A NOTE FROM THE CEO

Dear Friends, 2015 was a tremendous year for Trailblazer RC&D and we wanted to capture it in the attached annual report. You will see that there were many lives touched and many services offered to our people through-out the last 12 months.

In this report we just wanted to present some of the highlights for the year. Entrepreneurial Development Training, USDA StrikeForce Outreach, Bistineau Task Force Support and the Water Quality Program were the major issues and more than 48 quality meetings were planned and conducted.

New seeds have been planted for 2016 and Trailblazer will move forward to greater goals and greater services for our people. Let us know what is needed in your community & we might can help.

Finally, I would like to offer special thanks to ALL who have helped and encouraged us this year.

Ellzey Simmons

Our Mission

To support a quality environment, demonstrate regional leadership, secure resources and deliver programs and services that build strong, vibrant communities where conservation and development are in balance with the needs of the people.

About Trailblazer

Trailblazer RC&D, officially authorized in 1966 and incorporated in1988, serves the following parishes in North Central Louisiana:

- Bienville Parish PJ
- Bossier Parish PJ
- Webster Parish PJ
- Claiborne Parish PJ
- Union Parish PJ
- Bank of Winnfield
- Community Trust Bank
- Diversified Timber Services
- Gibsland Bank & Trust
- Harmon Wood Co.
- Hunt Forest Products
- Louisiana Land Bank
- Molpus Woodlands Group
- Mudd & Holland Consulting Foresters
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- Progressive Bank
- Roy O Martin
- Sabine State Bank
- Timberland Services
- Walsh Timber Co
- West Fraser
- Weyerhaeuser

Forestry Industry Issues & Support
Water Quality Education & Remediation
Landowner Issues
Environmental Stewardship
Pipeline Safety Awareness
USDA Program Support
Giant Salvinia Eradication/ Bistineau Task Force
Community Outreach
Women in Agriculture
Encouragement for Entrepreneurs
Encouragement for Rural Business
Energy Savings Program
Youth Programs

Trailblazer leaders have established the following major areas of interest:
Over **1,650** people were directly reached in 2015 through the water quality program!! This includes educational presentations and field trips, also presentations at 4H events, libraries, and civic groups. Participants learned about the importance of water and protecting it from pollution such as oil, pesticides, trash, sewage, and more.
Another aspect of the water quality program is determining solutions for non-point source issues in watersheds designated by the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality. Monthly watershed tours at Nantaches Creek Watershed (the current designated watershed) have been conducted near Montgomery, La. Also, Trailblazer has organized a Forestry Best Management Practice workshop to target this area and non-point source issues associated with Nantaches Creek Watershed.

(photos from this watershed pictured below)

Two Forestry Best Management Practice Workshops were conducted in 2015 in Winn & Claiborne Parishes! These workshops were aimed at improving and protecting local water resources from non-point source pollution that could be caused from careless logging operations. 6 credits of CLE (continuing learning education) credits and 4 CFE (continuing Forestry Education credits) were offered to participants at these workshops. Detailed field tours accompanied each workshop. Continued on next page....
WQ Program: Forestry Workshops Continued...

**Workshop participants learned about:** Best Management Practices for Water Quality including information on water bars, dips, wing ditches, water control measures, SMZ’s and more. Cost share programs available to assist owners/operators of land in agricultural or forest production. Programs such as EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) and CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program) were discussed as well as information on Forestland Conservation Practices such as riparian forest buffers, stream crossings and recommended tree/shrub site preparation. Timber tips to help landowners. Wildlife considerations were also addressed in relation to forestry management and Soil Health information with an accompanying outdoor demonstration.

**Special Thanks to all of our Sponsors (listed on front page) and Partners that helped make these workshops happen! Partners Include:** Claiborne Parish Police Jury, Claiborne Parish Library, Darbonne SWCD, Dugdemona SWCD, LSU AG Center, Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Louisiana Forestry Association, USDA-NRCS and Winn Parish Library.
Our Entrepreneurial Training Program came to a close in June this year after a successful 3 years of operation. Over 2,200 people were directly reached! 26 workshops and over 50 press releases sent out!

This program was aimed at assisting budding entrepreneurs accomplish their business goals and in turn boost economic growth and stability in our parishes. Participants learned the basics at workshops and were strongly encouraged to develop a business plan as well as let us know which areas of business they needed further instruction on such as sales, marketing, accounting, etc. Mentors were on hand to help entrepreneurs with their different needs.

Special Thanks to USDA—Rural Development for funding this program!
We have applied for renewal of this program in 2016 and are hopeful of approval.

Photos below are from various workshops conducted throughout our parishes!
Trailblazer RC&D has teamed up with USDA to bring The Strikeforce Initiative to your communities with a grass-roots effort reaching over 250 people directly from October 2014 to September 2015! We are looking forward to continuing this project into 2016!

Trailblazer has operated with a locally-led approach working with police juries, community leaders, and the USDA in our 8 parishes. 2 of our StrikeForce meetings broke state records for attendance this year! With one meeting in the Caddo/Bossier area garnering over 50 attendees and the other in Minden stacking up at 80 participants! Also we’d like to thank the Louisiana Land Bank for their donations to provide refreshments for these meetings.

Evaluations are conducted after these meetings where people have a chance to rate the meeting and provide comments. We are proud to say that we always receive great feedback from participants! Some sample comments from participants are included below:

I enjoyed the meeting – Good information. I’m hoping that you all can help me.

Everything was enjoyable – I’m getting to work on it.

Receiving good information

USDA Housing has been a blessing to me and my family over the years. I couldn’t make it without them.”

“Good meeting – good attendance. All speakers – excellent job!”

“I enjoy that the speakers were direct and willing helpers.”

“All the great people that spoke and gave information with a smile and were very concerned for the people to help and did not make you feel like a number but a person.”

Winnfield, La

Arcadia, La

Farmerville, La
ABOUT STRIKEFORCE:
Currently, 85 percent of our country’s persistent poverty counties are in rural America. More than one third of rural Americans, and one in four rural children live in poverty. Kids growing up in families earning twice the poverty threshold are nearly three times as likely as other children to have poor health, are more likely to finish two fewer years of school, and are more likely to earn half as much money in their adult lives. Growing the economy by investing in rural communities and increasing opportunities for families is key to our Nation’s future. In 2010, Secretary Vilsack established USDA’s StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity to address the specific challenges associated with rural poverty. Since then, StrikeForce teams have collaborated with more than 500 community partners and public entities to bring targeted assistance to rural areas experiencing chronic poverty. These efforts have invested more than $16.5 billion to create jobs, build homes, feed kids, assist farmers and conserve natural resources across twenty states. In 2015, StrikeForce expanded to include Oklahoma and Puerto Rico. Now, USDA StrikeForce teams will operate in 880 counties in 21 states and Puerto Rico. Each StrikeForce project is a commitment to America’s economic future.

Locally-led Outreach at the heart of Strikeforce
In many instances, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers are hesitant to seek assistance from or work with federal agencies. NRCS in Louisiana is dedicated to overcoming this barrier through targeted outreach at the local level. Locally-led outreach is an effective tool to engage farmers and ranchers, provide program information, and increase program participation. Working with grassroots organizations, such as the Trailblazer Resource Conservation and Development Council, has proven to be a very effective method of targeting and maximizing outreach resources at the local level.

Special Thanks to USDA-NRCS State Conservationist Kevin Norton for his support!
THE BIG EVENT

In August 2015, Trailblazer in cooperation with the USDA, and Grambling State University conducted the 3rd Big Event!

The Big Event took place at the Black & Gold Favrot Student Union Room at Grambling State University. **Over 40** participants learned about USDA programs including information from Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, and Natural Resources Conservation Service. In addition, Attorney Paul Spillers gave a presentation on Mineral Rights and Oil and Gas leasing issues.

**Evaluation results were very positive for this event and a sample of comments received about this event are included**

“Attorney Spillers did a magnificent job in explaining the oil/gas lease information.”

“Great refreshments! Presenters very knowledgeable!”

“Everything was presented nicely.”

“The entire presentation. Everyone was so knowledgeable about their topics discussed.”

“Continue to present this event. This information is most needed.”

PIPELINE PARTNERSHIP

In the past year, Trailblazer has teamed up with Enable Midstream Partners & Boardwalk Pipeline Partners. **Our mission is to promote pipeline safety!** We would like to encourage everyone to be aware and vigilant about this issue and also to remind everyone to call *811* before doing any digging. Special thanks to Greg Terry, Boardwalk, and Roy Wise, Enable!
LANDOWNER’S WORKSHOP

Trailblazer Rural Conservation and Development in cooperation with the Bossier Parish Police Jury facilitated a Landowner’s workshop on August 29th at the Bossier Parish Community College which was designed to help landowners understand mineral rights and oil and gas leasing considerations. Attorney Paul Spillers was the presenter for this workshop.

Spillers has conducted workshops across the state and helps answer landowner questions including how to value mineral rights, how to understand mineral rights contract negotiations, the environmental impact and land value impact from extraction of mineral deposits and other mineral rights considerations. Spillers also addresses divided property and forestry issues.

We would like to give special thanks to Paul Spillers for continuing working with us in putting on these workshops! He always does an excellent job and gets great ratings and comments on meeting evaluation surveys taken up at the end of the workshop!

ALSO we would like to give special recognition of Dr. Rick Bateman, Jr., Chancellor or Bossier Parish Community College for allowing the use of the facilities as well as helping set up for this program and Billy Montgomery, Bossier Parish Police Jury, for his assistance and involvement!

**Would you like to plan a (special topic) workshop in your community in 2016? Please let us know! Contact Ellzey Simmons @ Ellzey@trailblazer.org.
In 2009, Giant Salvinia covered about 8,000 acres of Lake Bistineau. The plant had been discovered in the lake three years earlier. The La. Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF), who has responsibilities for the management of the lake, was working hard to solve the problem. Lake users and property owners were growing hostile.

In an effort to try to improve communications, the (3) Police Juries asked Trailblazer Resource Conservation and Development to help seek solutions to the growing problem. Thus the “Bistineau Task Force” was born consisting of a cooperative agreement between Bienville, Bossier, and Webster Parish Police Juries and Trailblazer Resource, Conservation, and Development (RC&D) to combat the spread and domination of the invasive Giant Salvinia in Lake Bistineau.

Meetings are held every other month up till September at the Webster Parish Courthouse in Minden, La with 5 planned meetings a year that are open to the public; public attendance and involvement are highly encouraged. Also there is a web page at www.trailblazer.org that is updated regularly on BTF matters. The public is often given a chance to voice their concerns and opinions via surveys, comment cards, access to police jury officials in their parish as well as access to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries assigned Biologist, Jeff Sibley who does an excellent job!

Accomplishments of the BTF include improved communications plus the coordination of restoration activities, education, advocacy, and citizen action.

2015 proved to be the year of the weevil: The majority of lake stakeholders were convinced of the potential of the salvinia weevil to be one of the best options for salvinia control and thus there was a major effort to “grow” weevils in large quantities to be released into the lake.

“A year for the weevil: 2015 proved to be a tremendous amount of acceptance and acknowledgement of the need for biological controls such as the weevil along with other methods of control” - Ellzey Simmons

A weevil project was implemented on a small scale by BTF member, Pete Camp. He along with others was able to secure some weevils for release in a controlled “inlet” area of the lake on his property for study. Lee Eisenburg was the scientist employed to research and monitor this project. Fundraising also continued to promote and keep this project going; Lake Bistineau residents have been very willing to help with a solution whether through “hands-on” or financial means. Producing weevils on a mass scale will still be on the forefront in the coming year.

Overall, the main mission of the BTF is to keep the lines of communication open between the public, LDWF and local parish governing bodies. Being able to come together and discuss these issues as well as keeping everyone informed on the status of the lake has proved to be an effective measure that insures that the fight to save and maintain Lake Bistineau will not die.
In 2015, we had a group of folks that we would like to recognize who went above and beyond the “call of duty” to help Trailblazer. This includes volunteering their time, service, expenses as well as readily being on board with donations for our various workshops and general support of Trailblazer.

THANKS FOR HELPING TRAILBLAZER SUCCEED!

Danny Suggs, USDA-NRCS

Holly Martien, Retired USDA-NRCS

Roy Wise, Enable Midstream Partners

Paul Spillers, Attorney

Billy Montgomery, Bossier Parish Police Jury

Dexter Sapp, USDA-NRCS

Jerri Lee, Webster Parish Police Jury

Vera Davison, Webster Parish Police Jury

Brian Wade, Progressive Bank

Marcel Vandenoord, Louisiana Land Bank

Tim Holland, Mudd & Holland Consulting Foresters, LLC.

Trailblazer Board of Directors