

Mississippi
CONSERVATION
Showcase



WRP Program Helps Restore Mississippi's Black Bear Population

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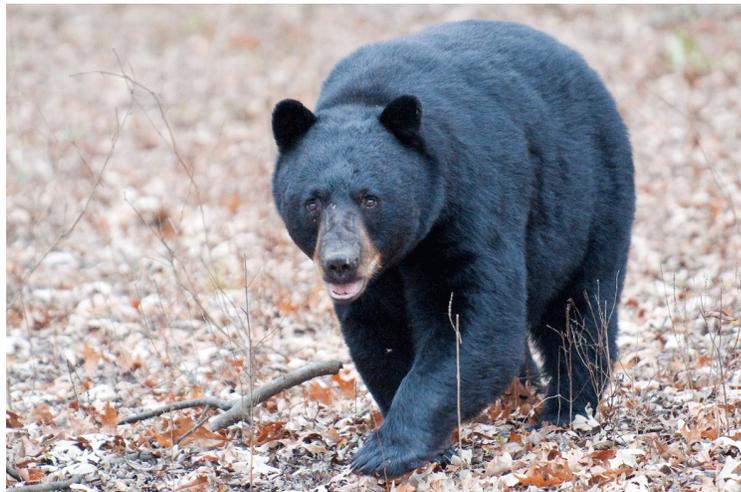
Though rarely seen by humans, more black bears are calling Mississippi home. It's a success story that wildlife biologists attribute to greater awareness and restoration of wetland habitat.

Mississippi's black bear population has grown in the past decade, growing from 40 to 120, making the species an icon of conservation in the Mississippi Delta.

And the first bear cubs born in Mississippi in four decades were born on land enrolled in the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

For years, Mississippi's bear population was composed mainly of males, who wandered across the Mississippi River. The population had stagnated because of a lack of habitat. But in 2005, a female wandered into Mississippi and made Mississippi her home. In 2007, the 220-pound female had two cubs on a 10-year-old WRP easement. Since then, those two cubs have had two cubs of their own. Also, the original mother had two more cubs, totaling 10 bears since 2005. These bears still call this WRP easement home.

The land was formerly used as a soybean farm in the 1990s. WRP has



Photos courtesy of Brad Young with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks.



had big impacts on Mississippi, protecting 13,059 acres of land through the obligation of \$23.3 million in 55 projects during fiscal 2010.

The primary emphasis of WRP is to protect, restore and enhance the functions and values of wetland ecosystems to attain habitat for migratory birds and wetland dependent wildlife, including threatened and endangered species. NRCS biologists and the local district conservationist (in consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks) assisted the landowner in developing a conservation plan to provide habitat restoration and management guidelines for the WRP easement area.

The success that is being seen with WRP, and other conservation programs shows the great interest of agricultural producers and other private landowners in helping sustain America's natural resources while maintaining our economic viability. The WRP is a voluntary program that offers landowners the opportunity to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. NRCS manages the program and provides technical and financial support to landowners participating in WRP.

Mississippi once boasted a large bear population, the main reason why President Theodore Roosevelt visited Sharkey County in 1902 for a bear hunt that made history—and inadvertently led to the creation of the “Teddy” bear when the president declined a shot at a black bear that his hosts captured and tied to a tree.

Restoring the black bear population would not have been possible without the dedication of landowners who protect bottomland hardwoods and wetlands.

