

Mississippi Church Restores and Nurtures a Forest with NRCS' Help

By Judi Craddock, NRCS Mississippi

Deacon Willie Moseley nurtures not only his church's congregation, but also the 40 acres of forest that surround it. Antioch Baptist Church in Lauderdale County, Miss. has owned the land for almost a century, but the church has recently formed a new vision for caring for this forest.

Starting in the 1920s, trees on the church's property were harvested periodically to help finance church projects, but a major harvest in the 1990s left nothing but stumps and idle land. Moseley wanted the church to benefit from the forest—sustainably managed forests can provide a steady income to their owners—and he turned to USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for help.

Moseley had worked with NRCS on his own land, so when he recently was chosen to head the church's Board of Trustees, he started talking to the other deacons about how NRCS provides financial assistance, expertise in planting trees and other help with stewardship of forests and other natural resources.



LEFT: Deacon Willie Moseley worked with NRCS Supervisory District Conservationist Kelvin Jackson to nurture a healthier forest ecosystem.

Through NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the church receives funds and help in planting loblolly pines. NRCS helped the church prepare for planting by spraying herbicide and conducting prescribed burning, helping the young trees get established by suppressing competitor plants. NRCS coordinates closely with the church to make sure they use the right type and amount of herbicide.

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NRCS also worked with the church to create a conservation plan, which outlines possible future ways that the church can care for its property. The agency offers free conservation technical assistance, or advice, to private landowners wanting to learn more about improving natural resources on their properties.

While the congregation members recognize the financial benefits of timber down the road, they also look to the other benefits of a healthy forest. It will provide habitat for wildlife and lead to cleaner water and air. Plus, it's a good place for congregation members to enjoy nature.

Moseley said he highly recommends NRCS and regularly encourages his church congregation and other community members to attend the agency's informational meetings.

"I will tell anybody I can that there are programs available that can assist them with their land," he says. "If I do anything in this life, I want to leave a legacy."

For more information on EQIP or other NRCS programs, visit www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov.

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