



Arkansas Outdoors for January 09, 2008

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Conservation easements protect wildlife habitat and helping landowners

LITTLE ROCK- Arkansas originally had an estimated 9.8 million acres of wetlands, primarily in what is known as the Delta. Today, less than 1 million acres of forested wetlands remain in the Arkansas Delta.

The region once teemed with waterfowl, deer, bear, turkey and many other species of wildlife associated with wetland habitat. Fortunately, remnants of these habitats still exist and some of these species are still abundant. Cypress trees with their red-tinged fall leaves, buttonbush, or buck-brush swamps, and towering oaks still impress us and are often found in remote and inhospitable places, further enhancing their allure.

These areas are the last of the wild haunts where we escape to hunt ducks, deer and turkey or simply go to marvel in their beauty and temporarily slough life's stresses, according to Dr. Brian Davis, regional biologist with Ducks Unlimited in Little Rock. "Most wetlands remain on private lands. Without good private land stewards, wildlife would be further pressed into ever shrinking habitats. Private landowners are critical to safeguarding many species of fish, wildlife and plants," Davis said.



Recognizing the importance of private lands, the Internal Revenue Service permits landowners to donate conservation easements to organizations like Ducks Unlimited, Davis noted. "This can create a winning opportunity for landowners, wildlife and their habitats, the easement holder, Ducks Unlimited and society in general," he explained.

A conservation easement is a legal agreement that allows a property owner to protect natural assets like wetlands and bottomland hardwood forests. The easement becomes part of the land deed and restricts the type and amount of development that occurs on the property. Landowners can manage the timber under a timber management plan developed by a forester and they can continue to pursue recreational activities like hunting, fishing, hiking and bird watching.

Davis emphasized that conservation easements protect valuable habitats. "They allow landowners to continue coveted outdoor heritages like hunting and fishing, and the grantee, such as Ducks Unlimited, can develop a valuable partnership with landowners. Properties considered for easements may include wetlands, bottomland hardwoods or other important natural features on hunting clubs, farms or ranches," Davis noted.



Conservation easements can be flexible to the landowner as well. "Landowners can actually include their own restrictions for such

things as development rights on their property while still retaining title to the property and important rights such as hunting, fishing, and other recreation,” he said.

Why should a landowner donate a conservation easement? Property owners can protect the wildlife habitat and natural values of their property and incur beneficial tax incentives. Landowners should discuss potential tax incentives with their tax advisor or attorney. Landowners should be prepared to obtain a title search for their land, a baseline documentation report (the biological inventory required by IRS rules), and an appraisal. Also, if lands are acceptable to Ducks Unlimited for conservation easements, landowners are asked to contribute 2 percent of the value of the easement into an endowment fund. The fund provides Ducks Unlimited with the means to monitor conservation easement properties annually, a requirement from the IRS.

According to David Long, agricultural liaison for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, many landowners, including row crop farmers who enroll croplands into wetland practices under USDA’s Conservation Reserve Program, can also reap the benefits of donating a conservation easement. “Not only do they receive up to 15 years in CRP soil rental payments and other incentives, depending on the practice, they can qualify for Ducks Unlimited conservation easements and provide future protection for these lands. At the same time landowners may qualify for federal tax breaks. This can be a much needed financial benefit for farmers needing to take flood or drought prone, hard to farm, marginally productive croplands out of production,” Long said.

Long encourages any landowner who thinks they may have qualifying lands to call Ducks Unlimited and check this tax saving opportunity out first hand. “In addition, there may be other programs potentially available to be piggy-backed with the CRP and conservation easement to realize additional financial benefits. Several private, non-profit groups are offering carbon credit payments for landowners planting hardwood trees. One group is offering \$300 per acre on certain CRP contracts that are planted to hardwood and cottonwood trees on croplands with specific soil types. When the carbon credits are sold, landowners may receive a percentage of this income as well,” he explained.



The AGFC has private lands biologist assigned to the Delta region that know these programs and can help landowners restore habitat, Long said. “Landowners can realize the greatest economic returns by being aware of all of the program options available to them to restore wetland habitat in the Delta,” he said.

Other organizations may also offer assistance in establishing conservation easements allowing them to qualify for tax reducing benefits as well. In recent years, the AGFC has entered into some major conservation easements with these groups. One recent example is the 16,000-acre Moro Big Pine WMA in south Arkansas. The AGFC entered into a conservation easement with Potlatch and The Nature Conservancy to secure that land.

There has also been the Seven Devils WMA purchase with Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission as well as a conservation easement with the Arkansas Wildlife Federation for land in Pulaski County. Last year the AGFC and The Nature Conservancy obtained

a grant to develop option agreements to purchase conservation easements related to the ivory-billed woodpecker.

For more information about Ducks Unlimited’s conservation easement program, contact Dr. Brian Davis (501) 955-9264 or Jimmy Emfinger, director of land protection in DU’s Southern Regional Office (601) 206-5431, or DU’s land attorney David Marrone (901) 758-3825. Long can be reached toll-free at (877) 972-5438.

Build a bird box with personality or uniqueness

LITTLE ROCK – January is a traditional time for constructing bird nesting boxes in home workshops all over Arkansas. It’s a great opportunity for parent-child or grandparent-grandchild doing something together.

These bird boxes can follow plans readily available from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, and the construction is easy for people who are not complete strangers with a saw, a hammer and a screwdriver.

But who says these bird structures have to be exactly according to somebody’s plan? There is not an inspection board you have to satisfy with the completed project. Make the bird house a little different, if you choose. Give it a twist. A bit of whimsy isn’t against the rules, and the birds really won’t care one way or another.

Bird “experts” say drab colors that blend into the surroundings are best for bird houses, but bluebirds themselves aren’t exactly dressed in camouflage, are they?



A youngsters involved in bird house construction may put some special touches on the basic box. A marking pen can draw in windows, flowers, shrubs, whatever.

You can find all sorts of bird houses resembling a school, a church, a locomotive, perhaps the Taj Mahal in retail stores, and you'll pay for the unusual designs too. Create your own. Maybe you will consider a miniature of the house you live in – simplified, of course. Let the younger help with the planning before starting to cut wood.

One suggestion, and it won't be to everyone's liking, is to make the bird house look like an old-fashioned outhouse, the traditional quarter-moon on the door.

Once you have a design sketched or at least in mind, get some wood. Any type of cedar is good for long life outdoors. So are cypress and redwood. Cypress is harder to find than cedar, and redwood is more costly. A phone call to a fence company may locate boards for the bird house project.

Do not use treated fence pickets under any circumstances for bird boxes. The preservative can be toxic to birds.

A key element is the size of the entrance hole for the bird house. Generally, one and a half inches is best. This will accommodate bluebirds and many of other common cavity nesting birds in Arkansas, but it will be too small for undesirable starlings to use.

If you want a box for wrens and chickadees, make the entrance hole a little smaller – one and a fourth inches in diameter. For wrens and chickadees, the box can be smaller than the bluebird size, too.

A perch below the entrance hole is not needed and may encourage unwanted English sparrows. Birds fly directly into the hole.

The bluebird box needs to be about five inches square inside. Since a 1 by 6 board actually measures 3/4 inches by 5 1/2 inches, this works fine. Inexpensive 1 by 6 fence pickets that are six feet long are ideal. The box needs to be about nine inches deep inside. The top can be flat or slanted, and the back should be longer on the top and bottom for nailing, screwing or tying to a post or tree.

Cut four pieces from the 1 by 6 by 6 feet board, with one longer for the back. Slant two of the ones for the sides if you desire. Measure and cut pieces for the bottom and the roof, allowing a little front overhang on the roof. For drainage on the bottom piece, just nick a little off each corner or bore two or three holes a quarter-inch in diameter.

You can get plans from any Arkansas Game and Fish Commission office or by requesting them by phone at 501-223-6351. The Eastern bluebird house plans also can be downloaded from our website at <http://www.agfc.com/data-facts-maps/publications/free-guides.aspx#birds>.

Winter fishing reports available online from AGFC

LITTLE ROCK - Many astute anglers know that winter produces some of the best fishing - and lunker-size catches of several species - in Arkansas. Lakes and streams aren't crowded, either.

Arkansas fishermen can find out about current conditions on lakes and rivers across the state on the Internet, and the information is free.

The fishing report of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission provides capsule reports from knowledgeable sources in all corners of Arkansas and is updated each Wednesday. The report also features a fishing tip of the week to help anglers land that trophy fish. Fishermen also can contact each of the report's fishing informants directly by accessing their websites or by phone. Just go to www.agfc.com and click on 'Fishing.'

To sign up for an electronic copy sent each week to your email address, just send an email to arkansasoutdoors@agfc.com and place "Fishing Report" in the subject line.



Outdoor education: The total learning experience

by Evan McGrew

As we enter the twenty-first century, technology now available allows educators to implement a curriculum far more challenging and exciting to students than ever before. As a science teacher working in the public school system, I realize the benefits new technology offers today's students, and I must work very hard to keep up with the latest and greatest learning tools, instruments, and gadgets which take student learning to a whole new level.

However, only so much can be accomplished within the classroom no matter what new types of technology exist. I am a huge supporter of outdoor education, and believe there are many important lessons to be learned beyond the confines of the normal classroom. These lessons are not limited to science related topics; they can be integrated into any discipline's curriculum frameworks, supplying all types and levels of learners with educational experiences which will benefit them throughout their lives. Arkansas has much to offer outside the classroom, and there is no reason education should not be extended to our natural surroundings.



Growing up just outside the small town of Mountain Pine which is about ten miles north of Hot Springs, I was fortunate to have a wide range of outdoor opportunities at my doorstep. Folded mountains, quartz crystals and a beautiful lake are just some of the features which highlight this area. At the age of 16, I took my first job as a dockhand at the Lake Ouachita State Park Marina. This is where my knowledge of the local wildlife, geology, and history gave me the chance to teach my first outdoor lessons to thousands of summer visitors from April to September for the next seven years. There is no doubt that seeing nature affect people's lives led me to promote these types of experiences in education today.



I am currently teaching science in the Magnet Cove School District located five miles west of Malvern. This is another area which is unique for the natural wonders found in Arkansas. Magnet Cove is home to over 50 distinct minerals which are a result of millions of years of sediment deposition accompanied by igneous intrusions of magma dating back to the Mid-Cretaceous Period. The rich deposits of mineral ore allowed the small town to prosper, and tax collections allowed Magnet Cove to construct a state of the art high school in the early 1970's complete with a fully functional planetarium and outdoor learning area with its own amphitheater and movie screen. Unfortunately, educational programs such as these are often the first to go when schools begin to lose revenue from stakeholder tax collections as well as valuable natural resource deposits. In the early 1980's the area was closed.

When I first heard about the former outdoor learning area, I could not wait to see it. I was taken by the current biology teacher to a patch of woods adjacent to the high school, and there I noticed what looked to be an entrance sign and trail leading into a "jungle." We slowly picked our way through years of neglected overgrown forest until we reached the remains of a giant movie screen and wooden benches.

To say the least, I was not impressed, but saw the dilapidated condition of the outdoor learning area as a wonderful opportunity to start over and design a center which would utilize all new technology, resources and educational activities available today. And so began the visioning process to restore outdoor education into the Magnet Cove School District curriculum. With the support of superintendent Gail McClure, and high school principal Brad Sullivan, we began our restoration project. The project began in mid-fall of 2005, and by the spring of 2006 we were providing students of Magnet Cove an education which had been missed for almost 30 years. Personally, I have taken much pride in the restoration project, but seeing how much enthusiasm is generated from all types of students is the motivation to make it a perfect experience.



Allowing Mother Nature to teach lessons which can not be taught within the walls of a regular education classroom is the key to such an area. No matter how advanced technology may be today, some of the best learning tools available have never changed. A student needs to experience nature with each of their senses, not just sight and sound, and the only way to stimulate the brain in such a way is by allowing students to become a living piece of the outdoor world.

There are many grants, learning station resource guides,

and lesson plans available for outdoor education through the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Arkansas Forestry Association, and other organizations to help assist any school if teachers are willing to venture out of the building and into the great outdoors.

Evan McGrew is a graduate student in the educational leadership program at Henderson State University.

Contact Information:

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2 Natural Resources Drive , Little Rock, AR 72205
Little Rock : 501-223-6300 or Toll Free: 1-800-364-4263
Email: info@agfc.com web: www.agfc.com

Arkansas Forestry Association
410 Cross St., Suite C, Little Rock, AR 72201
Phone: (501) 374-2441 Fax: (501) 374-6413
E-mail: info@arkforests.org web: www.arkforsts.org

Boating education class schedule

Click here for boating education information: <http://www.agfc.com/education-class/boating-education.aspx>

Hunter education class schedule

Click here for hunter education information: <http://www.agfc.com/education-class/hunter-education.aspx>

What's open for hunting

Current and approaching seasons in Arkansas:

Squirrel:

Statewide – Sept. 8-Feb. 29.

Rabbit:

Statewide – Sept. 1-Feb. 29.

Spotted Skunk, Weasel Hunting:

Closed.

Duck:

Jan. 12-Jan. 27

White-Fronted Goose:

Dec. 26-Feb. 3

Snow, Blue, and Ross' Goose:

Dec. 26-Feb. 3

Snow Goose Conservation Order:

Feb. 4-April 27

Statewide Canada Goose:

Dec. 26 – Feb. 3

Statewide Falconry:

Jan. 7-11 and Jan. 28-Feb. 17

Common Snipe:

Nov. 1, 2007 to Feb. 15, 2008

Deer Archery:

Oct. 1-Feb. 29 statewide.

Turkey Archery:

Oct. 1-Feb. 29 statewide.

Quail:

Nov. 1-Feb. 10 statewide.

Crow:

Sept. 1-Feb. 17 Thursdays thru Mondays only statewide.

Furbearers:

Furbearer trapping Nov. 17-Feb. 17 excluding coyote, beaver, muskrat and nutria.

Coyote trapping Aug. 1-March 31.

Beaver, muskrat, nutria trapping Nov. 17-March 31.

Gray fox, mink, opossum, red fox, striped skunk hunting Sept. 1-Feb. 29.

Raccoon day or night hunting Sept. 1-March 31.

Raccoon night hunting July 1-Aug. 31.

Bobcat and coyote hunting Oct. 1-Feb. 29.

River otter hunting Nov. 17-Feb. 29.

Muskrat, nutria and beaver hunting Sept. 1-March 31.

Badger, spotted skunk and weasel hunting is closed.

Coming up in the outdoors

Jan. 12 - Talkin' Outdoors at the Corner Café with Steve "Wildman" Wilson, 9 a.m. on KARK Channel 4. Topic of the show will be "Youth Duck Hunting."

Jan. 18 - Grand Prairie Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Hazen National Guard Armory. For more information contact: Ken Whiting at (501) 278-9533 or by email at vcsanner@centurytel.net.

Jan. 18-20 - Arkansas Marine Expo, Statehouse Convention Center, Little Rock. For more information, contact: Denton and Griffey Attractions, Ken Griffey, (501) 225-6177 or (501) 765-1423.

Jan. 19 - Saline County Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Bauxite Community Center. For more information contact: Jason Majors at (501) 316-1771 or by email at jmajors@stephens.com.

Jan. 19 - Talkin' Outdoors at the Corner Café with Steve "Wildman" Wilson, 9 a.m. on KARK Channel 4. Topic of the show will be "All about Raptors."

Jan. 24 – AGFC Commission monthly meeting, 2 Natural Resources Dr., Little Rock, 9 a.m.

Jan. 25 - Bottomland Boss Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Brinkley Convention Center. For more information contact: Robbie Horton at (870) 946-5527 or by email at bubbagbi@hotmail.com.

Jan. 26 - Talkin' Outdoors at the Corner Café with Steve "Wildman" Wilson, 9 a.m. on KARK Channel 4. Topic of the show will be "Canada Goose Hunting."

Jan. 26 - Lower Arkansas Longbeards Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Charles O Ross Center in Camden. For more information contact: Danny Young at (870) 231-5927.

Jan. 26 - Springlake Strutters Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, East End Elementary School in Little Rock. For more information contact: Michael Garner at (501) 888-7513.

Feb. 1-2 - Quail and Songbird Habitat Workshop, Petit Jean Mountain. Registration for the workshop is available online at www.uawri.org or by calling (866) 972-7778. Overnight accommodations are available. The registration deadline is Jan. 28. For more information about the workshop, contact Sandy Davies by phone at (501) 215-7990 or by e-mail at sdavies@uawri.org.

Feb. 2 - Crowley's Ridge Strutters Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Forrest City Civic Center. For more information contact: Randy Baldwin at (870) 270-0050 or by email at randyb@arkansas.net.

Feb. 2 - Saline River Longbeards Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Sheridan Community Center. For more information contact: David Hooks at (870) 942-4642.

Feb. 2 - Sebastian Co. Boss Gobblers Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Fort Smith Knights of Columbus Hall. For more information contact: Bob Gleason at (479) 996-6800 or by email at

Feb. 2 - Chicot County Young Hens and Old Gobblers Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Lake Village Country Club. For more information contact: Bobby Fisher at (870) 737-3088 or by email at fisherchannelcat@aol.com.

Feb. 2 - Talkin' Outdoors at the Corner Café with Steve "Wildman" Wilson, 9 a.m. on KARK Channel 4. Topic of the show will be "Winter Trout Fishing."

Feb. 8 - Laigle Creek Longbeards Grand Prairie Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Hermitage Community Center. For more information contact: Grady Story at (870) 628-3142 or by email at jastory@seark.net.

Feb. 8-10 - Arkansas RV Show, Statehouse Convention Center, Little Rock. For more information, contact: Denton and Griffey Attractions, Ken Griffey, (501) 225-6177 or (501) 765-1423.

Feb. 9 - Cane Creek Longbeards Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Star City Civic Center. For more information contact: Bruce Morgan at (870) 628-1616.

Feb. 9 - Talkin' Outdoors at the Corner Café with Steve "Wildman" Wilson, 9 a.m. on KARK Channel 4. Topic of the show will be "Outdoor Photography."

Feb. 9 - Miller County Longbeards Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Texarkana V. F. W. For more information contact: Jesse Whitehead at (870) 773-6720.

Feb. 2 – Perry County Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Perryville National Guard Armory. For more information contact: Tim Cates at (501) 727-5767 or by email at cates_@hotmail.com.

Feb. 15-17 - Arkansas State Boat Show, Little Rock's Statehouse Convention Center. The show times are 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday; and 12 noon to 6 p.m. on Sunday.

Feb. 16 - Talkin' Outdoors at the Corner Café with Steve "Wildman" Wilson, 9 a.m. on KARK Channel 4. Topic of the show will be "Snow Goose Hunting."

Feb. 21 - AGFC Commission monthly meeting, Dumas.

Feb. 23 - Talkin' Outdoors at the Corner Café with Steve "Wildman" Wilson, 9 a.m. on KARK Channel 4. Topic of the show will be "Late Season Squirrel Hunting."

Feb. 29-Mar. 2 - Hot Springs Boat Tackle and RV Show, Hot Springs Convention Center, Hot Springs. For more information, contact: Denton and Griffey Attractions, Ken Griffey, (501) 225-6177 or (501) 765-1423.

Mar. 20 - AGFC Commission monthly meeting, 2 Natural Resources Dr., Little Rock, 9 a.m.

April 17 – AGFC Commission monthly meeting, 2 Natural Resources Dr., Little Rock, 9 a.m.

May 22 – AGFC Commission monthly meeting, 2 Natural Resources Dr., Little Rock, 9 a.m.

June 19 – AGFC Commission monthly meeting.

For the latest in Arkansas Game and Fish Commission information go to www.agfc.com or call the Wildlife Information Hotline, (800)440-1477.