-4352, ext. 3
Richland	Rayville	Boeuf River SWCD	141 Industrial Loop, Rayville, LA 71269	(318) 728-4451, ext. 3
Sabine	Many	Sabine SWCD	570 Highway 171 By Pass, Many, LA 71449	(318) 256-3491
St. Bernard	Boutte	Crescent SWCD	14246 US Highway 90, Boutte, LA 70039	(985) 758-2162, ext. 3
St. Charles	Boutte	Crescent SWCD	14246 US Highway 90, Boutte, LA 70039	(985) 758-2162, ext. 3
St. Helena	Amite	Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD	805 West Oak Street, Suite 1, Amite, LA 70422-2820	(985) 748-8751, ext. 3
St. James	Donaldsonville	Lower Delta SWCD and New River SWCD	2274 Highway 70, Suite C, Donaldsonville, LA 70346	(225) 473-7638, ext. 3
St. John	Boutte	Crescent SWCD	14246 US Highway 90, Boutte, LA 70039	(985) 758-2162, ext. 3
St. Landry	Opelousas	St. Landry SWCD	5832 I-49 North Service Road, Opelousas, LA 70570	(337) 942-2530, ext. 3
St. Martin	Lafayette	St. Martin SWCD	905 Jefferson Street, Suite 310, Lafayette, LA 70501-7913	(337) 262-6601, ext. 3
St. Mary	Franklin	St. Mary SWCD	500 Main Street, Franklin, LA 70538	(337) 828-1461, ext. 3
St. Tammany	Franklinton	Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD	1111 Washington Street, Franklinton, LA 70438	(985) 839-5688, ext. 3
Tangipahoa	Amite	Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD	805 West Oak Street, Suite 1, Amite, LA 70422-2820	(985) 748-8751, ext. 3
Tensas	St. Joseph	Tensas-Concordia SWCD	1223 Plank Road, St. Joseph, LA 71366	(318) 766-3502, ext. 3
Terrebonne	Thibodaux	Lafourche-Terrebonne SWCD	143 Laura Drive, Thibodaux, LA 70301	(985) 447-3871, ext. 3
Union	Farmerville	D'Arbonne SWCD	604 East Water Street, Farmerville, LA 71241	(318) 368-8021
Vermilion	Abbeville	Vermilion SWCD	3221 Veterans Memorial Drive, Suite H, Abbeville, LA 70510	(337) 893-5664, ext. 3
Vernon	Leesville	Calcasieu SWCD	205 North 5th Street, Leesville, LA 71446	(337) 239-2193
Washington	Franklinton	Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD	1111 Washington Street, Franklinton, LA 70438	(985) 839-5688, ext. 3
Webster	Minden	Dorcheat SWCD	216B Broadway, Minden, LA 71055	(318) 377-3950, ext. 3
West Baton Rouge	Addis	Upper Delta SWCD	7747 Highway 1, South, Addis, LA 70710	(225) 687-2184, ext. 3
West Carroll	Oak Grove	West Carroll SWCD	208 South Constitution Street, Oak Grove, LA 71263	(318) 428-9303, ext. 3
West Feliciana	Clinton	Feliciana SWCD	9752 Plank Road South, Clinton, LA 70722	(225) 683-5496, ext. 3
Winn	Natchitoches	Dugdeмона SWCD	6949 Louisiana Highway 1 Bypass, Natchitoches, LA 71457	(318) 357-8366, ext. 3



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