

# SWCD Spotlight

## Morehouse SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Located in northeast Louisiana, Morehouse Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) encompasses all of Morehouse Parish. The district was originally part of the Northeast SWCD, which included Morehouse, West Carroll, and Franklin parishes; however, the three parishes became stand-alone districts in 1970 to address the natural resource concerns specific to local landowners.

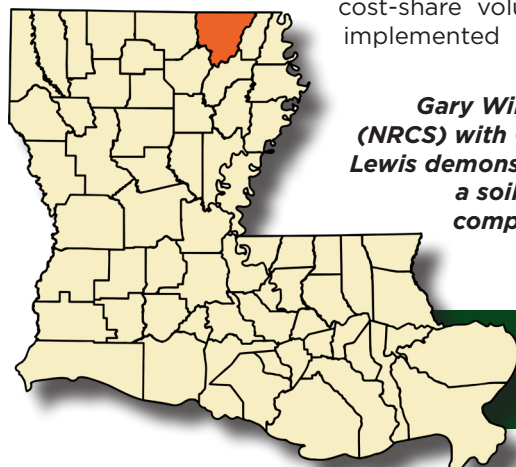
With over 25,000 residents and more than 400 farms producing cotton, corn, soybeans, rice, cattle, and more, the district works with staff, board members, and partners to ensure conservation projects are viable and successful.

Like other districts, each year Morehouse SWCD invites the public to their locally led information-gathering meeting to gather to discuss natural resource concerns and strategies to increase conservation awareness and implementation in the SWCD. Currently, the district has six special projects underway, all at varying stages of completion and ranging in size and scope. These include four watershed projects across three different watersheds and two district-wide projects targeting the rising feral hog population.

Three of the four current district watershed-specific projects target Bayou Bartholomew, a Louisiana Natural and Scenic Waterway and the largest bayou in the world, with a length of 364 miles through Arkansas and Louisiana.

The first accepted project, funded through the United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), is the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI). Focused on monitoring water quality and assessing resources, NWQI assists agricultural landowners with technical and financial assistance for voluntary conservation practices to improve water quality. In this case, the best management practices (BMPs), which include conservation tillage, nutrient management, and grade stabilization structures, are aimed at the reduction of agricultural contaminants. Landowner implementation of BMPs is cost-shared through the program, and funds are expected to be available over the next four years.

Morehouse SWCD also received funding through the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Clean Water Act - Section 319 Nonpoint Source Reduction Program to cost-share voluntarily implemented BMPs



**Gary Wilkerson (NRCS) with Garrett Lewis demonstrating a soil health comparison.**

on agricultural lands that will target water quality improvements within the watershed. The "319" Project boundaries are within the same drainage basin as NWQI, but each covers a different watershed.

Additionally, Morehouse SWCD is working with the USDA-NRCS and Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) to apply for federal assistance through the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566). This program addresses flood prevention and reduction, water supply, erosion, wildlife habitat, wetland creation and restoration, and increased recreational opportunities. After the Preliminary Investigation Feasibility Report, which is currently underway, the district can apply for funding of the proposed project, which could include structural projects, like dams, levees, and reservoirs or land treatment projects like BMPs.

The fourth watershed project targets two different sections of Upper Bayou Lafourche: Bayou Coulee and Bayou Galion. Funding for this project was made available through the Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA) and the EPA, to reduce nutrient loading in the Gulf of Mexico and the dead-zone created by excess nutrients from upstream. This project offers voluntary cost-share funding for cover crops, nutrient management, and residue/tillage management over the next three years. Through GOMA, funding for the implementation of specified conservation practices will be covered at 100% to participating voluntary landowners.

The last two projects involve feral hogs, which cause immeasurable damage across land uses and consistently rank as a top resource concern for cooperators. Firstly, the district purchased four net-style Pig Brig traps in 2020 to offer landowners and cooperators a cost-effective way to control hogs on their property. The program's success is reflected in record catches, as many as 33 hogs at once. Four years in, with additional traps donated by the local Farm Bureau Federation, hundreds of hogs are removed each season, and new



**Above: Cell cam image of more than 20 trapped feral hogs**



**Left: Drone footage of feral hog damage to corn crop**

cooperators continue to join the district in order to participate.

In addition to the trapping program, the district participates in the NACD's Feral Hog Perimeter Fencing program, which provides cost-share assistance to landowners to repair or install perimeter fencing that restricts feral hogs' access and impact. SWCD has been awarded funds to cost-share roughly 83,000 feet of perimeter fencing to landowners in need, and applications are currently being accepted.

Since 2019, Morehouse SWCD has been the recipient of the National Association of Conservation District's (NACD) Technical Assistance Grant, which provides funding for a hired technician, Garrett Lewis, who works directly with cooperators, creates conservation plans, and educates the public on soil and water conservation practices.

Morehouse SWCD cooperators, employees, and partners, stay busy from dawn to dusk. Not only are they effectively managing and implementing conservation through ongoing projects, but they continue to look for more opportunities to better assist their cooperators with all natural resource concerns.

### MOREHOUSE SWCD

9604 MARLATT STREET  
BASTROP, LA 71220-9758

Email: [erin.james@la.nacdnet.net](mailto:erin.james@la.nacdnet.net)

Phone: (318) 281-1561, ext. 3

To learn more about SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS in Louisiana, or to find your local SWCD office, visit [www.ldaf.la.gov](http://www.ldaf.la.gov).