

BIRDING FROG BAYOU WMA & VICINITY IN THE ARKANSAS VALLEY (updated 2017)



NOTE: Frog has been expanded with new acquisitions. See map at end.

Frog Bayou Wildlife Management Area (WMA) includes 812 + acres. It is located in the Arkansas River Valley, right along the Arkansas River, south of the Alma-Dyer area. Frog Bayou was established in 2005 by Arkansas Game & Fish Commission in partnership with Ducks Unlimited and the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service.

You reach the main area of Frog by turning south off US 64 onto River Road, just east of Dyer (watch for a brown AG & F sign at the intersection of 64 & River Road). The paved part of River

Road becomes a sandy but drivable (except during periods of heavy rain!) farm road south to the Arkansas River. There are creeks, forest edge, and bean fields along the way. See note at end about heavy rain and roads in this area.

Frog is a former farm turned into a wetland restoration project. Moist soil units have been created with low levees. These are operated as shallow impoundments during late fall and winter to attract waterfowl. Besides the moist soil units, other land has been planted in hardwoods such as cypress and willow oak. About 40 acres are forested. Lying right along the Arkansas River, Frog is a good place to scan up and down the river for water birds. One unit (on Sharp Chapel Road) is separated from the main tract.

We are still learning how to effectively bird Frog. The moist units are all behind locked gates. We park in the areas provided, then walk the levees. Parking areas provide starting points for walking on the levees in order to scan ponds. The suggested walk on the map totals 1.2 miles.

Heading south from Dyer on River Road: there is a parking area as you arrive on the WMA and nearby moist soil units. Walk the levees and scan the ponds, fields, and adjacent

River Road makes a "T" with Denman Road. If you turn left (east, downriver) there is a boat ramp and a broad view of the mighty Arkansas. If you turn right (west) onto Denman, there are also good river views. Denman Road heads northwest away from the river and becomes Red Hill Rd when you reach the pavement. BUT just past the intersection of Denman and River Road, a sharp left (west) turn onto a 2-track road reaches another parking area and more moist soil units. A frequent rail hunter who visits this area has found many Soras, a lower number of Virginia Rails, and on October 20, 2016, a Yellow Rail. He walks through the wetlands and uses a dog, but just a walk is productive.

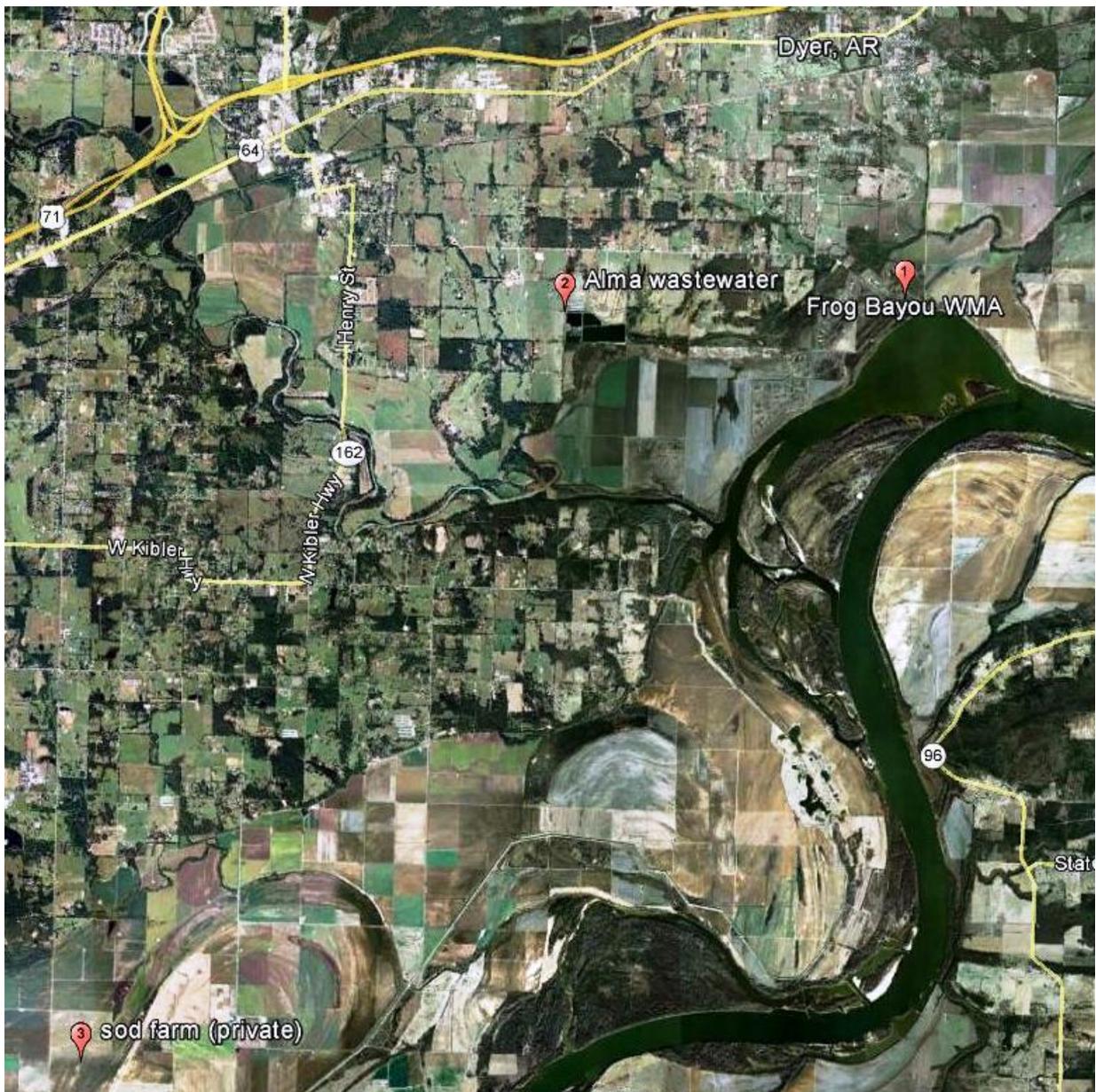
The Frog unit on Sharp Chapel Road cannot be reached from this general area. It is associated with Clear Creek Park just to the west and requires driving west on Red Hill Rd, then south back towards the river on Sharp Chapel Road. **DO NOT DRIVE IF ROAD IS WET!**

Painted Buntings sing during summer from riparian forests along River Road heading into Frog and along the forest edge. Bell's Vireos sing from thickets along the river. Yellow Warblers occur in the riparian forests along the river. Least Terns nest on sandy islands in the river and can be seen and heard overhead during the nesting season.

Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Cattle Egret, Green Heron, and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron all nest nearby and forage in the moist soil wetlands. Blue-winged Teal and Pied-billed Grebes have nested at Frog. Interesting transients are also present. In August 2010, both White and White-faced Ibises were found here, along with the more common herons and egrets, plus migrants like Willet, Black-bellied Plover, Upland Sandpiper,

and Buff-breasted Sandpiper. We have seen a family group of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons foraging on crawfish in the moist soil units. There are a few records for King Rails. Nesting by Least Bitterns is confirmed in big cattail patches.

Birders are always welcome, BUT remember that Frog is a wildlife management area with a lot of activity during hunting seasons (wear orange and respect the hunters!). Otherwise, birders pretty much have it to themselves. For additional information, contact AG & F's Ft. Smith Regional Office toll-free at 1-877-478-1043. You can download a very detailed map of Frog from the AG & F website.



OTHER BIRDING OPPORTUNITIES. A trip to Frog Bayou WMA can also include birding adjacent areas. Private landowners vary from friendly & curious to suspicious, hostile & confrontational. There are roads that access gas well sites. These roads are rarely posted, but they are all on private property and best avoided.

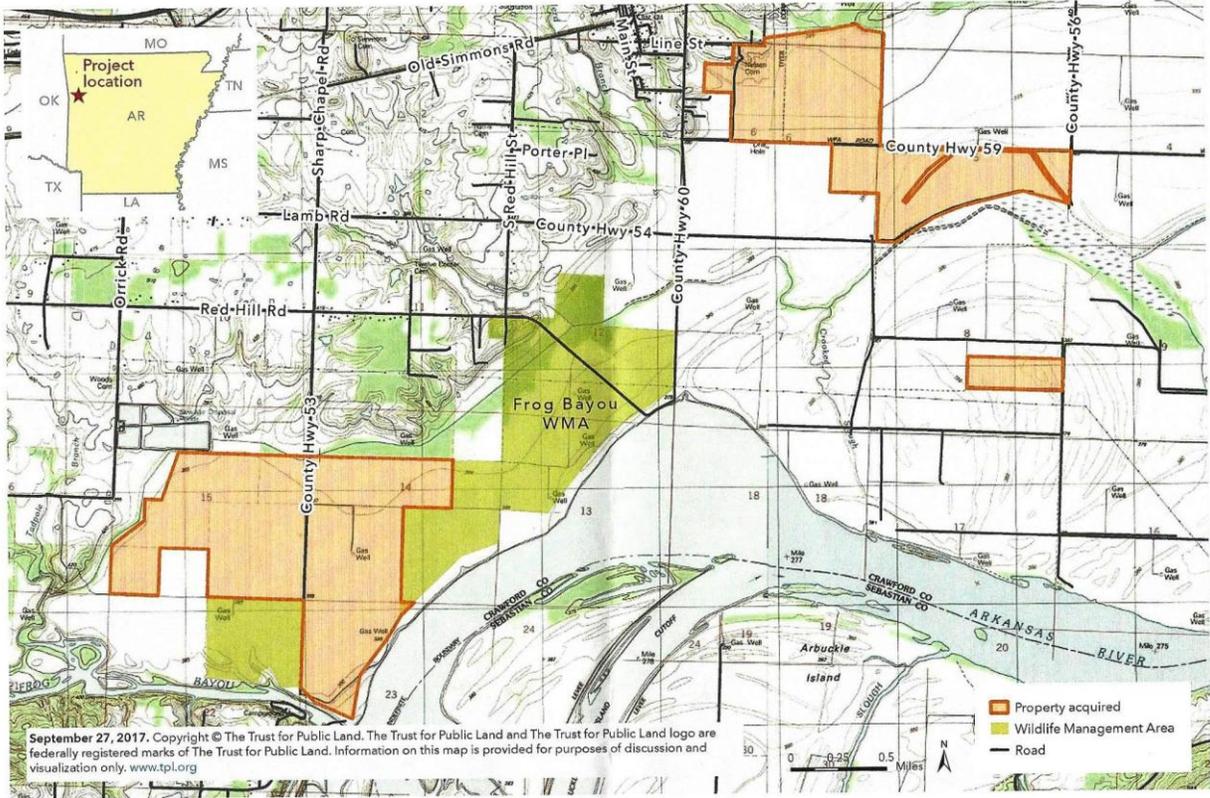
Sod farms in the Arkansas River Valley have been productive for various grassland birds, especially for nesting birds like Horned Larks, and transients like Upland and Buff-breasted Sandpipers. BUT the sod farms are private property, so confine your observations to the public roads unless you first obtain permission. We have often birded West-Ark Sod, at the corner of Westville and Crawford Roads, west of Frog Bayou (number 3 on the map). The farm is south of Kibler and most easily reached via Thornhill Road or Westville Road.

Bill Beall and others from Fort Smith have found Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks regularly in the vicinity of the Alma wastewater treatment plant (posted, but some ponds can be viewed from Orrick Road (turn S off Red Hill Rd) and the King Ranch (private property) west of Orrick on Red Hill Rd, both near Frog Bayou (number 2 above; on a detailed map these sites are near the intersection of Orrick and Red Hill roads). There is no public access to either property, but both Orrick and Red Hill are public roads and provide opportunities to view ponds in the area. South of the sewer ponds Orrick turns right (west) into Hamer Rd. Hamer Rd continues west to Ark 162. Turn left (S) to Kibler. Turn right (N) to Alma and I40.

NOTE: the “heavy rain” problem is no joke: the sandy roads can become impassable, so check the weather and watch out for bottomless mudholes on farm roads in the area. Sandy Berger of Fort Smith, who has regularly birded the Arkansas River Valley, sent me a note with this caution: “The whole place can be impassable if the river is flooded. Last summer we had very heavy rains, as did Oklahoma. Drove over there a couple of times, forgetting about the rains, only to find everything under water. We couldn't get to any of the units at parking lot B and couldn't get very far past A. So visitors must pay attention to what's going on with the river. It'd be a real drag to get there from far away only to find the place covered in water.”

--Joe Neal (with help from Bill Beall and Sandy Berger) March 2012; updated September 2017

NOTE: Map below shows properties acquired in 2017. This expansion mainly involves land on Sharp Chapel Road and Blackland Road.



Frog Bayou WMA

CRAWFORD COUNTY, ARKANSAS

