



United States Department of Agriculture

Louisiana Conservation Update

April 2016

Every Cloud Has A Silver Lining

Story from the Field
Keeping it in the Family

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

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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:

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service 3737 Government Street Alexandria, Louisiana 71302

Attention: Amy Robertson State Public Affairs Specialist amy.robertson@la.usda.gov or Adele Swearingen adele.swearingen@la.usda.gov

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service 3737 Government Street Alexandria, Louisiana 71302 (318) 473-7751

Table of Contents

Ag Facts.....2
New Feature.....2
Notes from the State Conservationist3
Every Cloud Has A Silver Lining.....4
Story from the Field6
StrikeForce.....6
Around the State.....6
Upcoming Events.....8
Programs Reminders.....8
Conservation Reflections8

On the Cover



A variety of birds are using John Guidry, Jr.'s rice and crawfish fields. To find out more about how NRCS helped make this possible, see pages 4 and 5.

New Feature

New Partnership with TWILA

NRCS has a brand new partnership with "This Week in Louisiana Agriculture" (TWILA) to bring you even more of the conservation story featured in each monthly issue of the Louisiana Conservation Update. Check your local listings for program times or visit the TWILA website at http://www.twilatv.org/.



YouTube Follow us on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/user/LouisianaNRCS

Twitter Follow us on Twitter: http://twitter.com/NRCS_Louisiana

Notes from the State Conservationist

Blue skies and sunshine greeted the settlers living on the Great Plains on Sunday, April 14th 1935. That morning was a very welcome change of scenery. The days, weeks and months leading up to this rare clear day was filled with relentless drought and dust storms that kept most settlers inside. Friends and neighbors took advantage of the warm weather and clear skies to do much needed work around their farms, visit friends and go to church. Little did they know...

It was the afternoon of the 14th when the worst dust storm occurred, known as "Black Sunday." A wave of black swept across the Great Plains blowing sand and dust as far as the East Coast. Daylight gave way to darkness, wet sheets were placed over windows and doors, prayers were offered, lives were lost, and some thought it was the end of the world. Estimates placed the amount of displaced topsoil at approximately 300,000 tons.

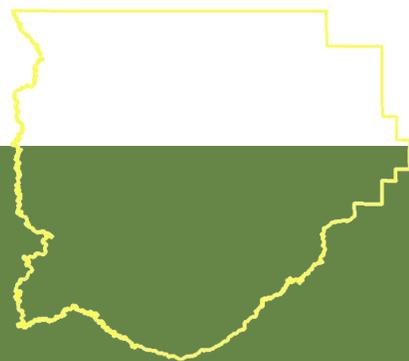


This year marks the 81st anniversary of Black Sunday. Just weeks following this event, Congress and President Roosevelt established the Soil Conservation Service. And the beginning of the conservation movement truly began. Over the years, we have seen agriculture production and technology progress, and in turn, the tools and programs we use to accomplish our goals have changed. However, the one thing that has not changed is our commitment to our customers, the producers who supply us with the food, fiber and fuel that our nation depends on.

I've just finished a week-long tour of our amazing state with Tony Kramer, Deputy Chief for Programs, and James Tillman, Southeast Regional Conservationist, from National Headquarters. I can honestly say, I could not be more proud of the work all of you accomplish day in and day out. Conservation on the ground, working with customers and partners is the heart of who we are as an organization. From the coastal wetlands, through our southern ag lands, and the urban agriculture production in the New Orleans area, our work is making a difference and our shared partnership in conservation was evident.

Although the Dust Bowl occurred far from Louisiana, the conservation needs of our state, land and producers have been no less challenging. And the advances we have made through the hard work of NRCS and Soil and Water District employees is one to stand up and take notice. I encourage anyone who has not already visited one of our offices located across the state, please do so. Our local offices can help you find out more about the technical and financial assistance that NRCS has to offer.

Kevin D. Norton
State Conservationist



Acadia Parish Facts

There are 841 farms in Acadia Parish.
238,218 acres of land is in farms.
78.6% is cropland and 11.3% is pasture.
Rice is the #1 commodity of the parish.

<http://www.agcensus.usda.gov>

“Every cloud has a silver lining,” the old saying goes. How do you make the best of a bad situation or unforeseen circumstances? Many would say, “search out the positive,” or “look for ways to start over, maybe even make things better than they were before.” Take those lemons and make lemon-aide.

That is exactly what NRCS did in response to the devastating Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The creation of the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (MBHI) provided alternate wetlands for migratory and resident water birds inland, away from the oil spill ravaged area. Although the program began in 2010 following the spill, the program is just as effective today.

John Guidry, Jr. and his family run a 4,500 acre farm in Acadia Parish, Louisiana. To say they know the rice and crawfish business is an understatement. But they also know a thing or two about birds. And not just any birds, migratory birds. “We see ducks, spoonbills, egrets, all types of birds,” Guidry explained. In fact, the significant number of birds that utilize

his crawfish ponds as a resting place is so significant it is a draw for bird watchers. Guidry laughs, “No, we don’t mind having the bird watchers, they just want a glimpse at these incredible creatures.”

For over 20 years, Guidry has worked with NRCS utilizing several programs to improve conservation practices. After seeing the value of being more efficient on his farm, working with the local NRCS office was just a given. “Mr. Guidry is currently enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) and the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (MBHI).

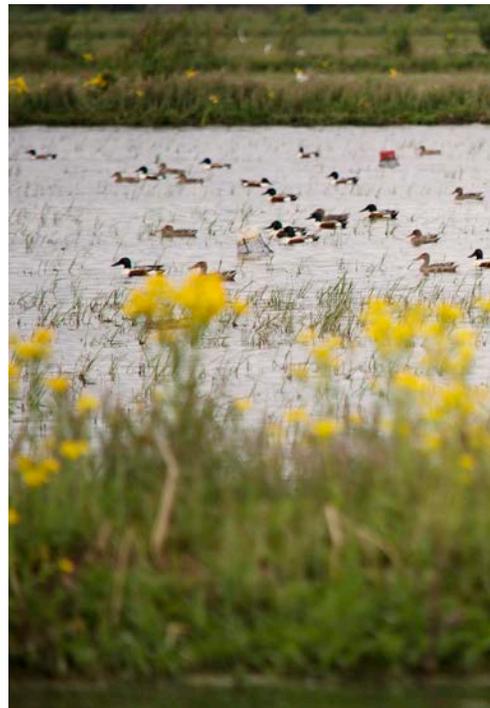
Guidry is fast to point out that having a close working relationship with his local field office and District Conservationist has been crucial in the success of his farm. Kody Meaux is the District Conservationist in Acadia Parish. “NRCS is a customer service agency, we help people help the land, that is our mission statement,” Meaux explained. “We have something very special to offer people around the nation ... and that is to implement

conservation practices on their land, to better improve it and make it sustainable for future generations.” Guidry and Meaux agree nothing beats the individualized attention each producer receives.

MBHI has proven to be very successful for Guidry and countless other rice and crawfish farmers in south Louisiana. Acadia Parish is the number one producer of rice in Louisiana. So, it is no wonder that MBHI is an incredible success. “In Acadia Parish there was an overwhelming number of producers who wanted to participate back when MBHI began,” Meaux explained. “The reason why is the holding water used for rice/crawfish production fits migratory bird habitat perfectly.”

In fact, the Mississippi State University College of Forest Resources and Forest and Wildlife Research Center recently released a study about the effectiveness of MBHI. In the research, scientists studied water bird species, populations, available food and cost-effectiveness on MBHI land. Researchers also estimated how many and which species of water birds

Every Cloud Has a Silver



were using the habitats, how much food was available and the possibility of maintaining birds during migration and the winter months.

The results were extremely positive, here are a few of the findings:

- Louisiana and Texas based MBHI flooded rice fields averaged 15 water birds per acre compared to two birds an acre on non-flooded fields and provided one-fourth of the region's estimated duck energy needs on less than two percent of the land.
- Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas Alluvial Valley MBHI lands had almost three times more ducks and twice as many water birds compared to non-MBHI sites.
- Biodiversity existed on MBHI idled catfish ponds with more than 40 water bird species.
- Louisiana and Mississippi MBHI wetlands had 1.3 to 1.5 times more native seeds.
- MBHI lands satisfied 28% of the duck energy needs designated by the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture in the MAV on only one percent of the land.

(To learn more about the MBHI study visit www.cfr.msstate.edu/kennedychair.)



Lining



Story from the Field

Keeping it in the Family

Submitted by: Cindy Beard, Area Soil Conservation Technician, Minden FO

James Everett Watson's grandfather purchased a 60 acre farm in Webster Parish in 1943. He had travelled here alone on horseback when he was only 12 and lived in Arcadia until he was 23. He purchased a farm in Doyline after he got married. Watson's father was one of nine children and the only son to stay on the farm. After his death in 1991, the farm was leased and fell into disarray. Once Watson's mother passed away, he took control of the farm and began restoring it.

Watson visited the local NRCS office in July of 2014 and discussed his dream of getting the family farm back in

shape. A conservation plan was soon developed and called for water sources for his cattle, erosion control, water well decommissioning and pasture improvement. Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, (EQIP), Watson has installed pipelines, water facilities and heavy use protection areas for gate openings and water facilities. His future plans include constructing a farm pond and decommissioning an old water well.



Because of the conservation practices installed, he has stopped the soil erosion that was occurring in heavy use areas, improved the quality of the water for his cattle, and improved the forages for his cattle through prescribed grazing.



StrikeForce Initiative



Louisiana Update

Louisiana StrikeForce Update

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, NRCS StrikeForce Coordinator

On Wednesday, March 30, 2016, the Food Bank of Central Louisiana's Board of Directors met with the Louisiana USDA StrikeForce Team and other USDA personnel. The Food Bank Board of Directors had never heard of the USDA StrikeForce Initiative or the information and resources that USDA provides.

Representatives from NRCS, FSA and RD were able to give an overview of their respective programs and services. This meeting led to a second meeting and USDA was asked to appear on the Food Bank's Agency Workshop Agenda to make a presentation to the eleven parish, sixty member body of the Food Bank of Central Louisiana organization. The workshop was held on Friday, April 8, 2016, at Calvary Baptist Church in Alexandria.

USDA is hoping to partner with the Food Bank on projects such as community gardens and other applicable programs in the near future.

Upcoming StrikeForce Events

May 12, 2016
StrikeForce Meeting
Winnfield, Louisiana

May 19, 2016
StrikeForce Meeting
Haughton, Louisiana

June 23, 2016
Undivided Property Workshop
Ruston, Louisiana

June 30, 2016
Proposed StrikeForce Meeting
Homer, Louisiana

Around the State

April 12, 2016

Alexandria Rotary Club

On Tuesday, April 12, 2016, Kevin Norton was invited to be the guest speaker at the Alexandria Rotary Club meeting. Kevin used this opportunity to introduce members to the Natural Resources Conservation Service as well as the Soil and Water Conservation Districts and let them know about the technical and financial assistance the agency provides to private landowners.



Around the State

April 13, 2016

Earth Day at the Alexandria Zoo

NRCS participated in the Alexandria Zoo's Earth Day event on Wednesday, April 13, 2016. This year, NRCS highlighted wetlands. Volunteers from NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation Districts from across the state helped with this year's activity.



April 14, 2016

Tioga High School Ag Day

The Rapides Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and NRCS participated in Tioga High School's first Ag Day. The purpose of the Ag Day was to educate area 3rd grade students on how agriculture affects their daily lives. Personnel from Rapides SWCD and NRCS spent time educating students on soil and water conservation and the importance of both in plant production.



April 15, 2016

Beauregard Parish Pasture Walk

The Louisiana Grazing Lands Coalition Initiative Committee along with NRCS held a pasture walk at Five Star Farms in Beauregard Parish on April 15, 2016.



Chris Ebel, NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist, led the group in an active discussion on the history and objectives of the Five Star Farms focusing on how to effectively incorporate annual forage types into grazed perennial pastures using no-till drill techniques. Harry Shaheen, the operator of Five Star Farms escorted the participants on a tractor trail ride discussing his grazing management and the various conservation practices he uses to improve his operation.

April 17, 2016

Louisiana Earth Day

NRCS participated in Louisiana Earth Day in downtown Baton Rouge on April 17, 2016. Thousands of people flock to this event each year. NRCS had a tent in the educational portion of the festival and highlighted wetlands with the visitors and assisted children with a hands-on activity.



April 18 - 22, 2016

NRCS Deputy Chief of Programs and Regional Conservationist Visit Louisiana

During the week of April 18 - 22, 2016, Tony Kramer, NRCS Deputy Chief of Programs

and James Tillman, NRCS Regional Conservationist toured coastal Louisiana. They visited farms in Allen, Vermilion, Iberia, St. Martin, Terrebonne and Orleans Parishes. In addition, they visited NRCS sponsored Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act projects in Cameron and Jefferson Parishes.



April 19, 2016

2016 House Egg & Strawberry Breakfast

On Tuesday, April 19, 2016, on the House Garden Plaza at the Louisiana State Capitol, members of the Louisiana House of Representatives were treated to a healthy of egg and blueberry crepes, strawberries, milk and orange juice. The breakfast was hosted jointly by the Louisiana poultry, egg, strawberry and dairy industries, the House Committee of Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture and Rural Development and by Dr. Mike Strain, DVM, Commissioner of Agriculture & Forestry to honor the 2016 House of Representatives. As part of the event, Commissioner Strain read the proclamation signed by Governor Jon Bel Edwards declaring April 24 - May 1, 2016 Soil and Water Stewardship Week in Louisiana.



Programs Reminders

USDA-NRCS Seeks Partner Proposals to Protect and Restore Critical Wetlands in Louisiana

The USDA NRCS recently announced the availability of \$15 million in financial and technical assistance nationwide to help eligible conservation partners voluntarily protect, restore and enhance critical wetlands on private and tribal lands.

Funding will be provided through the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP), a special enrollment option under the

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program's Wetland Reserve Easement component.

Proposals within Louisiana must be submitted to the Louisiana - NRCS State Office by Monday, May 16, 2016. To find the full proposal requirements, review criteria and submittal instructions, please visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/la/home/>.

Conservation Reflections



Group tour of project inspecting 2nd year improved pasture in Clinton, Louisiana in 1938.

For a current list of our offices visit

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/la/contact/local/>

Upcoming Events

May 6, 2016 Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana's Coastal Stewardship Awards

The 21st Annual Coastal Stewardship Awards will be held Friday, May 6, 2016, at the Hilton Baton Rouge Center at 6:00 pm. To purchase tickets visit <http://www.crcl.org/programs/stewardship-awards-banquet.html>

May 7, 2016 Alexandria River Fete

Visit the NRCS exhibit in downtown Alexandria, Louisiana, on Saturday, May 7, 2017.

May 10 - 12, 2016 Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers

A public meeting of the Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers will be held on Tuesday, May 10, 2016 - Thursday, May 12, 2016, at the Renaissance New Orleans Arts Hotel in New Orleans, Louisiana. To register for the meeting, please send an email

to ACMF@osec.usda.gov and include your name, organization and contact information.

**June 1 - 3, 2016
State of the Coast Conference**
Visit the NRCS exhibit at the State of the Coast Conference at the Ernest Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, Louisiana on June 1 - 3, 2016.

Visit our web site at:
www.la.nrcs.usda.gov

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against its customers. If you believe you experienced discrimination when obtaining services from USDA, participating in a USDA program, or participating in a program that receives financial assistance from USDA, you may file a complaint with USDA. Information about how to file a discrimination complaint is available from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. USDA prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex (including gender identity and expression), marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) To file a complaint of discrimination, complete, sign, and mail a program discrimination complaint form, available at any USDA office location or online at www.ascr.usda.gov, or write to: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410. Or call toll free at (866) 632-9992 (voice) to obtain additional information, the appropriate office or to request documents. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay service at (800) 877-8339 or (800) 845-6136 (in Spanish). USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.