



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

ALABAMA SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION



OVERVIEW

The Alabama Soil and Water Conservation 2024 Annual Report serves to highlight the accomplishments of the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee (ALSWCC), the Alabama Agricultural & Conservation Development Commission (AACDC), the state's 67 soil and water conservation districts (SWCD), the Alabama Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) and the Alabama Conservation District Employees Association (ACDEA). This report highlights conservation implementation, economic impact, education, outreach, partnerships and the diversity of conservation efforts statewide.

Each local SWCD within Alabama is charged with promoting and implementing conservation practices for the wise use of soil and water on private lands within their respective counties. Governed by a board of five supervisors, which are appointed public officials, each local district is the front-line advocate for locally-led conservation within every Alabama county.

ALSWCC supports districts, promotes conservation partnerships, provides conservation education and technical assistance, and champions for new and emerging conservation practices. AACDC provides funding for needed agricultural water, erosion control, forestry improvement and wildlife management programs. AACD serves as the voice for districts on natural resource issues, advocates for legislative priorities, and supports districts through information, training, and administrative services. ACDEA unites administrative coordinators from all 67 Alabama counties, by providing quarterly meetings, annual training and scholarships to advance local conservation efforts.

CONTACTS

William Puckett, Ph.D.

Executive Director, ALSWCC
william.puckett@swcc.alabama.gov

Ashley Henderson, P.E.

Assistant Executive Director, ALSWCC
ashley.henderson@swcc.alabama.gov

Rhonda Bryars

State Administrative Coordinator, AACDC
rhonda.bryars@swcc.alabama.gov

Vickie Watkins

Executive Director, AACD
vickie@alconservationdistricts.org

Debbie Clements

President, ACDEA
bibb@alconservationdistricts.org



ALABAMA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

For 80 years, the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee has been committed to conserving Alabama's natural resources by connecting those who use and work the land to the resources they need. We work to promote healthy soils, fishable and drinkable water, sustainable forests, and healthy wildlife to benefit all Alabamians. We do this by:

- Supporting Alabama's 67 Soil and Water Conservation Districts;
- Developing & Implementing State & Federal Programs to Conserve Alabama's Natural Resources;
- Securing the Cooperation and Financial Assistance of State and Federal Partners; and
- Educating Alabamians About the Importance of Conservation.



FY2024 FUNDING



Federal Dollars
\$3.1M



AL General Fund
\$3.6M



AL Education Trust Fund
\$2.5M

COMMITTEE

Charles A. Holmes – Chairman
Perry County

Vaughn Poe – Vice Chairman
Hale County

Rickey L. Cornutt
Marshall County

Dr. Carol Knight
Randolph County

Johnny Lee
Henry County

Jake Harper
Wilcox County

Dr. J. Mike Phillips
Director, Alabama Cooperative Extension System

Collin W. Adcock
Agriscience Education Specialist

Dr. Paul Patterson
Dean, Auburn University College
of Agriculture
Director, Alabama Agricultural
Experiment Station

Dr. William Puckett
Executive Director, SWCC



ALABAMA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

FEDERAL PROGRAMS

PROGRAM STATUS TO DATE



ALABAMA IRRIGATION INITIATIVE

\$
Federal Funding
\$6.6M


Acres
5,528


Producers
26



FERAL SWINE MANAGEMENT

\$
Federal Funding
\$5M


Traps
381


Producers
293



BLACK BELT PRAIRIE RESTORATION

\$
Federal Funding
\$2.2M


Counties
19


Producers
31



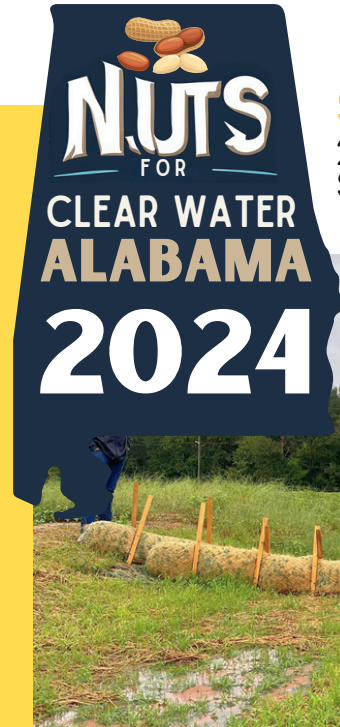
ALABAMA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

PROGRAMS



ALABAMA EROSION & SEDIMENT CONTROL PROGRAM

ALSWCC funds and leads the Alabama Erosion & Sediment Control Partnership (ALESCP), guiding effective erosion and sediment control practices during construction to protect Alabama's water resources. Through maintaining key resources, like the Alabama Erosion and Sediment Control Handbook, and providing statewide technical training, ALESCP supports professionals in implementing best practices. Additionally, ALSWCC hosts the annual Clear Water Alabama Seminar and Field Day, offering municipal, construction, and stormwater professionals the latest insights on erosion prevention and sediment control techniques.



SAVE THE DATE!
2025 Clear Water Alabama
September 24 & 25, 2025



Want More Info?

Contact Perry Oakes at
Perry.Oakes@al.nacdnet.net



ALABAMA BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL SOIL CLASSIFIERS

To practice soil science in Alabama, professionals must be certified by the State Board of Registration for Professional Soil Classifiers. ALSWCC oversees the application process, ensuring that applicants meet the state's standards for soil science expertise. Board members serve 5-year terms.





Alabama Agricultural & Conservation Development Commission

RESOURCE CONCERNS

The Alabama Conservation Incentive Program (CIP) fosters voluntary conservation by providing rebates to offset the cost of installing practices that protect the soil, water, forests, and wildlife of the state. These practices, administered by the state's 67 soil and water conservation districts, provide benefits to all of Alabama's citizens through active and productive grazing and crop land; clean and abundant water resources; dynamic, vital forests; and healthy, plentiful wildlife. Thirty-five conservation practices are available through the program.



WATER QUALITY



FORESTRY



EROSION CONTROL



WILDLIFE

COMMISSION

Dr. Carol Knight
Governor's Representative

Rick Pate
Alabama Agriculture & Industries

Jimmy Parnell
Alabama Farmer's Federation

Dr. Terry Slaten
AL Cattlemen's Association

Patty Lambrecht
Citizen/Active Farmer

Sue Gaines
Citizen/Active Farmer

Rick Oates
AL Forestry Commission

Chris Langley
AL Assoc. of Conservation Districts

Charles Holmes
AL Soil & Water Conservation Committee

Representative Matthew Hammett
Ex-Officio

Representative Danny Crawford
Ex-Officio

Representative Reed Ingram
Ex-Officio

Senator David Sessions
Ex-Officio

Senator Donnie Chesteen
Ex-Officio

Senator Greg Albritton
Ex-Officio

Dr. William E. Puckett
Executive Director



Alabama Agricultural & Conservation Development Commission

FY2024 CIP Funding



\$670,000

General



\$675,000

Feral Swine

FY2024 CIP Impact



\$1,340,000

Payments to Landowners



572

Conservation Practices Installed

FY24 CIP Practices by Number of Applications



- 1** Herd Health
Watering Facility
Feral Swine Management
- 2** Herd Health
Forest Improvement
Soil Health
- 3** Feral Swine Management
Herd Health
Soil Health
- 4** Feral Swine Management
Forest Improvement
Watering Facility
- 5** Feral Swine Management
Erosion Management
Soil Health
- 6** Feral Swine Management
Soil Health
Forest Improvement

Want More Info?

Contact Rhonda Bryars at rhonda.bryars@swcc.alabama.gov or
Cassandra Guilford at cassandra.guilford@swcc.alabama.gov



Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Alabama's 67 Soil and Water Conservation Districts received \$63,000 each from the Alabama Education Trust Fund and General Fund to assist the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in supporting farmers with conservation practices and support district activities like implementing CIP and conservation education. They used approximately **\$4.2 million** in state funds to leverage an impressive **\$153 million** in federal funds, leading to **29,000** applied practices covering areas like cover crops, conservation tillage, pest management, longleaf pine burning and management.



District staff played pivotal roles by communicating with clients, processing applications, creating GIS maps, and conducting field visits and follow-ups. They also hosted a variety of outreach events including farm tours, forestry field days, Women in Ag workshops and local work group meetings. Soil and water districts educated over 100,000 students statewide about agriculture, farming, wildlife, and natural resource conservation through events such as Ag in the Classroom, Farm-City Week, Forestry Awareness Week Now (FAWN), Progressive Agriculture Safety Days, Ag in Action Trailer, Water Festivals, and more! District employees and supervisors enhanced their expertise in conservation programs through virtual and in-person training.



FY24 Impact

\$50M + \$83M + \$20M
Installed Practices Obligated Practices Farmer Contributions

= \$153M



2024 HIGHLIGHTS

Racing Towards Conservation - Annual Workshop

The Alabama Conservation District Employees Association (ACDEA) held its 2024 Annual Workshop June 9-11 in Oxford, Alabama, welcoming a record-breaking 72 attendees. The packed agenda featured educational sessions, hands-on training, engaging tours, valuable networking opportunities, and, of course, a bit of fun along the way!

Student Scholarships

This year, ACDEA increased its scholarship awards from \$500 to \$1,000, providing six \$1,000 scholarships—one for each Area.

Training

In 2024, each Area prioritized training to enhance skills and knowledge. A total of 16 training sessions were held across the state.

"Our association's purpose is to strengthen local Soil & Water Conservation Districts by providing vital assistance and resources to the districts, their boards, and employees. We aim to promote excellence in fulfilling district responsibilities and to support district employees through ongoing professional development. The association's greatest benefit lies in the continuing education workshops offered to all district staff and the encouragement for fostering stable, collaborative relationships among districts, employees, supervisors, and partnering agencies."



ACDEA President Debbie Clements
Bibb County Soil and Water Conservation District

Alabama's Henrietta Taylor, District Administrative Coordinator (DAC) for Lawrence County Soil and Water Conservation District, was named District Professional of the Year by the National Conservation District Employees Association (NCDEA). Taylor received the award Feb. 13, 2024, at the National Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting in San Diego, California.

This award recognizes professionalism and dedication in the people behind the nation's conservation district programs. The award is based on several criteria, including contributions at the district, state, regional, and community levels. Taylor began her career in 2002. Taylor (above left) is pictured with ACDEA President Debbie Clements.

Want More Info?

Contact Debbie Clements at bibb@alconservationdistricts.org



**ALABAMA
ASSOCIATION OF
CONSERVATION
DISTRICTS**

SE Conservation Hall of Fame

In June, Dr. William Puckett was inducted into the Southeast Region Conservation Hall of Fame at the Southeast NACD annual meeting in Gainesville, Florida. An alumnus of Auburn University and the University of Florida, Dr. Puckett has served as Alabama NRCS State Conservationist and, as Executive Director of the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee, has advanced sustainable irrigation, pioneered a feral swine control program, improved state funding, and strengthened District support.



Soil and Water Matters Day

In April, representatives from Alabama's Soil and Water Conservation Districts convened at the Alabama State House to discuss important conservation programs and showcase successful district projects, with a strong focus on continued funding for the Alabama Conservation Incentive Program (CIP).



NACD Fly-In

In March, AACD representatives joined hundreds of district leaders from across the country in Washington, D.C., for the annual DC Fly-In, an important advocacy event. This gathering provides a unique opportunity to engage directly with policymakers, where the team met with members of the Alabama legislative delegation and NRCS leadership to discuss conservation priorities and advocate for funding that support Alabama's natural resource conservation efforts.



AACD Area Annual Meetings

In 2024, AACD proudly hosted six Area Annual Meetings across Alabama, bringing together local conservation leaders, partners, and stakeholders. These gatherings offered valuable opportunities for program updates, enabling attendees to stay informed on the latest conservation initiatives and priorities.

AACD Annual Meeting

The AACD Annual Meeting is a cornerstone event for Alabama's conservation community, providing essential training for district supervisors and staff across the state. This gathering, held in November, offered an array of sessions led by experts who address current conservation issues, policies, and strategies. Highlighting the event is the statewide conservation awards ceremony, where outstanding achievements in stewardship and service are recognized.

Outreach and Training Meetings

AACD hosted 12 outreach and training meetings in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. These events provided statewide education on NRCS programs and career opportunities to nearly 1,200 individuals, including representatives of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, students, and local landowners.

Alabama Envirothon

Alabama Envirothon is shaping the future by developing leadership skills and environmental stewardship in high school students across Alabama, as well as providing opportunities for students to explore exciting career opportunities.

In February, the Alabama Envirothon saw record attendance at its statewide competition, doubling its previous participation and bringing over 200 students, educators, and volunteers to the Alabama 4-H Center. Of 26 participating teams, Ardmore High School placed first, Albertville High School placed second, and Benjamin Russell High School placed third.

Want More Info?

Contact Vickie Watkins at vickie@alconservationdistricts.org or Courtney Curen-ton-Baker at courtney@alconservationdistricts.org



SAVE THE DATE!
2025 Alabama Envirothon
February 27- March 1, 2025



CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORIES

ALABAMA IRRIGATION INITIATIVE

Trey Mann, along with his brother Clay, operates 2M Farms on 550 acres in Madison County, where they are witnessing the transformative power of modern irrigation. His system includes five pivots, all controlled through phone apps that allow him to adjust water delivery based on real-time crop needs. “With this technology, I can modify the speed of the pivot and give my crops exactly what they need,” Mann explains. This smart irrigation system has significantly boosted his yields while conserving water, with half of his land now under irrigation thanks to the Alabama Irrigation Initiative.

This year’s harvest illustrates the system’s success. Mann reported that their irrigated soybeans produced 35 bushels per acre more than the non-irrigated crop and were of much higher quality, with less damage due to the optimal growing conditions.

Alabama agriculture faces a critical challenge: only 7% of the state’s harvested cropland is irrigated, putting it 28% behind its closest neighbor, Georgia. The lack of widespread irrigation limits the ability of farmers to produce consistent yields, especially as unpredictable weather patterns become more common. To bridge this gap, the Alabama Irrigation



Mann showcases irrigated (left) and non-irrigated (right) soybean plants, highlighting the impact of irrigation on growth and yield. 2024 yield: irrigated soybeans produced 35 bushels more per acre than non-irrigated.

Initiative, launched by the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee (ALSWCC) in partnership with USDA’s NRCS, Auburn University and University of Alabama Huntsville, is helping farmers like Mann adopt water-efficient irrigation systems that conserve water and boost productivity.

Launched in 2019, the initiative initially focused on the Middle Tennessee River Basin and has since expanded to include the Choctawhatchee River and Pea River watersheds, as well as the Middle Alabama River Basin. The goal is to help farmers implement water-efficient systems such as drip, micro, and center pivot irrigation, which enhance water use efficiency and increase crop yields.

Lawrence County row crop farmers Bu and Jody Letson are also seeing results from the Alabama Irrigation Initiative. They've installed three irrigation systems on their land, with dramatic results: for the 2024 crop year, their irrigated corn yielded 178 more bushels per acre than the non-irrigated crops, and the grain quality was substantially better.

"Installing these irrigation systems through the Alabama Irrigation Initiative has been a game-changer for our yields," Bu Letson said. "It's all about taking what you have and making it more productive. Working with the Lawrence County Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS made the whole process seamless, and they've been great partners in getting conservation practices on the ground where it's needed most."

The Alabama Irrigation Initiative provides financial support to farmers like Mann and the Letsons, offering up to \$250,000 per producer to cover the cost of new irrigation systems. This includes drilling wells, installing infrastructure like pipe, pumps and pivots, and powering the systems. Additionally, the initiative emphasizes Irrigation Water Management, equipping farmers with tools such as weather stations, soil moisture sensors, and flow meters, along with a three-year vendor subscription to optimize their irrigation schedules.

By promoting sustainable irrigation practices, the Alabama Irrigation Initiative is not only increasing crop yields but also conserving water and protecting the environment. Farmers interested in participating can contact ALSWCC for more information on how to benefit from these cutting-edge irrigation technologies.

Want More Info?

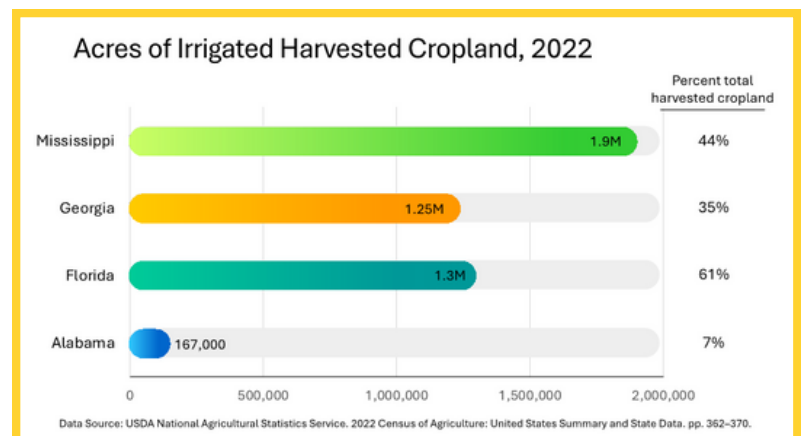
Contact Kathy Gotcher at kathy.gotcher@swcc.alabama.gov or Michael Helms at michael.helms@swcc.alabama.gov



Non-irrigated versus irrigated corn. Letson's 2024 yield: irrigated corn yielded 178 more bushels per acre than the non-irrigated crops



Letson demonstrates how touchscreen irrigation controls on his center pivot system help him manage water usage and field operations. The digital interface allows farmers to monitor and adjust irrigation settings similar to using a tablet computer.





CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORIES

WILDLIFE HABITAT RESTORATION

Lance Dement is not your typical landowner. A new, beginning farmer, veteran, and professional shooter, he bought 300 acres in Russell County in 2016, planning to use it for hunting and shooting. However, what he found was far from ideal. "It was a jungle," Dement said. The land was overgrown with sweet gums and thick underbrush, with no history of management. But as he explored the property, he realized it had great potential.

After discovering gopher tortoise burrows, Dement shifted his focus to habitat restoration. Working through the Russell County Soil and Water Conservation District, which provided administrative support and assistance with the application process, he secured NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contracts and began managing the land with timber stand improvement practices and controlled winter burns every other year. These practices targeted the undesirable sweet gums while being carefully planned to avoid harming the tortoises. His efforts paid off, and today, the land is home to over 40 gopher tortoise burrows, with a dozen confirmed tortoises. "I'm excited about seeing baby tortoises, discovering juvenile burrows, and tracking their footprints," Dement said. "It's been well worth the effort."

Gopher tortoises thrive in open-canopy habitats, like longleaf or loblolly pine savannas on well-drained sandy soils. Unfortunately, this type of habitat is disappearing due to development and changes in land use. Dement's hard work is helping to restore it.

But his conservation work doesn't stop with the gopher tortoise. His land could also help the threatened Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW), a bird species that depends on longleaf pine forests. The RCW nests in mature pine trees, usually over 80 years old, and unlike other woodpeckers, it carves its homes in living trees. Like the gopher tortoise, the RCW population has shrunk dramatically as longleaf pine forests have been lost, making habitat restoration vital to their survival.



Tortoise Photo Credit: Carrie Threadgill, Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries

“Some landowners have expressed concerns about potential legal restrictions that could come with having endangered or threatened species on their property,” said NRCS Area Resource Conservationist John Curtis. “This uncertainty can sometimes discourage them from participating in conservation efforts or reporting the presence of protected species on their land.”

Programs like the Safe Harbor Agreement help ease these concerns. In 2006, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to launch the Safe Harbor Program. This voluntary program provides landowners with assurances that if they manage their land for the RCW, they won’t face new legal restrictions. It encourages landowners to protect endangered species without worrying about losing control over their property.

In addition, NRCS Alabama has submitted a proposal to the Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership program, which is developed at the local level through collaboration between NRCS, Forest Service, and partners. The Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee has signed on as a partner for a Landscape Corridor Project across the region. This proposed initiative aims to create wildlife corridors connecting properties throughout the area. These corridors will help species like the RCW and gopher tortoise thrive over a larger area. The program would offer conservation rebates to landowners willing to invest in improving their forest stands, benefiting both the RCW and gopher tortoise. “It’s all the same habitat and the same goal,” Curtis said. “Helping one species helps the other.”

If approved, this initiative could potentially have an additional benefit: the opportunity to reduce some of the management pressures on Fort Moore – home to a thriving RCW population. “By creating these wildlife habitat corridors, we would not only be supporting the recovery of species like the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, but we’d have the potential to relieve the military’s environmental management obligations,” said Dr.

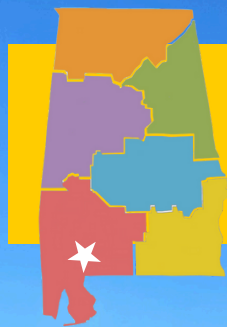


(Top) Dement showcasing one of the many gopher tortoise burrows on his property.

(Below) Bill Puckett, ALSWCC, John Curtis, NRCS and Beau Dudley, land management consultant, examine a proposed East Alabama Corridor for the threatened Red Cockaded Woodpecker.

William Puckett, Executive Director of the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation District. “With habitat available in other areas, Fort Moore can focus its resources on military training and operations, while contributing to conservation efforts off-base.

With timber prices fluctuating and the market for pulpwood becoming oversaturated, landowners are facing tough choices, Curtis explained. “Some are cutting down trees without replanting, leaving the land in poor condition. If approved, this program would provide incentives to maintain healthy forests and wildlife habitats.”



CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORIES

HEALTHY HERD, CLEAN WATERS



In 2024, Alabama's Soil and Water Conservation Districts made a major leap forward in livestock management with their Conservation Incentive Program (CIP). By adding new herd health practices such as corral systems and feed troughs, the program supports cattle operations while safeguarding Alabama's water quality. CIP provides targeted rebates to livestock producers, enabling them to implement practices that promote animal welfare, enhance management, and lessen the environmental footprint of cattle operations.

"Including corral systems and feed troughs as new water quality practices of the Conservation Incentive Program was an excellent step in the direction of providing practical, production-minded assistance to cattle producers across Alabama," said Alabama Cattlemen's Association Executive Vice President Erin Beasley. "Both practices are basic necessities for operating a successful herd health protocol, and we are proud producers now have the opportunity to cost share on the investment."

Monroe County cattle producers Ben Wiggins and his wife, Sophak, who began their cow/calf business only a few years ago, are seeing firsthand how a new corral system transforms cattle care on their 70-acre farm. "I've always wanted to work with cattle," Ben said. "But we needed a way to keep them healthy and easy to manage. The system has made routine health practices, like worming, much easier and safer." With backgrounds in healthcare and an interest in regenerative farming, the couple values how improving herd health also enhances water quality.





JEFFERSON COUNTY
PHOTOGRAPH BY TIM TATE

2024 Herd Health Practices

23 Corral Systems Installed

54 Feeding Troughs Installed

\$206,275 Rebates to Producers



Similarly, Escambia County cattleman Che Trejos finds that his new system has simplified operations and reduced stress on his animals, especially during Alabama's hot summers. "My cows don't have to walk as far now," Che explains. "It makes working them so much easier and keeps them healthier. Moving them through the corral is simpler, and it's been a huge help with loading and unloading as well."

In addition to herd health measures, CIP now includes rebates for soil testing and amendments. Forage, a major feed resource for cattle, is made more productive by lime applications guided by soil tests, which help maintain healthier pastures and deter invasive species.

CONSERVATION PRACTICES LIVESTOCK & GRAZING



WATERING FACILITIES

- Pipeline (Livestock)
- Heavy Use Area Protection
- Watering Facility
- Water Well



HERD HEALTH

- Corral System
- Squeeze Chute
- Feed Trough



FENCING

- Cross-Fencing
- Exclusion Fencing



SOIL HEALTH

- Forage & Biomass Planting
- Nutrient Management
- Soil Amendment (Lime)
- Soil Test

"When we improve our soil, it does several important things," said Dr. William Puckett, Executive Director of the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee. "It helps hold water better, reduces erosion, and helps grass grow stronger." These soil improvements provide Alabama farmers with vital tools for maintaining healthy grazing lands.

CIP's wide array of conservation options also include heavy-use protection, watering facilities, water wells, and cross-fencing. Together, these tools address livestock needs and environmental health, helping farmers manage soil erosion, safeguard water quality, and improve grazing conditions.

CIP is state-funded, reflecting Alabama's commitment to conserving natural resources while supporting agricultural operations. Eligible applicants receive a 75% rebate on installation costs, making these essential conservation practices more accessible for producers across the state.

Want More Info?

Contact your local soil and water conservation district.



In rural West Alabama, a grassroots conservation effort is making a real difference. Project PAIS (Partners Against Invasive Species), launched in 2018 with a \$300,000 grant from the USDA National Institute of Agriculture, has quickly grown into a successful multi-state initiative. What started small has turned into a major force in protecting natural resources and providing practical experience for future conservationist.

The University of West Alabama (UWA) and the Sumter County Soil and Water Conservation District teamed up to address a growing problem in the region: invasive species threatening local ecosystems and agriculture. In its early stages, PAIS focused on a lack of knowledge about how to manage invasive species like cogon grass and feral swine. By training UWA students and sending them out to work with landowners, the project not only raised awareness but also provided hands-on help and experience in the field, making an immediate impact.

According to Dr. John McCall, UWA professor of biology and PAIS program director, the project has provided a dual benefit: "This approach wasn't just about helping landowners—it also gave UWA students valuable, real-world experience in agriculture and conservation. Working side by side with landowners, these students have gained practical skills that shaped their career paths."

PAIS Impact



2K

Wild Hogs Captured



145

Acres of Cogon Grass Treated



12K

Hours logged by 3 dozen interns

As of Spring 2024, 92 percent of the PAIS student interns graduated with a Bachelor's Degree from UWA; over one third of those graduates went on to receive a Master's Degree from UWA, and 50 percent of the interns have secured a career in their field of study here in Alabama.

The early success of PAIS led to a huge leap forward in 2021 when the program was awarded a second USDA grant in the amount of \$740,000. This allowed PAIS to expand into PAIS 2.0 (Partners for Agricultural Innovation and Sustainability), extending its reach and adding new goals. With new partners like East Mississippi Community College and Coastal Alabama Community College, PAIS 2.0 took on broader issues like forest management, pollinator support, and soil health, all while continuing its work on invasive species control.



West Alabama Center for Conservation and Agriculture (WACA) Field Coordinator Drew Busby pictured with Napoleon, a Sumter County feral swine captured through the PAIS Program.

As a result of the significant impact PAIS has made to land stewardship throughout the region, it received the prestigious Alabama Wildlife Federation's Land Conservationists of the Year Award in 2022.

"Partnerships have been the driving force behind PAIS's success," said Sumter County Soil and Water Conservation District Chairman Mickey Smith. "By working together with academic institutions, government agencies, and local communities, we've made a real difference in controlling invasive species

and improving agricultural practices. I believe this model of cooperation is something every soil and water conservation district can adopt to improve conservation efforts in their communities."

One of its most promising achievements of the project has been the creation of the West Alabama Center for Conservation and Agriculture (WACCA), a direct outgrowth of these early efforts. Poised to become a regional center for agriculture and natural resource management, WACCA is set to lead the way in sustainable practices for the region's landowners and communities.

Want More Info?

Contact Sumter County Soil and Water Conservation District at sumter@alconservationdistricts.org or visit <https://uwa-wacca.com/>





CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORIES

FORESTRY EDUCATION

Forestry plays a critical role in Alabama's economy and environment, contributing a staggering \$36 billion annually and employing over 54,000 people. This rich natural resource requires responsible management and Cleburne County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), in partnership with the Cleburne County Forestry Planning Committee, has made it their mission to educate youth, landowners and the public about the value of wise forestry management.

One of the district's most impactful annual outreach events is Classroom in the Forest (CIF). Developed by the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association, CIF offers Alabama students a rare opportunity to step beyond the classroom and explore the state's private forestlands. For over 20 years, this program has been a cornerstone of the district's educational efforts.



Held four times each year, Cleburne County SWCD partners with local Treasure Forest landowners—Jerry Owen, Winston Bryant, Johnny Cofield, and Jimmy Jimmerson—who host 5th-grade students from all four county elementary schools. Classes of 30 to 75 students explore the wonders of the forest, supported by volunteers from Alabama Extension, the Alabama Forestry Commission, the Cleburne County Chamber of Commerce, NRCS, Quail Forever, and SWCD supervisors and their spouses.

Paul Williams, Cleburne County SWCD Supervisor and Forester with the Alabama Forestry Commission, emphasizes the importance of these hands-on experience. "You'd be surprised how many kids, even in a rural county like Cleburne, have never really spent time in the woods. It makes an impression. Some of them have even gone on to careers in forestry because of what they learned."

"You'd be surprised how many kids, even in a rural county like Cleburne, have never really spent time in the woods."

Paul Williams
Cleburne County SWCD Supervisor
Forester with the Alabama Forestry Commission

For many students, the opportunity to spend an entire day outdoors, away from screens and technology, is a rare experience. “It’s so obvious how much students enjoy being outside,” said Cindy Beam, Cleburne County SWCD District Administrative Coordinator. “They get to apply what they’ve learned in school and truly explore the world around them. It’s a big change from their usual routine.”

Empowering Landowners with Forestry Knowledge

In addition to educating students, Cleburne County SWCD places great emphasis on equipping landowners with the latest forestry management techniques. The annual Forestry Landowner Tours are designed to bring together both novice and experienced landowners for discussions on topics such as forest mapping, pine beetle infestations, and best practices for spraying in forest operations. Last year’s tour attracted over 150 participants.

The "Learn to Burn" training, introduced this year and funded through the Natural Resources Council, is another key component of the district's 2024 educational efforts. This workshop teaches landowners the techniques and tools for conducting safe and effective prescribed burns. “It’s about giving landowners the skills they need to manage their own land,” Williams explained. “There’s not always a consultant or vendor available to help, so we’re teaching people how to do it themselves.”

Recognizing Excellence in Conservation

The work in Cleburne County has not gone unnoticed. In 2023, the Cleburne County Forestry Planning Committee was awarded the "Outstanding County Natural Resources Council Award" by the Alabama Natural Resources Council and The W. Kelly Mosley Environmental Awards Program. This recognition highlights the county’s commitment to sustainable forestry, private land stewardship, and environmental education.



Alabama Forestry Impact



23.1M
Acres of forests



2ND
Pulp and Paper
(nationally)



4TH
Lumber Production
(nationally)

Source: Alabama Forestry Association

Want More Info?

Contact Cleburne County Soil and Water Conservation District at
cleburne@alconservationdistricts.org



CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORIES

GROUND WATER FESTIVALS



2024 Festivals



20

Alabama Soil & Water
Conservation Districts
Hosted Water Festivals



15K

Students Reached

Imagine biting into a delicious model of the earth beneath your feet. In Lee County, Alabama, students do just that by creating "edible aquifers," layering sweet treats to visualize how groundwater moves through underground formations. This tasty science lesson is just one of the many ways the Lee County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has made environmental education both fun and impactful since 2003.

In 2024, the festival celebrated another successful year with participation from 12 schools and approximately 1,400 students. This impressive turnout highlights the event's ongoing influence and the community's dedication to water conservation education. Beyond edible aquifers, students engaged in activities like crafting water cycle bracelets, experimenting with mini water filtration systems, and attending an interactive fish show presented by Auburn University.

"These activities help students grasp essential water science concepts, like how groundwater is stored and filtered," said Lee County SWCD District Chairman Gaines Whatley. "Our goal is to make learning enjoyable while fostering a deep appreciation for natural resources and environmental stewardship."

The success of the festival is driven by the support of over 60 volunteers from across the community including the City of Opelika, Auburn Water Works and Mid South RC&D. NRCS also plays an important role by providing volunteers from both state and local levels. Lee County District Conservationist Patrick Rohling serves as the festival committee chair, providing planning and logistical support for the event.

The Lee County festival is part of a statewide movement that began in 1997 when the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) launched the Groundwater Festivals initiative. Through ADEM's efforts and an EPA Nonpoint Source grant, festivals were organized to educate students about drinking water sources, protection methods, and the importance of clean water for future generations. Today, ADEM continues to support these events by offering educational materials and grants of up to \$2,500 to organizers through the Alabama State Revolving Fund.

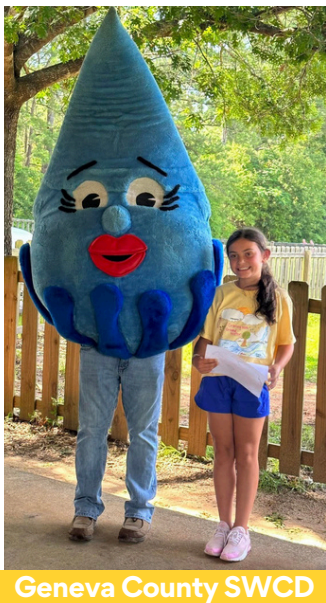
"These festivals make learning fun," said Eric Ready, Chief, State Revolving Fund, Operator Certification, Ombudsman for ADEM. "We want students to develop a deep appreciation for water, understand the water cycle, and learn how to prevent pollution through education." Ready expressed his appreciation for the work Alabama's Soil and Water Conservation Districts do to facilitate these water festivals each year. In 2024 alone, 22 districts hosted festivals, reaching over 15,000 students statewide.



Meet Sammy Soil & Ruby Raindrop

Sammy Soil and Ruby Raindrop are conservation icons! Originally created by a conservation district in Chattanooga, Tennessee, the lovable cartoon characters have caught the attention of thousands of children for more than 40 years. Sammy Soil and Ruby Raindrop teach kids why healthy soil and clean water are important.

Want More Info?
Contact your local soil and water conservation district.



Geneva County SWCD



Lauderdale County SWCD



St. Clair County SWCD



Monroe County SWCD



Butler County SWCD



Jefferson County SWCD



Conecuh County SWCD



Cullman County SWCD



Soil & Water Matters!

www.alabamasoilandwater.gov
www.facebook.com/ALSWCC/