LOWER MISSISSIPPI RIVER BATTURE REFORESTATION
WETLANDS RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

AT A GLANCE

PROJECT: Through the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP), the Mississippi River Trust and Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee are offering monetary incentives to landowners in the Lower Mississippi River floodplain, an area known as the “batture,” so they can re-forest cleared land.

SCOPE: Lands within the river’s active floodplain from Cairo, Illinois, to the Port of Baton Rouge in Louisiana.

BENEFITS: Reforestation of these batture lands will lessen the amount of excess nutrients entering the river and the Gulf of Mexico; reduce flooding of farmland; reduce federal crop insurance payments; increase opportunities for outdoor recreation; and expand habitat for bears, migratory birds, and other wildlife.

STATUS: Began in May 2012. More than 10,000 acres enrolled in conservation easements so far.

PARTNERS: Mississippi River Trust, Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee, U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. Matching funds are provided by the Walton Family Foundation and the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities.

WATER QUALITY BENEFITS

- Recent scientific studies and federal data indicate that converting farmland to forested wetlands can reduce significant amounts of harmful nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) that would otherwise enter the river and the Gulf of Mexico.

- More than 30 pounds of nutrients per converted acre per year could be avoided through the batture reforestation project. That amount is expected to rise to more than 60 pounds per acre per year over time as wetlands become more effective at absorbing nutrients from floodwaters.

- That means more than 2.5 million pounds of nutrients per year would not enter the river and the Gulf after 40,000 acres are reforested in the batture as planned.

Photos: Bill Stripling, Mississippi River Trust, John Ruskey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Jan Hoover, NASA
WILDLIFE AND RECREATION BENEFITS

HUNTING AND FISHING: The Lower Mississippi Valley has lost 80 percent of its forested wetlands and 90 percent of its floodplain. The forests, lakes and other habitats that remain in the river’s 2.8 million-acre floodplain provide some of this nation’s best hunting and fishing opportunities. Efforts to manage wildlife habitat in the remaining floodplain, such as the WREP reforestation project, will only expand recreational opportunities and the value of recreational land.

FOREST BIRDS: Dozens of species of songbirds, including the Prothonotary Warbler, inhabit the forests along the Lower Mississippi River. Reforesting land in the floodplain will help create larger blocks of forest needed to keep bird populations healthy as they nest along the river or use the river corridor in their migration between northern nesting grounds and wintering areas in the Tropics.

BLACK BEAR: The forests of the Lower Mississippi River floodplain provide important habitat for Black Bear to travel safely and regain viable populations in the region. Bears are an important part of the region’s natural and cultural heritage. President Theodore Roosevelt’s bear-hunting trips to Mississippi and Louisiana in the early 1900s gave rise to the “Teddy Bear” toy.

A PARTNERSHIP FOR THE RIVER AND THE GULF

“By combining private and government support, we can proceed with one of the most significant conservation projects in the region. This program will provide lasting benefits to landowners along the river and it will help our downstream neighbors by improving water quality in the Gulf of Mexico.”

James L. Cummins, President
Mississippi River Trust