



Improving the Water Quality of the West Fork of the White River and Beaver Lake

Reducing streambank erosion and the amount of sediment flowing into Beaver Lake is the focus of an ongoing joint project between the Watershed Conservation Resource Center, the Beaver Water District, Walton Family Foundation, Beaver Watershed Alliance and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The West Fork of the White River is a major tributary in northwest Arkansas that flows to the White River which forms Beaver Lake, the primary drinking water source for one in seven Arkansans. The West Fork of the White River Watershed Project builds upon 15 years of planning and design by the partnership.

The project received \$4.3 million in federal dollars in 2017 to develop a watershed plan and stabilize three miles of streambank through natural channel design methods, and to implement other best management practices (BMPs) on agricultural lands. The funds were provided through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), an initiative of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

An array of partners raised a total over \$4.3 million dollars in both cash and in-kind matching funds which will provide \$8.6 million to be devoted to a portion of the West Fork of the White River Watershed by the partnership to improve and protect water quality in Northwest Arkansas over the next five years.

As part of the project, three miles of river banks that were historically cut back due to erosion of the fast-moving West Fork of the White River have been stabilized to reduce sedimentation in Beaver Lake. The stabilization of the banks uses recycled timber from development sites and other sources. This reinforced bank structure and the re-vegetation of the area helps prevent further loss of land and lowers drinking water treatment costs.



Areas treated to reduce erosion and sedimentation. Photos provided by Shelby Spence, NRCS Arkansas watershed planning engineer.

NRCS recently provided \$375,000 of new funding which will be utilized to develop the designs and construction plans for additional streambank restoration projects.

“We are grateful to NRCS for helping the Watershed Conservation Resource Center and our partners to create this amazing opportunity to restore reaches of the West Fork White River,” commented Executive Director Sandi J. Formica of the Watershed Conservation Resource Center. “Not only will this project reduce sediment and nutrients to the river and Beaver Lake watershed, but it will set a direction to restore aquatic habitat, save valuable agricultural and forests lands, and restore boating and fishing recreation to the local community and the region. This has been a true watershed effort that are the results of scientific-based assessment and planning over two decades,” she said.

Assistance is being provided by NRCS through the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (Public Law 83-566 Watershed Program) which allows NRCS to work with local groups to reduce damages from flooding, protect watersheds, improve municipal and agricultural water management and enhance wildlife habitat.

“Watersheds are natural boundaries,” Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan said. “Using this watershed program in Arkansas helps protect lives and property, improves natural resources, and supports agricultural production within our state’s watersheds.”

Portions of information above came from an Arkansas NRCS news release dated July 10, 2020.

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May 2021