

# Lake Providence Watershed Council



## MANAGING LAKE PROVIDENCE WATERSHED RESOURCES

*2021 Update*

*An Annual Report to the Louisiana Legislature*

*April 2021*

***To the Distinguished Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources and Environment and Senate Committee on Environmental Quality of the Louisiana Legislature. and the People of the Great State of Louisiana***

April 30, 2021

Dear Senators and Representatives:

We, the members of the Lake Providence Watershed Council, have completed this Annual report in accordance with House Concurrent Resolution No. 96 of the Regular Session 2020.

Specifically, the Lake Providence Watershed Council provides this update to the watershed management plan submitted to the legislature in April 2020. It is the intent of this Council, interested stakeholders, and all those involved in the project to preserve, protect, and enhance the quality of Lake Providence located in East Carroll Parish - now and for generations to come.

The citizens of Louisiana deserve to have a restored and viable Lake Providence. The lake restoration and revitalization can be accomplished through engineering, education, enticement, as well as, enforcement of existing and new regulations focused on best management practices.

This update report describes the on-going activities and efforts by the Lake Providence Watershed Council, East Carroll Parish Police Jury and local stakeholders, and offers background information, graphs, charts and maps, and further recommendations for your review. We look forward to any further guidance or feedback as we press forward with managing the Lake Providence Watershed Resources Project.

We appreciate the support of the Louisiana Legislature as we move forward with this plan of action.

Sincerely yours,

***The Members of the Lake Providence Watershed Council***

## Lake Providence Watershed Fact Sheet

### Lake Providence Watershed:

- East Carroll Parish
- Total area: ~17,000 acres
- Cultivated area: ~11,000 acres (64%)
- Developed area: ~1,600 acres (14%)
- Forested/Other Use area: ~2,700 acres (12%)
- Open water: ~1,700 acres (10%)
- Average Annual Precipitation: ~57 inches

### Lake Providence

- Owned by the State of Louisiana
- Oxbow/horseshoe lake – abandoned meander of the Mississippi River
- Area: ~1,380 acres (3,200 acres with associated wetlands)
- Shoreline (including the Chute): ~74,000 feet (14 miles)
- Developed shoreline: ~46,000 feet (9 miles)
- Pool stage: ~90 feet above mean sea level (NGVD)
- Maximum depth: ~37 feet
- Average depth: ~12 feet
- Primary Outfall - Tensas Bayou spillway
- Secondary Outfall - Baxter Bayou Structure

Sources: LDWF, LDNR, LDOTD, NRCS

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This annual report update is submitted to the Louisiana Legislature, specifically the House Committee on Natural Resources and Environment, and the Senate Committee on Environmental Quality in accordance with HCR 96 of 2020. Ongoing Activities, Concerns and Maintenance Issues by the Lake Providence Watershed Council (LPWC) are as follows:

***1. Ongoing damage and repairs to the Tensas Bayou Weir***

The structure on Tensas Bayou is a weir that was redesigned by the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LDOTD) in 1975, but never replaced. Currently, the weir, which is the primary drain for the lake, does not allow for lake level manipulation, it is in disrepair and being bypassed at higher flow (see Figure 1). The LPWC submitted on behalf of the East Carroll Parish Police Jury a pre-application to the LDOTD's Statewide Flood Control Program in May 2016 and 2020 to seek funds to replace the weir with a control structure (see heading 3 below). The East Carroll Parish Police Jury has been in contact with the LDOTD and has hired an engineer to prepare plans to replace the weir.

***2. Ongoing Damage to the Baxter Bayou Control Structure***

Anecdotal information by local stakeholders suggests that the structure on Baxter Bayou only allows water to flow out of the lake at high stage, otherwise reverse flow can occur at time of unevenly distributed precipitation. Prior to 1923, Baxter Bayou discharged into the lake. In 1923, Baxter Bayou was dredged to reverse the flow direction; it now is supposed to flow toward Caney Bayou. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) data collected at Baxter Bayou shows that during their one-and-a-half-year study, flow reversed direction (negative discharge) approximately eleven times. Currently, the structure does not allow for lake level manipulation, it is in disrepair and is bypassed at higher flow. In the last nine years a sand bar has emerged at the confluence of Baxter Bayou and a tributary (see Figure 2). The position of this bar and its growth toward the structure and Lake Providence is further evidence that flow from Baxter Bayou is being directed toward the lake and not Caney Bayou as initially intended. The LPWC submitted on behalf of the East Carroll Parish Police Jury a pre-application to the LDOTD's Statewide Flood Control Program in May 2016 and 2020 to seek funds to replace the structure. This is further discussed under item 3 below.

***3. Louisiana Watershed Initiative***

The East Carroll Parish Police Jury has had a representative participating in the Louisiana Watershed Initiative meetings since the onset of the program. Although no project within the Lake Providence watershed has been yet approved, a proposal for East Carroll and Madison Parishes has been submitted.



Figure 1: Condition of the Tensas Bayou weir in Oct 2015 (1), August 2020 (2), October 2020 (3) and March 2021 (4). Notice the cement bags installed in August 2018 to prevent erosion and pass of the structure.

#### ***4. Statewide Flood Control Program Pre-Application***

As previously reported (LPWC, 2020 and LPWC, 2016), the East Carroll Parish Police Jury with the assistance of the LPWC submitted a Pre-Application in May 2016 (for \$2-\$3 Million). The Pre-Application was approved by the LDOTD. Because of the difficulty securing the matching funds, East Carroll Parish Police Jury was unable to submit a formal application with engineering designs by the prescribed deadline of October 1, 2020. At the recommendation of the LDOTD, East Carroll Parish Police Jury resubmitted the pre-application to LDOTD in May 2020. After reviewing the resubmitted pre-application, the LDOTD responded that it did not have “anyone available who is capable of completing the hydrologic and hydraulic modelling needed to determine the likely effects of the proposed project. This is a fairly complex problem that will need very careful consideration. As such, unless the parish is able to hire a consultant to model the project, the application will be dependent on the completion of the model that is being completed on behalf of the Louisiana Watershed Initiative.”



11/15/2012



8/26/2015



3/17/2021

Figure 2: Conditions at the Baxter Bayou Structure showing the accumulation of sediments

### ***5. Ongoing and Planned Tensas and Baxter Bayou Clearing and Snagging***

In the past couple of years, the East Carroll Parish Police Jury has been cleaning and snagging the Tensas Bayou from the Tensas basin to Corbin Ferry road. They anticipate finishing the work by the end of this summer.

The East Carroll Parish Police Jury has been in contact with a local contractor to clean the accumulated sediments in Baxter Bayou. It is anticipated that this work will limit the backflow into Lake Providence.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) has secured \$500,000 for a pre-study of the clean-up of the Tensas and Big Colewa basins. The Corps is presently doing a permanent channel range survey in about 30 locations to determine what is needed as far as clean outs are concerned. In addition, \$4,000,000 dollars for the project has been included in the 2021 Corps Work Plan, but has not yet been appropriated.

### ***6. NRCS MRBI Program Success and End of Funding***

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) Project provided great opportunities for participants in the Lake Providence watershed area to get involved with improving various resource concerns, mainly regarding water quality in Lake Providence. There were multiple conservation practices installed and implemented such as Cover Crops (340), Nutrient Management (590), Conservation Cover (329), Residue Management (345), and Grade Stabilization Structure (410). By implementing these conservation practices, resource concerns such as soil erosion/health, poor water quality, and field sediment loss were all addressed. If these practices continue and local stakeholders adopt new innovative conservation practices or enhancements, the water quality improvements in the Lake Providence watershed will continue (USDA, 2018 and Appendix A).

### ***7. LDEQ Nonpoint Source, Clean Water Act Section 319 Program***

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) Nonpoint Source (NPS) Program, funded by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (USEPA) Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 319 Program funds, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) NRCS MRBI Program, funded by USDA Farm Bill, are partners in efforts to restore water quality in Lake Providence. In the 2016 Biennial Integrated Report, Lake Providence was impaired for fish and wildlife propagation (FWP) with a suspected cause of impairment being total dissolved solids (TDS). Alongside implementation of conservation practices through the MRBI Program from 2017 to 2020, the LDEQ NPS Program monitored water quality to track progress in water quality improvement. In addition, the LDEQ Ambient Monitoring Program collected data from October 2018 to September 2019 at Lake Providence.

The 2020 Biennial Integrated Report shows that Lake Providence is now supporting the fish and wildlife propagation use for TDS. In addition, the recent Lake Providence TDS data collected by the LDEQ NPS Program also shows that Lake Providence is supporting the FWP use for TDS. In September 2020, LDEQ, along with USEPA, developed a NPS Success Story to highlight the restoration of water quality in Lake Providence (LDEQ and USEPA, 2020). A copy of the news release by the USEPA is included in Appendix B.

### ***8. Ongoing Fisheries Data Collection***

Electrofishing samples were conducted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Inland Fisheries in spring and fall in 2020. Total catch-per-hour rates of Largemouth Bass were 57 and 21, respectively. These values reflect a low to moderate abundance of Largemouth Bass. The size distribution of Largemouth Bass from the spring sample is shown in Figure 3. The distribution appears normal, with nearly all inch groups between 5 – 17 inches represented. Figure 4 shows abundance estimates of Largemouth Bass from spring electrofishing samples since 2001. Mean abundance estimates have generally been lower than optimal. Though estimates have varied, there is a slight decreasing trend in abundance.

### ***9. Other Funding Sought***

Since 2015, the East Carroll Parish Police Jury with the help of the LPWC has sought \$100,000 from Capital Outlay for a study of the Lake's hydrology. Similarly, in collaboration with the USACE funds have been sought to perform an ecological study of the watershed. Both sources of funding have shown to be elusive to secure.

### **References:**

Lake Providence Watershed Council, 2016. An Interim Report to the Louisiana Legislature May 2016: report submitted to the House Committee on Natural Resources and Environment and the Senate Committee on Environmental Quality, pp. 125.

Lake Providence Watershed Council, 2020. An Interim Report to the Louisiana Legislature April 2020: report submitted to the House Committee on Natural Resources and Environment and the Senate Committee on Environmental Quality, pp. 42.

Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), 2020. Full Participation in Conservation Practice Implementation Restores Water Quality in Lake Providence, pp. 2. [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-09/documents/la\\_lake\\_providence\\_1907\\_508.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-09/documents/la_lake_providence_1907_508.pdf)

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2018. Louisiana Conservation Update: monthly newsletter of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), February 2018, pp. 8.

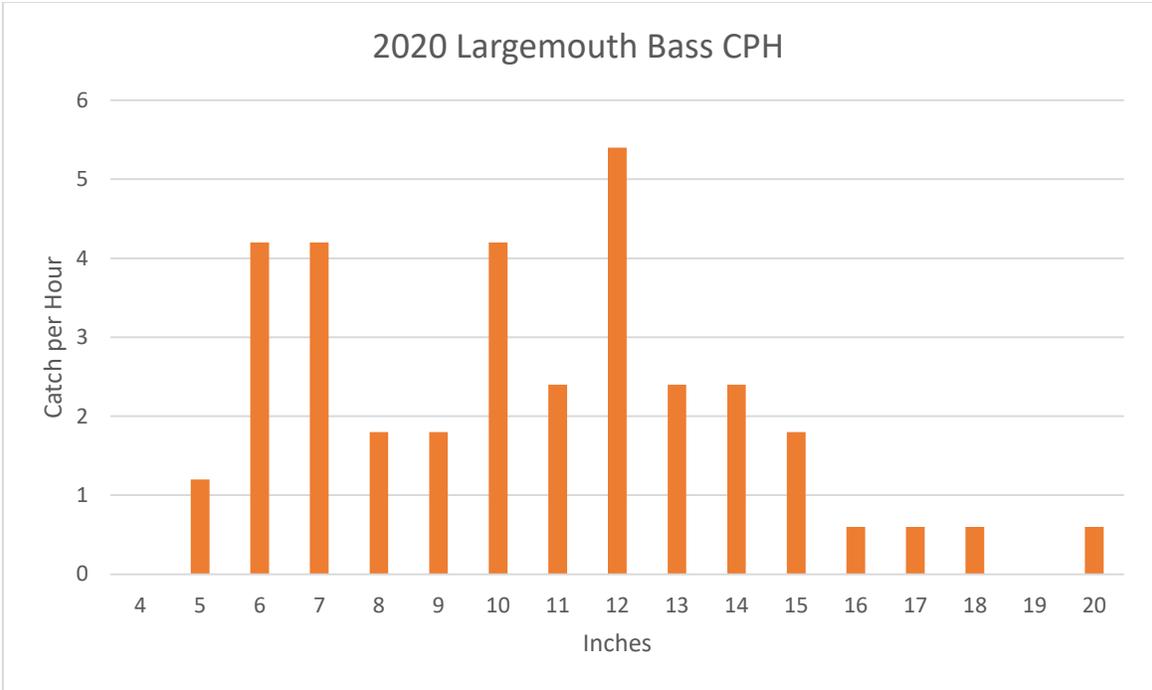


Fig. 3: Length distribution of Largemouth Bass from spring electrofishing on Lake Providence, 2020.

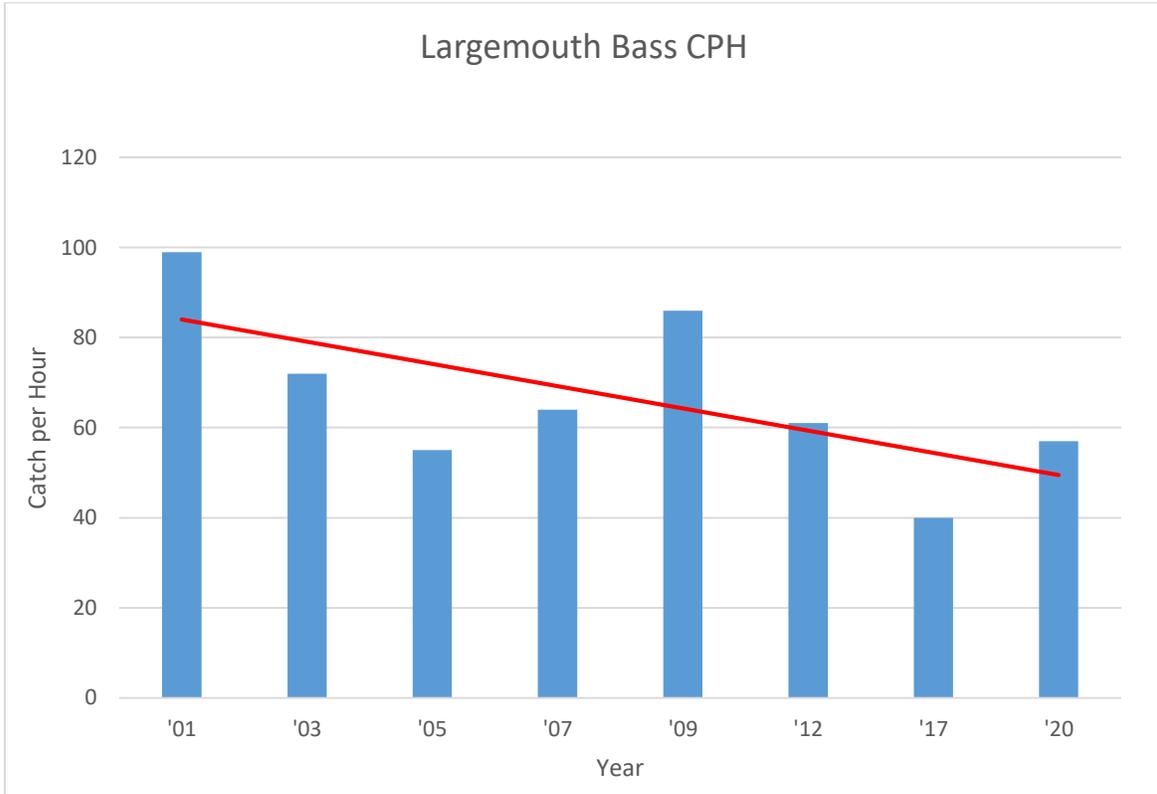


Fig 4: Catch-per-Hour estimates of Largemouth Bass from spring electrofishing Samples on Lake Providence, 2001 – 2020.

Appendix A  
USDA  
Bringing Back the Beauty



United States Department of Agriculture

# Louisiana Conservation Update

February 2018

## Bringing Back the Beauty

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



# Bringing Back the Beauty

Located in East Carroll Parish in the northeast corner of Louisiana, the town of Lake Providence provides awe-inspiring views of an ideal southern landscape and a lifestyle living close to the water.

An oxbow lake, Lake Providence was formed many years ago when the Mississippi River changed course and shifted slightly to the east. The lake it left behind is a vibrant natural resource, known for fishing, wildlife and scenic views. In fact, the scenery was so impressive it garnered the attention of President Teddy Roosevelt, who explored and hunted the area back 1907.

Today, it's just as beautiful as it was back then and one of the primary reasons why is the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) participation in the Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) healthy watersheds project and the improvements it has made in water quality and soil health near and around Lake Providence.

To improve the health of the Mississippi River Basin, including water quality and wildlife habitat, MRBI was created. Through this initiative, NRCS and its partners help producers select watersheds in the Mississippi River Basin, voluntarily implement conservation practices and systems that avoid, control, and trap

nutrient runoff, improve wildlife habitat, and maintain agricultural productivity.

Eddie Foster, District Conservationist in Lake Providence explains, "All of this was started to improve the water quality in Lake Providence. In the MRBI program you have to target a specific practice and for the landowners and farmers around the lake, it was improving water quality."

When the project began a little over two years ago the water in the lake was a shadow of its former beauty due mainly to run-off and sediment from neighboring fields, streams, drainage ditches, etc. Residents, landowners and farmers noticed the change and were ready and willing to do something about it.

Brian Howard, farmer and lake-front property owner says the watershed project was not a hard sell. "It was easy because 9/10ths of the producers in the watershed either live on the lake or have property on the lake or they actively enjoy recreation on the lake, so it was important to them to keep the lake clean and improve the quality of the water."

Howard is also a member of the East Carroll Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and works hand-in-hand with the NRCS field office. The SWCD along with Eddie and

others with NRCS developed a plan and the real work began.

Howard adds, "We had such excellent cooperation with all the producers in the area." And Foster quickly agrees, "Absolutely, when we started this project, we developed an outreach plan that utilized local producers. So instead of NRCS employees going out and promoting this project we involved the SWCD board members to help spread the word, we held public meetings with producers in the watershed and then we had "producer to producer" talks. And now we have 100% participation. Everyone who farms within this watershed is participating in this MRBI project."

Foster goes on to point out that most of the participants chose to utilize cover crops, some utilized field borders, some targeted riparian areas along streams that feed into the lake and also large drainage ditches that flow into the lake.

Howard is quick to point out, "I have seen a definite improvement and so have the other residents who live around the lake. I'm encouraged by what we've seen and the progress and the participation we've experienced with MRBI."

The added benefit for the producers has been not only improvement of water



quality, but the row integrity of the land, holding the soil structure in place throughout the winter during heavy rains. Foster adds, "Producers don't have to go back in and work on their beds because the vegetation has sustained the rain and held the row integrity."

Planting cover crops in the watershed has been paramount to the success of this project. Howard goes on to say "Farmers can tell the difference planting cover crops. I've heard my neighbors mention that their rows are staying in place into the spring, whereas, before they would have to go back and re-work everything."

"In the long-run producers will see multiple benefits including soil health and improving the organic matter of the soil, which in turn, will increase productivity and decrease your inputs, so their bottom line will be a lot lower and the profit margin will be a lot higher because of the reduced inputs," explained Foster.

Although, some would argue that planting cover crops are not financially feasible. Howard states that NRCS has made it possible for him and countless others to participate. "Because of the hard financial times, without the financial assistance from NRCS most farmers would not be able to participate in this program," explained Howard.

Howard is quick to explain the benefits to any farmer thinking about planting a cover crop for the first time. "There are so many positive outcomes to cover crops including

soil health and reducing the cost of winter weed spraying."

Farming for over 28 years, Howard has worked with NRCS for about 12 years. Currently, farming corn and soybeans, he has been working with cover crops, on and off, for many years. He has also participated in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) installing irrigation pipeline, drop pipes and land leveling.

A love of his family, land and conservation runs deep for Howard. Foster points out, "Brian was one of the first farmers to participate in the Master Farmer program because he wanted to maintain, protect and enhance the resources on his family farm."

Experiencing greater productivity and reducing the outputs on his land are two incredible benefits Howard has received. But, more importantly for Howard, investing in the future of his farm is at the top of his list.

"I'm farming land that my father and grandfather bought, so it has deep rooted meaning for me. I want to keep it and leave it the best that it can be and ultimately improve it." Preserving the farm is the most important thing to me."

The Lake Providence MRBI project is a resounding success. With 100% participation from landowners, the results are clear... just take a look at the water in Lake Providence.



Aerial photo taken by Brian Howard in December 2017, showing fields of cover crops by Lake Providence.



Local field with residue left in the field and natural winter vegetation. No cover crop planted.



Local field with no residue, minimal winter vegetation and no cover crop planted after several heavy rains.

## Appendix B

# Full Participation in Conservation Practice Implementation Restores Water Quality in Lake Providence



## NONPOINT SOURCE SUCCESS STORY

# Louisiana

## Full Participation in Conservation Practice Implementation Restores Water Quality in Lake Providence

### Waterbody Improved

Runoff pollution from nearby agricultural land led to an impairment of fish and wildlife propagation (FWP) in Lake Providence, an oxbow lake in northeast Louisiana. During 2013–2014, Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) ambient monitoring data showed high total dissolved solids (TDS) and an impairment of FWP in the lake. Working with producers in the watershed, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and partners garnered 100 percent participation in conservation practice implementation, which restored water quality.

### Problem

Lake Providence, a 1,400-acre recreational lake in East Carroll Parish, lies in the Ouachita River Basin. An abandoned meander of the Mississippi River, the lake is surrounded by flat cropland and borders the town of Lake Providence (Figure 1). Data collected in 2013–2014 at the LDEQ ambient monitoring site at the Tensas Bayou bridge indicated that TDS concentrations exceeded the state's water quality standard for FWP at Lake Providence. As a result, in 2016 LDEQ added the Lake Providence TDS impairment to its Integrated Report. The assessment identified agriculture as the primary suspected source. Additionally, the Lake Providence Watershed Council stakeholder group identified soil erosion from cultivated areas as a concern to water quality in the lake in a 2016 report, *Managing Lake Providence Watershed Resources, An Interim Report to the Louisiana Legislature*. Soybeans, corn and cotton are prevalent in the watershed, and agriculture comprises 68 percent of land use in the subsegment. Runoff flows into drainage canals and tributaries that meander through farmland and drain into the lake.

### Story Highlights

In 2015, the Louisiana State Legislature created the Lake Providence Watershed Council to address degraded water quality and other local concerns related to sedimentation. The Council named USDA NRCS as a federal partner for agricultural best management practice (BMP) implementation. Lake Providence

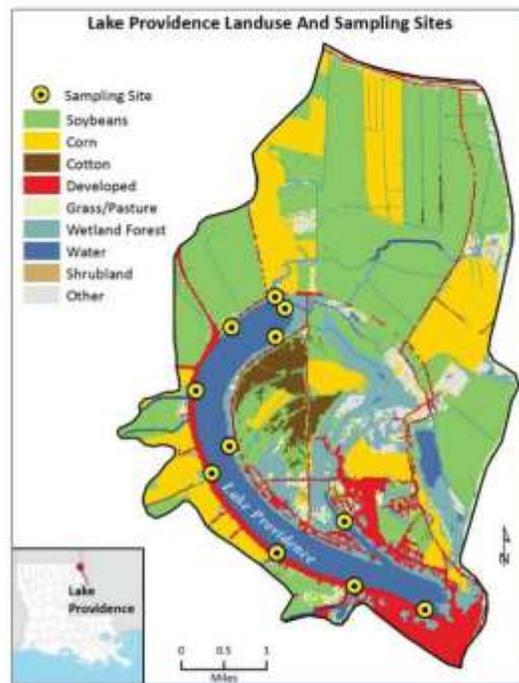


Figure 1. Lake Providence drains an agricultural watershed in northeast Louisiana.

is one of NRCS' Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative (MRBI) watersheds. LDEQ also was named as a partner and, through its Nonpoint Source Pollution Program and Water Surveys, monitored and

analyzed water quality at 11 sites around the lake to help target conservation practices.

MRBI goals include reducing soil loss and improving nutrient management through methods such as reducing fall tillage, using cover crops and/or residue, and employing better nutrient management techniques. NRCS worked with soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) in the area to develop outreach plans and implement BMPs to reduce runoff. LDEQ monitored water quality at several sites throughout the lake and presented results periodically to inform stakeholders about water quality trends and to inform partners where pollutant concentrations were highest.

From October 2016 through 2020, NRCS cooperated with the East Carroll SWCD and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) to garner 100 percent producer participation in BMP implementation on cropland draining to the lake. Because of this work, LDEQ monitoring data shows that levels of TDS have declined, which indicates the lake once again can support its FWP designated use.

## Results

NRCS, along with SWCDs and other partners, developed targeted outreach plans to reach producers. After conservation practice implementation in the Lake Providence watershed, monitoring results show water quality improvement (Figure 2). Project data and ambient data show restoration, and LDEQ removed the Lake Providence TDS water quality impairment from its 2020 draft water quality assessment.

## Partners and Funding

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, LDEQ, USDA NRCS, the East Carroll Parish SWCD, LDAF, the Lake Providence Watershed Council, stakeholders and producers are responsible for improving the water quality in Lake Providence. NRCS has expended \$2,157,876 for contracts for conservation practices on 12,393 acres; LDEQ has allocated approximately \$224,876 (\$134,926 federal and \$89,950 matching funds) for nonpoint source staff activities, water quality monitoring and analysis.

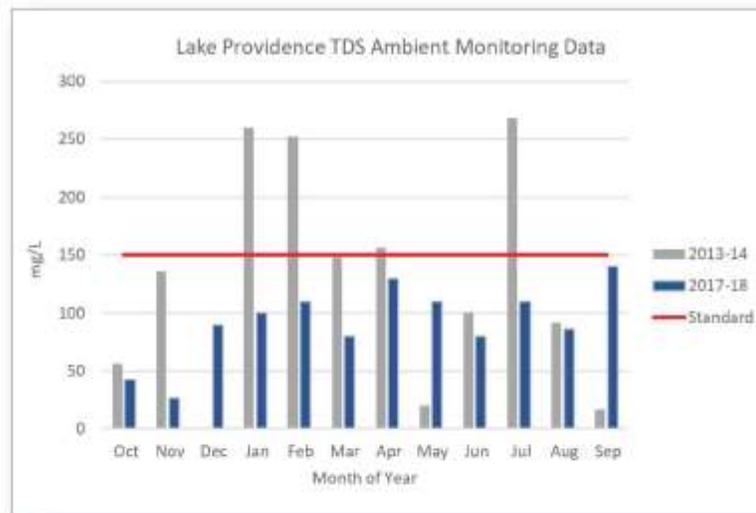


Figure 2. Ambient monitoring data show that total dissolved solids levels have declined in Lake Providence.



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Office of Water  
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