



ARKANSAS

“Happy to put it back into timber for wildlife, and for marginal land it is a fine program,” said Ben Williams.

Ben William’s property and his recently restored floodplain wetlands.



Introduction and General Description

Declines in quality fish and wildlife habitat in Arkansas have triggered conservation efforts. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program plays a key role in those efforts. In Arkansas, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program began addressing habitat loss in the late 1980s. It focuses primarily on restoring vegetation and hydrology to historic conditions.

Arkansas Activities

Bottomland Hardwood
Reforestation
Wetland Restoration
Wetland Enhancement
In-stream Restoration
Streambank Stabilization
Riparian Fencing
Outdoor Classrooms
Prairie Restoration

Habitats of Special Concern

Bottomland hardwood forests have been documented to constitute some of the most productive fish and wildlife

habitat in the United States. Historically, about 24 million acres of bottomland hardwoods extended nearly the entire length of the Lower Mississippi River Alluvial Valley. Today, fewer than 5 million acres remain. This represents over 80 percent of the loss of forested wetlands along the Mississippi River with remnant tracts distributed as mostly small to moderately-sized fragments. The majority of the remaining bottomland forests (67 percent) are found along stream margins and drainage ways. Over the last 100 years, the floodplain available for natural flood storage has been reduced about 90 percent and the flood storage capacity of the Delta has been reduced from about 60 to 12 days of mean daily discharge.

Threats

In Arkansas, bottomland hardwood forest destruction has generated long term concern over the fate of many wildlife species. Excessive logging of mature bottomland hardwood forests is believed to be the main reason for the extinction of the

ivory-billed woodpecker and the Bachman’s warbler throughout their respective ranges. The black bear, once common, is now found in a few remaining large forested bottomland areas such as the White River and Atchafalaya Basin. Many other species of wildlife (e.g., waterfowl and neotropical migratory birds such as the prothonotary warbler) have experienced population declines as bottomland forests were converted or fragmented into smaller patches.

In eastern North America, long term surveys indicate that populations of 71 percent of the bird species classified as

neotropical migrants declined between 1978 and 1987. In Louisiana populations declined 47 percent, 53 percent in Mississippi, and an astonishing 77 percent in Arkansas between 1980 and 1989. Wildlife species endemic to the Delta, such as the red wolf and the Florida panther, disappeared from the region.

Conservation Strategies

Bottomland Hardwoods

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in Arkansas is helping to increase forest core areas, riparian habitat, and travel corridors for neotropical migratory birds and other wildlife species. The establishment of priority and focus areas are increasing the number of hardwood forest restoration projects. For example, designated Partners in Flight, Migratory Bird Conservation Areas have been incorporated into the ranking criteria for the



A Partners reforestation project in Clay County.

Lower Mississippi River Ecosystem's Partners projects and USDA Wetlands Reserve Program sites in Arkansas. Efforts are underway to establish similar Migratory Bird Conservation Areas throughout Arkansas.

Restoration activities are geared towards priority and focus areas, such as the Saint Francis Floodway, the Arkla and White River Focus Areas, and the L'Anguille, Arkansas, and Red Rivers. Federal, State, and private organizations in Arkansas are approaching habitat restoration from a landscape prospective. Bottomland hardwood restoration costs in Arkansas range from \$100 to \$140 an acre.

Wetlands

The restoration potential of wetlands in Arkansas is unlimited. Focus areas within the Delta of the Lower Mississippi River Alluvial Valley, along the Arkansas River, and



One Partners project - a newly restored wetland.

within the Red River Valley have been identified by the Partners Program for restoration, enhancement, or protection.

Different strategies are used to restore wetlands within the State. Wetlands on smaller projects are restored by either plugging ditches, creating small berms or levees, or installing water control structures at a cost of \$300 to \$900/acre. Whenever possible, landowners participating in the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program will obtain water control structures from the Partners Program at no cost to the landowner other than installation and initial pick up. After completion of Partners projects some landowners enroll their property into the USDA Wetlands Reserve Program.

Programs like the Arkansas Partners program of Ducks Unlimited and the USDA Wetlands Reserve Program complement our Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

Streams and Riparian Areas

Arkansas streams and riparian (streamside) areas are valuable resources and provide habitat for numerous aquatic species. Riparian areas help stabilize streambanks, improve water quality, reduce flooding and sedimentation, and enhance wildlife habitat. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program frequently works with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's Arkansas Stream Team to restore and stabilize streambanks in Arkansas. Fencing is often used along streambanks to exclude livestock which contribute to bank erosion and sediment deposition. On past projects, the Partners Program has purchased fence materials to protect streams from cattle at a cost of \$300 per quarter mile.

Outdoor Classrooms

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program works with educational and recreational facilities to restore and enhance wildlife habitat. In Arkansas, the Partners Program formed a partnerships with other Federal, State, and local organizations to create outdoor classrooms. The Partners Program leverages funds with these other agencies to restore habitats and create outdoor classrooms. The Partners Program typically contributes \$5,000 per project..

Partners

Natural Resources Conservation Service
Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
The Nature Conservancy
Arkansas Conservation Districts
Farm Service Agency
Ducks Unlimited
Arkansas Forestry Commission
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff - Student
Subsection of the American Fisheries Society
Bayou Bartholomew Alliance
Arkansas Stream Team
Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department

Accomplishments



One-on-one technical assistance with the landowner.

Since 1988, wildlife habitat has been restored, enhanced, or protected on private lands through 70 Partners for Fish and Wildlife agreements.

The Partners Program has carried out restoration activities on over 32,000 acres.

Over 360 project sites have been restored, enhanced, or protected.

More than 30 water control structures have been installed to improve habitat for wetland-associated species.

20 miles of riparian habitat have been restored and 1 mile fenced.

Over 26,000 acres of bottomland hardwood trees have been planted. This is almost 8 million trees.

2 educational and 1 recreational facility are utilizing restored wildlife habitat as outdoor classrooms.

Future Needs

- ' Restore, enhance, and protect 310,000 acres of bottomland hardwoods and wetlands, primarily within the Lower Mississippi River and Arkansas-Red Ecosystems. These wetlands can be restored effectively and are the most productive wetlands used by migratory birds.
- ' Restore, enhance and protect 20,000 miles of riparian habitat.
- ' More than 242,000 acres of riparian corridors could be restored in Arkansas.
- ' Concentrate on restoring, protecting, and enhancing cave and aquatic habitats for species of concern which occur within the Ozarks and Arkansas-Red ecosystems.



The start of a streambank restoration project.



One year after completion of the streambank restoration.

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