

2015 Presidential Migratory Bird Federal Stewardship Award Nomination

Natural Resources Conservation Service: Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative

Partners: Gulf Coast Joint Venture; Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture; Louisiana Rice Grower's Association; Shorebird Recovery Project; Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences; USGS National Wetlands Research Center; Ducks Unlimited, Inc.; Louisiana Soil and Water Conservation Districts; Louisiana State University; US Fish and Wildlife Service; Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries; Numerous private landowners in 8 southern states

As oil spewed from the damaged Deepwater Horizon well in June 2010, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service launched an unprecedented proactive effort to benefit migratory birds headed toward Gulf Coastal wetland habitats. Called the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (MBHI), the effort literally mobilized thousands of private landowners to help create and enhance habitats for numerous species of waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds.



Photo Credit: John Pitre/USDA-NRCS

Although the spill was the impetus for the MBHI, for years resources managers had envisioned similar activities could be used to address the numerous threats to wintering habitats. Eight states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas) enrolled over 471,000 acres by August 1, 2010. Louisiana enrolled 193,000 acres most of which was multi-year agreements on working rice and crawfish farms in the southwestern part of the State. Immediately after shallow water and early successional habitat practices were implemented, anecdotal evidence seemed to indicate high bird use by a variety of species. In order to accurately assess the Initiative's impact, partnership formed between NRCS, Ducks Unlimited, Inc. USGS-NWRC, and Mississippi State University. Based on the results of this assessment, MBHI was very successful in providing wintering habitat benefits to a variety of migratory waterbirds. The Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative is a present day wildlife management success efficiently tapping into the infra-structure of working agricultural lands to provide landscape scale wintering habitat needs for migratory birds.