

Conservation easements in Arkansas



A 41-acre easement helps protect the entrance to Sherfield Cave as well as a tributary to the Buffalo National River.

Sherfield Cave, Ozark Mountains

PUBLIC BENEFITS

- Protects Indiana bats (federally listed endangered)
- Helps protect a national river

PRIVATE BENEFITS

- Fencing will be erected to curb trespassing
- Revenue from sale of development rights

When Jane Anderson learned that Arkansas's largest colony of Indiana bats hibernated in Sherfield Cave, the entrance to which is located on her property, she worked with The Nature Conservancy to place an easement on 41 acres of her land. The easement helps protect the cave, which had seen many trespassers in the past and limits potential disturbances during the bats' winter hibernation. Anderson's dedication to the cave and bats inspired her neighbors to sell 1,225 acres above the cave to the

Conservancy. The acquisition helps protect the water that flows through and seeps into the cave, as well as the bats' foraging and roosting area. The tract also linked land on the Buffalo National River with the Ozark National Forest.

"I was very happy to work with the Conservancy to help protect the cave as well as the endangered bats that hibernate in it. What was most appealing to me was the thought that by working with The Nature Conservancy, the cave, the bats and the land will be protected for generations to come."

- Jane Anderson

ARKANSAS AT A GLANCE

3,750	acres under conservation easement with The Nature Conservancy
700	acres under conservation easement with local and regional land trusts
71,600	acres of prime agricultural land lost between 1992 and 1997
100,000	acres of pine forests converted per year to plantation forest in southern Arkansas

ABOUT CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Conservation easements are one of the most powerful, effective tools available for the conservation of private lands. Their use has successfully protected millions of acres of wildlife habitat and open space, and hundreds of miles of rivers, all while keeping property in private hands and generating significant public benefits.

Often, some of the most ecologically significant lands and waters in the country are those found in rural and agricultural landscapes. Easements have been instrumental in preserving these landscapes, from family farms to working ranches and timberlands. Between 1992 and 1997, more than 11 million acres of rural land in the United States were converted to developed use – an area five times the size of Yellowstone National Park. As people struggle to keep family farms and ranches together in the face of steep taxes and unpredictable markets, conservation easements are often the tool of choice.

Conservation easements in Arkansas have helped protect wetlands in the Mississippi River Delta and the huge populations of ducks that winter in them, as well as pine and hardwood forests, native prairies, caves and waterways around the state.

Public benefits of conservation easements

- Protect water quality
- Conserve wildlife habitat
- Preserve open space
- Preserve farmland, ranchland, timberland
- Maintain character of rural communities
- Buffer public lands
- Maintain landscapes for tourism
- Require less in public services, generate more in local revenues



A conservation easement on the Smith Tract in southwest Arkansas allows for restoration of native blackland prairie. © TNC

A.D. Smith Tract, Blackland Prairie

PUBLIC BENEFITS

- Conserves a rare ecosystem
- Buffers Grandview Prairie Wildlife Management Area
- Habitat for potential reintroduction of native animals
- Aids landscape-scale restoration

LANDOWNER BENEFITS

- Improved habitat for game animals
- Helps address erosion problems

A.D. Smith's desire to help conserve a rare ecosystem led him to donate a 400-acre easement to The Nature Conservancy in 2002. Smith's land is part of the blackland prairie, a landscape of woodlands interspersed with open prairies underlain by deep, fertile soil. Over the past 200 years, blackland prairies have been widely converted to agricultural uses. Here in southwest Arkansas, most of the prairies are now cattle-grazing pastures seeded with Bermuda grass and containing very little biodiversity. Smith's land is significant because it adjoins the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's Grandview Prairie Wildlife Management Area, which is one of the largest publicly owned blackland prairies in the nation. Working with Smith, the Conservancy has developed restoration and stewardship plans for the Smith tract, and Smith has been interested in restoring species that once thrived in the Arkansas blacklands, such as prairie chickens and bison.

“Much of the blackland prairies that have been converted to cattle pastures or farmlands have been heavily eroded. Restoring the native prairies **should help to prevent erosion problems in the future and the water pollution problems caused by the erosion.**”

- A.D. Smith



We use conservation easements because they are a cost-effective and highly efficient conservation tool on private lands.

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