

THE ROLE OF THE ARKANSAS CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

What is the Partnership?

Arkansas is a state blessed with soil and water resources. Over the last century, Arkansas landowners have collectively utilized these resources to make Arkansas a national leader in agricultural and forestry production. Maintaining profitable production while protecting these natural resources is increasingly more challenging. To more effectively assist private landowners in meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century, several organizations have formed the Arkansas Conservation Partnership (ACP). The ACP consists of the following:

- The Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission (ASWCC)
- The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- The Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts (AACD)
- The Arkansas Association of Conservation District Employees (AACDE)
- The Resource Conservation & Development Council (RC&D)
- The University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (UA-CES)
- The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB)

The partnership is a unique force, combining the strengths of federal, state and local organizations along with educational institutions, to help preserve and protect the Natural State. The vision of the ACP is to foster a productive Arkansas that is in harmony with a quality environment.

Guiding Principals of the Partnership

While the tasks and services of these individual organizations are different, they do share a common sense of purpose: to assist Arkansas landowners in using their land in a manner that conserves natural resources and sustains economic vitality while protecting the environment. This common sense of purpose is the foundation of the ACP. The guiding principals of the ACP include a commitment to the conservation ethic, a pledge to work together, and utilizing the partnership to deliver services with more effectiveness and efficiently.

The ACP is committed to locally-led conservation of natural resources by providing a unique combination of educational, financial, and technical assistance to landowners. While each partner offers unique services, the ACP is committed to teamwork, consensus, joint decision-making, and sharing of successes and failures. The partnership strives to breakdown interagency barriers, eliminate duplication of efforts, and, improve communication so that landowners are better served.

How Does the Partnership Function?

While everyone who belongs to one of the member organizations is part of the ACP, the partnership has two interagency committees that meet regularly. One is the

Cooperative Management Team (CMT) which consists of the AACD President, AACDE President, ASWCC Executive Director, the NRCS State Conservationist, the Associate Vice President for Extension for the University of Arkansas' Division of Agriculture, the Dean/Director of the School of Agriculture Fisheries and Human Sciences' UAPB; and the RC&D President. The purpose of the CMT is to provide executive leadership for land and water conservation priorities in the State of Arkansas and to carry out the guiding principles as set by the ACP.

The other committee is the Partnership Workgroup (PWG), which consists of one or more representatives of each of the Arkansas Conservation Partnership members. The CMT member appoints one or more member (s) from their organization to the PWG. The PWG meets as needed to accomplish priorities as set by the CMT.

Arkansas Conservation Partnership Partner's History

Arkansas Conservation Districts – A Brief History

Arkansas' Conservation districts are political sub-divisions of the State of Arkansas. They were created by popular vote of resident landowners, as authorized by Act No. 197 of the General Assembly of 1937, which was the nation's first conservation districts law.

District lines generally coincide with county lines, but Mississippi County is divided into two districts, resulting in a total of 76 conservation districts in the state.

Conservation District Directors

Act No. 197 provides for a five-member board of directors to govern the affairs of a conservation district. The Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission appoint two (2) members, and Three (3) are elected by resident landowners.

Duties of Conservation District Directors

As an appointed or elected government official, the conservation district director assumes a solemn obligation to the public on taking the Oath of Office.

Basically, the director's job is to furnish leadership for the local soil and water conservation program. A director must think, plan, recognize problems, examine alternative courses of action, make decisions, and set priorities for conservation work.

If districts do not accept this challenge, state and federal officials will make decisions that local people should have made.

District Responsibilities

- a. Furnishing effective local leadership in the form of an organized governing body. Boards should reorganize annually, although officers may succeed themselves an indefinite number of times.
- b. Holding regular and special meetings to determine community needs for conservation and resource development, and to plan their work.
- c. Developing a long-range program for soil and water conservation as mutually agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding with the U. S. Department of Agriculture.
- d. Developing an annual work plan to serve as a guide in carrying out the long-range program.
- e. Developing an annual budget that reflects financial requirements to carry out the annual work plan.
- f. Preparing an annual report of work accomplishments that reflects the district's success in carrying out the annual work plan.
- g. Enlisting needed assistance from whatever source is available.
- h. Determining who receives services and setting priorities regarding the kinds and amount of work to be done in carrying out items in the long-range program and annual work plan.
- i. Consulting with and making recommendations to all agencies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and to the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission regarding conservation needs and programs to carry out conservation activities.
- j. Providing funds, services and facilities, as available, to carry out district activities.
- k. Keeping adequate records to supply needs for information by USDA agencies and the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission.
- l. Report to the public on resource conservation needs and the work of the district.
- m. Providing for the supervision of district employees.
- n. Managing funds, facilities and equipment belonging to the district.
- o. Cooperating with other districts and governmental bodies in matters of mutual concern.
- p. Actively encouraging all landowners and operators to become cooperators of the district.
- q. Providing information assistance to educational institutions and other organizations on subjects related to soil and water conservation.
- r. Developing a systematic method of follow-up work needed to carry out individual and group conservation plans.

District Powers

Conservation districts are given the following specific authorities by Act No. 197, as amended:

- a. To carry out preventive and control measures for better utilization of soil and water resources on public and private lands with the consent and cooperation of those in charge of such lands.
- b. To enter into agreements and furnish financial or other aid to any private or public agency or land user within the district for better utilization of soil and water resources, and for disposal of water as the directors deem necessary.
- c. To obtain by purchase, gift or otherwise, any real or personal property to accomplish goals of the district.
- d. To make available to land users any equipment and materials needed to carry out soil and water conservation programs.

- e. To construct, improve, operate and maintain works of improvement as needed.
- f. To develop comprehensive plans for soil and water management in the district, and bring this information as needed.
- g. To accept contributions in money, services or materials from any source for use in carrying out the district program, except that forest tree seedlings must be obtained from the Arkansas Forestry Commission's nursery when available.
- h. To sue and be sued in the name of the district; to have an official seal; to have perpetual succession unless terminated as provided in Act No. 197; to make and execute contracts; to borrow money, issue notes and bonds, and mortgage property; levy taxes based on specific benefits; and to make and amend regulations as needed.
- i. As a condition to extending benefits on private lands, the district may require contributions in money, services, or materials, except that no charge may be made for technical services provided by NRCS, or other agency providing technical assistance.
- j. To develop land use regulations within the district when needed to conserve soil and water resources, as provided in Act No. 197
- k. To cooperate with other districts in the exercise of any of these powers.
- l. To Discontinue a district after five years by petition to the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission, as provided in Act No. 197
- m. To organize an irrigation, drainage or watershed development district to install, operate and maintain works of improvement such as dams, levees, ditches and pumping stations, as provided in Act No. 329 of 1949.
- n. To form improvement project areas to assure local obligations in installing, operating and maintaining structural measures in watershed projects and Resource Conservation and Development measures, as provided in Act No. 197, as amended.

The Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts

Conservation districts are political subdivisions of the State of Arkansas. They are a creation of popular vote of resident landowners for the purpose of conserving our land and water resources as authorized by Act No. 197 of the Arkansas General Assembly of 1937; the Nation's first conservation district law. Conservation districts are local governments at work and their specific responsibility is management of our soil and water resources. The idea behind their formation is to keep decision making on soil and water conservation matters at the local level. Each district is governed by a board of five directors who serve without pay. Two directors are appointed by the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission and three are elected by resident landowners.

The AACD serves as an umbrella organization for Conservation Districts. For more information on the AACD and conservation districts, visit the AACD website at <http://www.aracd.org/default.htm>.

The Arkansas Association of Conservation District Employees

The Arkansas Association of Conservation District Employees (AACDE) was formed to facilitate the professional development of district employees through educational and training opportunities. The AACDE serves as a valuable networking and communications tool to help

conservation district employees meet the challenge set forth by the local district boards to expand the influence of conservation on the land and environment. AACDE is a part of the "Conservation Team" that is dedicated to strengthening Conservation District programs through local leadership with state leadership support. For more information the employee newsletter can be found on the AACD website at <http://www.aracd.org/default.htm>

Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission – A Brief History

An integral part of Arkansas' conservation district enabling legislation was the creation of the "State Soil Conservation Committee". The main purpose of this committee was to oversee the establishment and operation of Arkansas' conservation districts.

The committee's first major task was to assist in the formation of the state's soil and water conservation districts. Then, as districts became established, the need arose for the agency to provide training to district directors and to provide field personnel who could visit districts and explain district law and operating procedures. Financial support was also provided (in time) for the general operation of the district and for individual district projects.

Other committee duties included developing the state program for soil conservation, facilitating a district discontinuance process, overseeing district director elections and appointments and removing district directors for neglect of duty or malfeasance.

The "State Soil Conservation Committee" operated from within various state agencies until 1963 when Act No. 14 of the Arkansas General Assembly created the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission (ASWCC). The Act transferred all duties, powers and functions of the Arkansas Geological & Conservation Commission in relation to soil conservation and flood control to ASWCC. The Act also abolished the Arkansas Water Conservation Commission and the Water Compact Commission and transferred their duties, powers and functions to the newly created ASWCC.

It can be said that the state agency for soil conservation is but one of the threads that make up the cloth of the soil conservation movement. An intergovernmental program that is sometimes confusing and difficult to separate into its various relationships supports this movement. However, without the contribution of the state partner, the soil and water conservation movement would not be as successful as it has been.

The Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission is a statutory body consisting of nine members appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the State Senate. Two members represent each of the State's four congressional districts with one commissioner and an at-large member. The Executive Director of the Commission is appointed by and serves, at the pleasure of the Governor, ex-officio as Secretary of the Commission, but is not a voting member.

The Commission establishes policy and makes funding and regulatory decisions relative to soil conservation, water rights, dam safety and water resource planning and development within the State.

Assistance to the Conservation Districts

The Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission provides direct financial and administrative assistance to the State's seventy-five conservation districts. This assistance directly affects the conservation districts' ability to function productively.

Natural Resources Conservation Service - A Brief History

Mission

To provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, improve and sustain our natural resources and environment.

Our History

The Natural Resources Conservation Service began in the Dust Bowl days of the 1930's as the Soil Erosion Service when Congress passed the Soil Conservation Act, Public Law 46, August 25, 1933. The law established the Soil Erosion Service as an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The agency was renamed the Soil Conservation Service in 1935. By 1936, the Soil Conservation Service supervised 454 Civilian Conservation Corps camps.

In 1903 Hugh Hammond Bennett joined the Bureau of Soils. A native of North Carolina, Dr. Bennett began his career with the USDA Bureau of Soils in 1903 as a soil scientist. Part evangelist, part scientist, Bennett dedicated his life to one objective: the proper use and treatment of the land. He served as the agency's first Chief from 1935 to 1951.

Bennett set up the first erosion experiment station at Guthrie, Oklahoma, late in 1929 to measure the effects of runoff. Soon, nine other stations were established, one in Batesville, Arkansas.

Arkansas was the first state to enact a model conservation district law, March 3, 1937. The first soil and water conservation district, however, began in Anson County, North Carolina, the birthplace of Hugh Hammond Bennett. Today, more than 260 NRCS employees serve all 75 Arkansas conservation districts from 62-field service centers across the state.

NRCS field service centers are led by district conservationists, with NRCS and partner staff members of range conservationists, resource and soil conservationists, engineers, soil scientists, soil conservation and engineering technicians, water management specialists and administrative support specialists. These employees work hand-in-hand with land managers to preserve and maintain natural resources on private lands in The Natural State.

Our Services

There are 12 congressionally funded programs managed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service; three are not a part of operations within Arkansas.

Conservation Operations, or CO-1, provides direct technical assistance to land users within the 75 conservation districts in Arkansas. Conservation Operations is the “bread and butter” of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954, Public Law 83-566 provides broad authority to USDA and other federal and state agencies to cooperate in watershed planning, surveying and investigations. NRCS uses the Small Watershed Program to reduce flooding problems, develop erosion control and runoff management guidelines, help landowners control erosion in high priority watersheds, and improve water quality.

The National Cooperative Soil Survey Program (*NCSS*) is an effort to inventory the nation’s soils resources. Soil surveys provide information on the distribution of soils, their chemical and physical properties and information on soil behavior under various uses. Soil surveys have been published for 64 of the 75 counties in Arkansas.

The Booneville Plant Materials Center (*PMC*) serves parts of Arkansas, Missouri and Oklahoma and is part of a national network that provides vegetative solutions to conservation problems. The Booneville *PMC* works with other agencies and groups to locate plants to meet specific needs and to develop and demonstrate vegetative establishment methods.

The Resource Conservation and Development Program (*RC&D*) is an unique USDA program to help rural areas promote wise use of natural resources, make community improvements or stimulate economic development. NRCS administers the program providing a coordinator and administrative support to each of the seven Arkansas *RC&D* Councils. A local council of citizens sets the priorities for each council’s activities.

Grazing lands technical assistance in Arkansas is very important. NRCS has four full-time Grazing Lands Specialist on staff and another 54 employees that spend more than fifty percent of their time working on grassland projects. Partnerships are very important to promote grassland activities. The Arkansas Grazing Lands Advisory Committee (*AGLAC*) was formed to provide leadership and direction to the Grazing Lands programs in Arkansas. *AGLAC*’s membership is made-up of representatives of the major agricultural support groups in Arkansas.

The Emergency Watershed Protection program helps restore watersheds ravaged by natural disasters.

NRCS provides technical assistance for all 1996 Farm Bill programs. In addition, many state agencies or non-profit organizations often look to NRCS technical assistance for support of their conservation cost-share programs. *EQIP*, *CRP*, and *WRP* are funded through the Commodity Credit Corporation.

Currently these programs, along with traditional conservation technical assistance, are administered through three Natural Resources Conservation Service areas in Arkansas. The top

Natural Resources Conservation Service official in Arkansas is the State Conservationist. An Assistant State Conservationist heads each Natural Resources Conservation Service area for Field Services. The ASTC(FS) answers directly to the state conservationist and is responsible for administering Natural Resources Conservation Service programs throughout his/her area.

Cooperative Extension Service – A Brief History

The Cooperative Extension Service (CES) came into existence when on May 8, 1914, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Lever Act and thus creating the “Bring the University to the People” services.

Today, the CES is a unique achievement of American education. It is an agency for change and for problem solving, a catalyst of individual and group action with a history of eighty-seven years of public service. Extension brings the rewards of higher education into the lives of all segments of our extraordinarily diverse population.

The CES services, provided through land-grant universities established under the provisions of the first and second Morrill Land-Grant College Acts in 1862 and 1890 provided an opportunity for the children of the working man to secure a higher education. Then came a new concept, which cooperative extension embodied, that the knowledge within the land-grant institutions should be made available to those not attending those institutions and should continue to be available throughout one’s life. Thus was the university brought to the people.

Extension was designed as a partnership of the land-grant universities and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. However, the provisions of the law were broad enough that the states were able to bring their counties into the system as a third legal partner. Today, Extension is truly a cooperative under-taking, with the county, state and federal partners interdependent, yet with each having considerable independence in funding, staff, and programming. Each partner performs distinct function essential to the operation of the total system.

CEC Mission

The mission of the Extension Service is to assure an effective nationwide Cooperative Extension System that is responsive to priority needs and the Federal interest and policies with quality information, education, and problem- solving programs.

Cooperation with People

Cooperation is the hallmark of extension’s relations with people. Its educational programs are available to anyone who wishes to participate, but no one is forced to take part. Within this voluntary cooperative framework, extension, drawing upon research-based knowledge, teaches people to identify problems, to analyze information, to decide among alternative courses of action for dealing with those problems, and to locate the resources to accomplish a preferred action. The educational programs it undertakes most often arise as a response to needs identified on the local level. In addition to basic educational programs, Extension staff members and volunteers meet local needs by organizing such activities as weed and insect identification

clinics, providing materials on the conservation of natural resources, distributing information about diet and health, and encouraging participation, especially by youth, in the educational aspects of county and state fairs.

Extension Financing

The CES system is financed primarily by federal, state, and local taxes, although substantial sums are contributed to Extension – mainly to 4-H – by private individuals and institutions. Volunteer services add greatly to the effectiveness of Extension's programs. In addition, the results of research carried on by the land-grant institutions and USDA provide the foundation for Extension's educational work.

Extension poised for the future

Through two world wars, the most severe depression the nation has ever seen, drought that sent dust storms rolling across the entire nation, and a farm depression that seriously affected a third of the nation's farms and many rural communities, Extension has been a force for sustained, rational change that improves the quality of American life. It has taken the University to the people. Today, people are concerned about the wise use of natural resources. Forged for change by past necessities, CES in partnership with ACP is poised to meet the challenges of conservation issues of today.

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff - A Brief History

The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff is an 1890 Land Grant University. It is the second oldest state supported institution of higher learning in Arkansas. It was created by an act of the Arkansas Legislature in 1873 as Branch Normal College of the Arkansas Industrial University (now the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville). The act stipulated that the institution was being established for the convenience and well-being of the "Poorer Classes". The Land Grant Act of 1890 charged the college to teach Agriculture, Mechanic Arts, and Military Tactics without excluding other scientific and classical studies.

The college opened on September 27, 1875, in a rented frame building on the corner of Sevier and Lindsey Streets in the city of Pine Bluff with Professor Joseph Carter Corbin in charge of three students from Jefferson County and four students from Drew county. In 1882, the college moved to a two-story brick structure in the suburbs of Pine Bluff. Between 1881 and 1894, Branch Normal College conferred ten Bachelor of Arts degrees. From 1894 to 1929 the institution operated as a Junior College. In 1927, the governor appointed an independent board of trustees for the college and the state legislature appropriated \$275,000 for the erection of a new physical plant just outside the city limits. In 1929, the college expanded into a standard four-year degree granting institution and was known as Arkansas Agricultural Mechanical and Normal College (A. M. & N College). In 1933, A. M. & N. College was certified as a standard four-year college. On July 1, 1972, a merger rejoined the two oldest public higher educational institutions in the state: Arkansas Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal College was merged

with the University of Arkansas System and renamed the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB).

The University has been competently headed by the following Chief Administrators: Principals – Joseph Carter Corbin, 1875-1902; Isaac Fisher, 1902-1911; F. T. Venegar, 1911-1917; Superintendents – W. S. Harris, 1911-1917; Jefferson Ish, 1915-1921; Charles Smith, 1921-1922; Robert E. Malone, 1922-1928; Presidents – John B. Watson, 1928-1942; Lawrence A. Davis, Sr., 1943-1972; Earl Evans (Acting), 1959-1960; and Chancellors – Lawrence A. Davis Sr., 1972-1973; Johnny B. Johnson (Interim), 1973-1974 ; Herman B. Smith Jr., 1974-1981; Lloyd V. Hackley, 1981-1985; Johnny B. Johnson (Interim), 1985-1986; Charles A. Walker, 1986-1991; Carolyn F. Blakely (Interim), 6/91-11/91; Lawrence A. Davis Jr., 1991-Present.

The University operates three farm sites. The 220 acre college farm which was obtained in 1929 is located about 0.5 miles from the main campus, the 871 acre Lonoke farm site which was deeded in 1991 is located about 54 miles from campus and the 48 acre Marianna site which was obtained on a long term lease is located approximately 88 miles from campus. These sites allow the university to conduct research and demonstrations on different soil types and under slightly different environmental conditions. They also allow the university to demonstrate Best Management Practices (BMP's) in different parts of the state.

The university became a part of the Conservation partnership in 1997. This was another step in the university's efforts to serve the small and limited resources farmers and families in the state. Conservation and good stewardship are just as important to these groups as they are to any other group in the state. UAPB's presence will provide an opportunity for the voice of these groups to be heard and it will ensure that these groups have an opportunity to learn about conservation issues that impact their way of life. UAPB feels a special sensitivity and responsibility for working with these groups because they are a part of our mission and continue to be our clientele.

The aforementioned legislative Acts of 1873 and 1890 provide the basis for the historic mission of the University. However, the evolving mission allows UAPB to maintain a special sensitivity to the needs, aspirations, problems, and opportunities of its historic constituents while serving a more heterogeneous clientele. The University continues to operate with the tri-partite focus of student preparation through academic excellence, conducting relevant research for clientele, and providing public service to its constituents.

Resource Conservation and Development – A Brief History

The Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D) was first authorized by the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962, Public Law 87-703.

Authority for Administration of the RC&D is delegated to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The intent of USDA is to develop a cost effective Federal Government delivery system that builds local working relationships of the conservation and development of

natural resources and enhances the social, economic, and environmental conditions in the United States.

RC&D Federal Program Mission

The mission: To make available the total resources of USDA and other public-private partnerships to build relationships, create financial leverage, and increase the capability of communities to meet their regionally identified resource conservation and development needs.

RC&D Councils

Resource Conservation and Development Councils are recognized as nonprofit corporation within a state. Councils seek and utilize appropriate legal documents in building formal partnerships, and as needed, utilize local, State, and federal statutory means to accomplish the vision and mission of the RC&D Program.

Arkansas is completely covered by Seven RC&D designated areas. These Areas; Arkansas River Valley, Central Arkansas, East Arkansas, Northwest Arkansas, Ozark Foothills, Southeast Arkansas and Southwest Arkansas make up the Arkansas Association of RC&D Councils. Each Council maintains a 501-© 3 status to assist in obtaining funds necessary for Area project implementation.

RC&D Coordinator

The RC&D Coordinator is the designated USDA representative under the administration of NRCS and serves as the liaison between USDA and the RC&D Council. The Coordinator maintains knowledge of and serves as the primary point of access to USDA programs that support the RC&D council Plan.

RC&D Partnerships

A major component of the RC&D program is its ability to develop partnerships necessary to address the complexity and diversity of resources needs of Arkansas. The RC&D program maintains a Memorandum of Understanding with many USDA Agencies:

- Agricultural Research Service (ARS)
- Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES)
- Economic Research Service (ERS)
- Forest Service (FS)
- Farm Service Agency (FSA)
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Rural Development (RD) Agencies
- Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)

Other USDA agencies may also participate in the RC&D Program.

RC&D and ACP

In 2001, the Arkansas Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils became the seventh member of the Arkansas Conservation Partnership (AARCDC).

The AARCDC and the Arkansas Conservation Partnership seeks to utilize strength of common interest and diversity of resources to address resource concerns for the betterment of the social economic and environmental conditions in Arkansas.