

LEADERS ON THE LAND

The Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMJVJ.org) 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

Late Summer brings many predictable things. Unfortunately, for many of our partners and families it brought Hurricane Ida. The storm tide, wind, and rain have proven destructive to our colleagues and friends in their path, and we want to remember them in our thoughts, prayers, and through helping hands as they recover.

Before temperatures and humidity finally fall, many of us anticipate the coming of autumn through a host of activities, not least of which is putting finishing touches on fields and wetlands prepared for hunting, birding, and enjoying time with family. In this issue we again highlight, in our **Private Landowner Spotlight**, a private lands conservation champion who has been managing and preparing habitats in northeast Texas for many years. We also highlight a brand new assistance opportunity in **JV Partnership in Action** that will help private landowners improve pine and associated grassland habitats for numerous wildlife species in Arkansas and Louisiana. And as we eagerly wait for cooler weather and the arrival of birds we haven't seen in a while, our **Hands-on Guidance** section



JOINT VENTURE

Private Landowner Spotlight



Keith Alford (Meridian Forestry), Sean Willis (Texas Parks & Wildlife Department), and Craig Whealy at the entrance to White Rock Pasture.

Craig Whealy & White Rock Pasture

White Rock Pasture is an 11,500-acre property in Trinity County, Texas, owned by Red Town Timberlands. Since 2001, Craig Whealy's Meridian Forestry has actively managed the farm for wildlife and timber. In 2007, they received TPWD's Lone Star Land Steward Award, which recognizes private landowners for outstanding contributions to natural resource conservation and management and is meant to promote long-term conservation of unique natural and cultural resources. While the property is managed as commercial timberlands, the owner has a strong interest in wildlife management, particularly

describes a resource for land managers with useful information for providing shorebird habitat in the fall. This section also provides information and resources for native understory conservation in pine forest. In **Opportunities** we help connect readers with resources that can directly assist in achieving management goals, and the **Meet Our Staff & Partners** section highlights two people who are helping many landowners access those resources. Finally, you'll find a round-up of interesting and useful news items in the **Conservation in the News**. We sincerely hope that you and yours are well, and well on your way to enjoying the fruits of fall!

Jeff Raasch

LMVJV Management Board Chair



Keith McKnight

LMVJV Coordinator & *Leaders on the Land* Editor



for deer and turkey, and has allowed Meridian Forestry to work closely with TPWD wildlife biologists to improve habitat. The property is leased for recreational deer hunting and has had some permitted alligator harvests over the years. Bottomland habitat along White Rock Creek provides habitat for waterfowl, particularly nesting wood ducks. A unique prehistoric oyster reef with petrified oyster shells believed to be 40 million years old is also located on a portion of the property along White Rock Creek.

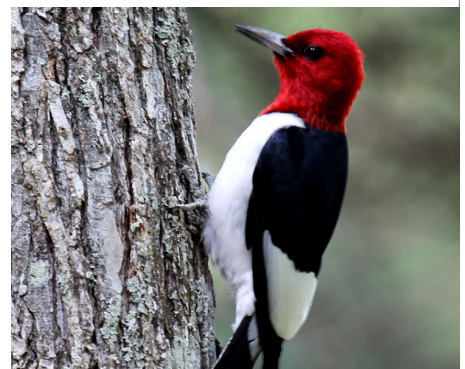
Habitat improvements are abundant and include

- day-lighting roads
- understory control using both herbicide and prescribed fire
- conversion of logging sets to wildlife openings
- retention of hardwood stands

Improvements in the habitat led to the property being approved as an Eastern Turkey Super Stocking Site in 2015, and between 2015-2016 it was stocked with 80+ wild trapped Eastern Turkeys as part of a restoration project by TPWD. The owners collaborated with TPWD and Stephen F. Austin State University staff to conduct nesting and brood research by tracking GPS-marked hens. TPWD also conducts gobbler counts and brood survey routes to monitor the restoration efforts.

In 2016, a NWTF Hunting Heritage Super Fund project converted 29 old logging sets to permanent wildlife openings to provide nesting and brood habitat for turkeys, and in 2018 researchers at Louisiana State University began analysis of the GPS data collected in 2015-2016. In 2018, White Rock completed a Neches River Habitat Incentive Program/NWTF project (part of the LMVJV's NETX Conservation Delivery Network [CDN] efforts) to chemically control the understory on 14 stands totaling 537 acres. In 2019, a NETX CDN Habitat Incentive Program project funded burning on approximately 15 stands totaling 672 acres.

Mr. Whealy and Red Town Timberlands have consistently sought technical guidance from TPWD and have been extremely accommodating to staff for access to their property for monitoring, research, and collection of data. Continued focus on understory control using herbicide and prescribed burning are not only improving timber production and habitat for deer, they are also providing critical nesting and brood habitat for turkeys, and quality habitat for multiple bird species and pollinators that thrive in open pine habitats.



Red-headed Woodpecker by James D. Childress

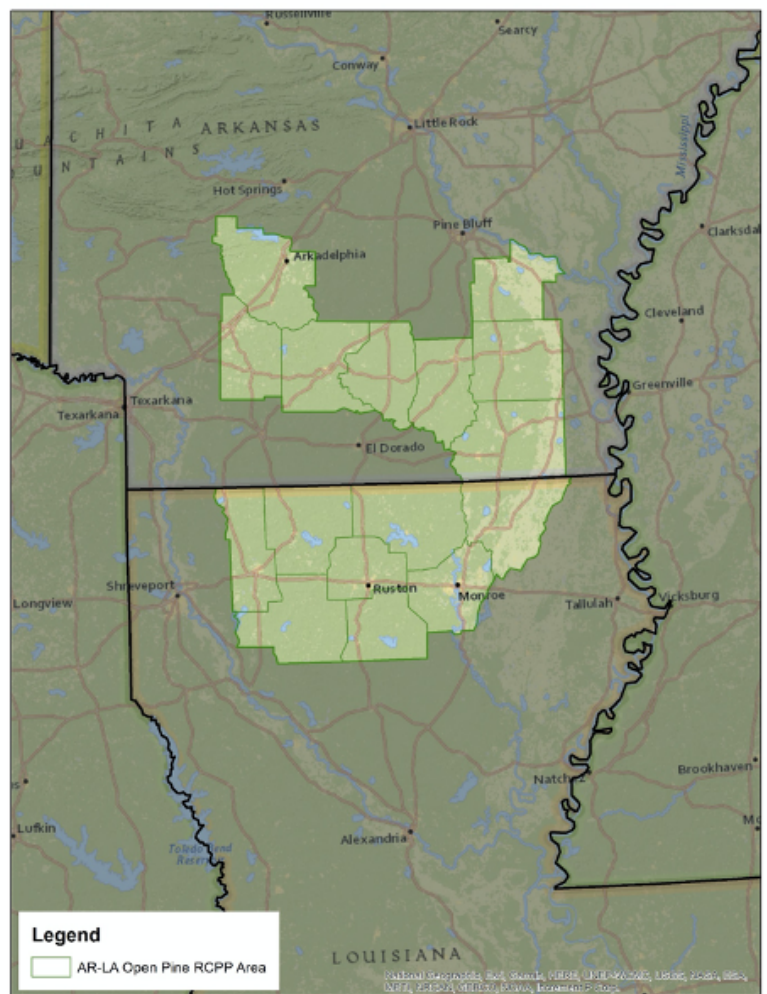
JV Partnership in Action

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Open Pine Landscape Restoration in Arkansas & Louisiana

Partners in the **Arkansas-Louisiana Conservation Delivery Network (AR-LA CDN)** are bringing new resources to private landowners within 16 counties and parishes of north-central Louisiana and south-central Arkansas. The LMJVJ's AR-LA CDN Open Pine Landscape Restoration partnership has secured \$5.9 million over five years from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to conserve species of conservation concern across 30,000 acres of private lands within the delivery area.

This RCPP, administered by the American Bird Conservancy, strategically focuses on priority conservation zones in the West Gulf Coastal Plain historically dominated by shortleaf pine. Farm Bill Conservation and other resources (technical and financial) will be available to landowners for critical habitat conservation practices such as invasive species control, forest stand improvement, prescribed burning, and native vegetation establishment within pine and mixed pine/hardwood forest and connecting right-of-way habitats.

The CDN, including 19 partners, will use several innovative tools and approaches to target conservation funds on lands important to species such as Northern Bobwhite, Henslow's and LeConte's sparrows, Louisiana Pine Snake, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Eastern Wild Turkey, and many more. Partners are bringing an additional \$8 million to the table to assist in delivery of the program, monitor important outcomes, and ensure effective outreach and communication to potential cooperators. Bill Bartush (LMJVJ Partnership Coordinator), Ricky Chastain (Arkansas Game & Fish Commission), and David Breithaupt (Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries) are working through many other CDN partners and NRCS leadership in Arkansas and Louisiana to help make this important project a reality - proving that Partnership Really Does Pay!



LeConte's Sparrow by K. Niyo, USFWS

Opportunities!

Longleaf prescribed fire grant: Applications to the Texas Longleaf Implementation Team for **prescribed fire assistance** are currently open and due by *Thursday, September 30th*. [Apply here](#).

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](#).

Landowner Assistance, by state, within the Lower Mississippi Valley

Numerous technical and financial assistance opportunities are available to private landowners in the LMJV region. Some of the most relevant of these are detailed on the [LMJV's Landowner Assistance page](#). Many programs are federal, but vary by state. Others are state programs funded through fish and game agencies or others, but terminology varies from state to state. Regardless, they are all focused on providing resources and/or technical assistance to landowners who want to manage habitat for wildlife.



NRCS-Louisiana staff discuss conservation activities with Private Landowner Conservation Champion, Dr. Johnny Armstrong.



Northern Bobwhite by James D. Childress

The National Bobwhite Technical Committee

is proud to announce the long awaited, highly anticipated eastern grazing strategies document, ***Beef, Grass, and Bobwhites – Quail Management in Eastern Native Warm-Season Grass Pastures***. This technical bulletin, funded by Working Lands for Wildlife, is targeted to technical advisors working with cattlemen and women in the eastern U.S. who are interested in managing for bobwhites. The authors combine a review of the literature, current research and first-hand experience to present this first-of-its-kind technical manual integrating grazing and bobwhite management in the eastern U.S.

[Preview the report here](#), or place a [pre-order for your copy here](#).

Regional Conservation Partnership Program Open Pine Landscape Restoration in Arkansas & Louisiana

As noted on p. 3, the RCPP has been approved and is in the establishment phase. Expect an announcement from NRCS late in 2021 with a fact sheet and timelines; a process and further information will be provided at the [LMJV Landowner Assistance page](#) to guide interested landowners to the appropriate resources and county/parish NRCS contacts.



Shortleaf Pine Cone

Hands-On Guidance

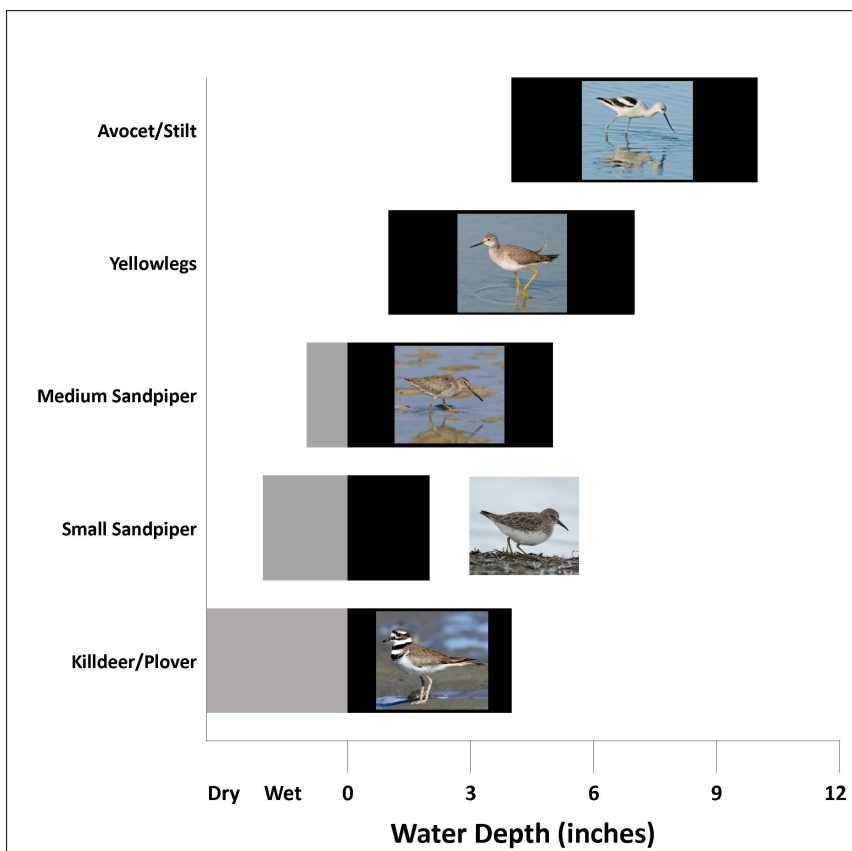
Shorebird Management Manual

How many of us can say they've seen a bird that flies 14,000 (or more) miles in migration every year of its life – up to 3,000 in a single flight? Well, probably most of us! If you've spent much time around fresh, shallow water during spring or late summer in this part of the world, chances are you've seen a Semipalmated Sandpiper. Most know them simply as 'sandpipers' or 'peeps'. Whatever you call them, their ability to make a living in wetlands from Alaska to South America is nothing short of amazing. And it's what they are doing on our mudflats and shallow wetland edges that is of interest to biologist- and landowner-conservationists alike. These habitats supply the fuel (mostly aquatic insects) that they, their look-alike sandpiper cousins, and other shorebirds, need to get from their Arctic breeding grounds to winter havens in South and Central America, and back again.



Semi-palmated Sandpiper by James D. Childress

Managing for most shorebirds is straightforward, but not necessarily easy, especially during the challenging southward (late summer/fall) migration. With relatively short legs and the need to keep an eye out for aerial predators, most small shorebirds require wetlands with moist mud to only a couple inches of water, and little (if any) standing vegetation.



Luckily, helpful management resources are close at hand. The latest [comprehensive shorebird habitat management guide \(https://bit.ly/manomet-shorebird-mgmt\)](https://bit.ly/manomet-shorebird-mgmt) was recently published by Manomet (manomet.org), covering the spectrum of shorebird needs across the Western Hemisphere, with practical guidance to land managers (see pp. 43-48, and the Sherburne WMA, LA, Case Study pp.141-145). The LMJV's Shorebird Plan Summary also provides management recommendations for shallow wetlands, aquaculture ponds, rice fields, and other agricultural fields. Both documents can be found on the [LMJV Shorebird Plan page \(lmvjuv.org/shorebird-plan\)](https://lmvjuv.org/shorebird-plan).

Native Plants Under a Pine Canopy

Production foresters have long understood the reality of tree competition for light and applied that knowledge to forest management plans. Tree density and spacing through the life cycle of a forest stand are key to maximizing growth and yield. This same light, and competition for it, is key to management of forest stands to provide quality wildlife habitat as well.

Habitat management recommendations for many forest wildlife species call for canopy gaps, which allow generous amounts of sunlight to reach the forest floor and enable the growth of native grasses and forbs. This is the first key ingredient for providing good habitat in pine and mixed pine/hardwood stands for game species such as Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Wild Turkey, and deer. It's also critical to support a host of songbirds, such as Bachman's sparrow and Prairie Warbler, as well as bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. These critters are without a doubt in the forest, but they are making a living mostly from the food and cover provided by this healthy undergrowth of "groundcover."



You can find excellent information about common, important understory plant species within the LMJVJ region at the Texas Longleaf Implementation Team website (txlongleaf.org) under **Landowner Assistance, Ecosystem Management**.

However, panic grass, bluestem, and milkweed are not the only plants that respond to the sunlight! Without the application of frequent fire, woody species quickly begin to shade out most of the wildflowers and grasses. Providing quality wildlife habitat within pine stands is a function of maintaining a moderately open canopy (generally, 30-70% Canopy Cover) coupled with the frequent application (every 2-3 years) of prescribed fire.

Both Longleaf and Shortleaf Pine are especially equipped to thrive under such a management approach.

Your nearby state and federal wildlife agency private lands biologists (lmvjv.org/landowner-assistance) can help you develop, refine, and execute a management plan for keeping a healthy native understory community within your upland forest stands. They may even be able to point you toward potential financial assistance for some of these activities. Maintaining a pine forest with open canopy and fire-enabled native understory will provide wildlife sights and sounds you may not have thought possible. And some of our highest priority species will be better off for it!



Photos courtesy of James D. Childress. Top to bottom: Butterfly weed, female Diana Fritillary, and Bachman's Sparrow

Conservation in the News

Flooded Fields for Shorebirds and More in Mississippi
Delta Wind Birds and private landowners in the Delta region of Mississippi are discovering that shallow fall/winter flooding on corn fields not only benefits birds, but early evidence suggests it conserves soil, keeps excess nitrogen out of streams, and may improve subsequent crop yield. [Read more.](#)

Growing Wildlife Managers in Cass County, TX—One Family at a Time

Learn how one family in Cass County, TX was inspired by a shortleaf pine tour hosted in 2017 by the Joint Venture, which eventually led to restoration workshops and the establishment of a landowner wildlife cooperative. In 2021, the family received an award from the Marion-Cass Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) for their ongoing contributions to local conservation efforts. [Read more.](#)



Arkansas Game and Fish Commission Makes Decision to Change Greentree Reservoir Management for the Benefit of Wildlife, Current and Future Waterfowlers
 GTR renovations will be completed across 16 Arkansas WMAs, initially with help from a [NAWCA grant and LMJV partners](#). GTR management plans will be revised to provide a more natural flooding and flow regime by:

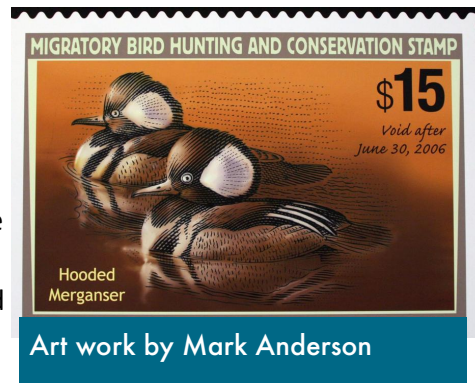
- delaying intentional flooding each year until after mid-November to prevent extra stress that trees experience from floodwater before they are fully dormant;

- incorporating flexibility in water management to allow year-to-year variability and a more cyclical five- to seven-year flood cycle. [Read more.](#)

Hunting Element Requirement of Federal Duck Stamp Removed

Beginning with the 2022 Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Contest (Federal Duck Stamp Contest), artists will no longer be required to include an appropriate hunting element within contest entries.

Established in 1934, all U.S. waterfowl hunters who have attained the age of 16 are required to buy an annual Federal Duck



Stamp. Funds generated from stamp sales are used to protect waterfowl and wetland habitat that is incorporated into the National Wildlife Refuge System. [Read more.](#)

Forest Markets - A Key Component of Successful Habitat Management

The Tri-state Conservation Partnership (TCP) continues to work in support of habitat management and Desired Forest Conditions for Wildlife (DFCW) through collaboration and



coordination with the forest products industry and wood suppliers in the MAV. [Read more.](#)

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If you are reading a hard copy, you can access this newsletter and all its internet links by going to www.lmvjv.org/leaders-on-the-land on the web.

Meet Our Staff & Partners

Bill Bartush, WGCP Partnership Coordinator (staff)

Bill's primary role is to provide coordination and communication assistance to partners in pursuit of LMVJV bird habitat objectives in the West Gulf Coastal Plain/Ouachitas region. He works out of Tyler, TX. Contact: bbartush@abcbirds.org, 903-570-9626



Annie Farrell, NWTF (partner)



Annie currently serves as District Biologist for Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska for the National Wild Turkey Federation, and is an integral part of the leadership team for the Northeast Texas Conservation Delivery Network. She works out of Lindale, TX. Contact: afarrell@nwtf.net, (903) 539-0279

Acronyms

AGFC - Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
CDN - Conservation Delivery Network
DFCW - Desired Forest Conditions for Wildlife
FSCP - Feral Swine Eradication and Control Program
GTR - Greentree Reservoir
HIP - Habitat Incentive Program
JV - Joint Venture
NRCS - USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

NAWCA - North American Wetlands Conservation Act
NWTF - National Wild Turkey Federation
RCPP - Regional Conservation Partnership Program
SWCD - Soil & Water Conservation District
TCP - Tri-state Conservation Partnership
TPWD - Texas Parks & Wildlife Department



Lower Mississippi Valley

J O I N T V E N T U R E

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