

ALABAMA'S

TREASURED FORESTS

A Publication of the Alabama Forestry Commission



Issue No. 1 - 2024



ALABAMA

FOREST

I'D RATHER BE IN THE WOODS

Alabama TREASURE Forest Association




TIMBER, RECREATION, ENVIRONMENT, AESTHETICS, SUSTAINABLE, USABLE, RESOURCE

The Alabama TREASURE Forest Association is dedicated to promoting good forest stewardship, educating others about responsible forest management and improving the forests of our state and nation. These lands are managed for many resources, including wildlife habitat, pine and hardwood timber, clean water, recreation opportunities and beautiful scenery. When utilizing a multiple-use management strategy, all of the benefits a forest provides are enhanced.

We are passionate about making our land better for the next generation. In a very real way, the future of Alabama's forests rests in the hands of landowners and like-minded individuals who support good forest stewardship. You can be a part of that effort. Purchase an "I'd rather be in the woods!" tag and support education and outreach efforts to raise awareness about the wonderful possibilities of sustainable land management.



TREASUREForest.org

ALABAMA'S
**TREASURED
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On the Cover:
Little tree frog peeps out
from a pitcher plant.
Photo by Patrick Thompson

This publication is provided at no charge to the forest landowners of Alabama, with a circulation of approximately 13,000. Published four times each year, the magazine is filled with forestry information and technical assistance designed to assist landowners in making informed decisions about the management practices they apply to their land. Articles and photographs are contributed by AFC employees and other forestry or natural resources professionals.

Alabama's TREASURED Forests magazine is also available on-line! www.forestry.alabama.gov



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The publication of a story or article in this magazine does not constitute the Alabama Forestry Commission's endorsement of that particular practice, product, or company, but is an effort to provide forest landowners of Alabama with information and technical assistance to make informed decisions about the management practices they apply to their land. The Alabama Forestry Commission is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

Message from the STATE FORESTER

MINUTES FROM THE STATE COMMISSION OF FORESTRY - January 15, 1924

The meeting of the State Commission of Forestry that was to be held on January 10, 1924, was postponed, through correspondence, and pursuant to call a meeting of the Commission was held at the office of the Governor on Tuesday, January 15, 1924, at 2:30 P.M.



Rick Oates, State Forester

The following members were present:

Governor Wm. W. Brandon, ex-officio Chairman
J. Lee Long, Greenville, Ala. | John L. Kaul, Birmingham, Ala.
W. M. Spencer, Gallion, Ala. | E.F. Allison, Bellamy, Ala.

Governor Brandon stated that the purpose of the meeting was to carry out the resolution adopted at the previous meeting to select a State Forester.

These seven applicants appeared before the Commission:

Harry Lee Baker, Lynchburg, Va.	John J. Cathey, Gadsden, Ala.
E. Murry Bruner, Asheville, N.C.	H. S. Newins, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Page S. Bunker, Texas	H. L. Russell, Lynchburg, Va.
Clarence H. Burrage, Demorest, Ga.	

At the conclusion of the examination of applicants, Col. J. Lee Long, of Greenville, moved the election of Major Page S. Bunker of Texas as State Forester, at a salary of \$3300.00 per annum, payable monthly. This motion was seconded by Mr. John L. Kaul of Birmingham. The Commission unanimously elected Page S. Bunker of Texas as State Forester.

So, with the hiring of Major Bunker as the first state forester of Alabama, the Alabama Forestry Commission officially started work on the mission that was given them by the passage of the Forestry Act of 1923. That is why 2024 will be a significant year for the agency. WE TURN 100!

On April 10, 1924, the Commissioners authorized the State Forester to hire:

1 Clerk or stenographer at a compensation not exceeding.....	\$125 per month,
1 Clerk at a compensation not exceeding	\$200 per month,
1 Agent at a compensation not exceeding	\$250 per month,
1 Agent at a compensation not exceeding	\$175 per month,
60 Rangers or Patrolmen at a compensation not exceeding.....	\$135 per month,
3 Inspectors at a compensation not exceeding	\$225 per month.

At that same meeting...

Mr. Kaul moved that an allotment of not to exceed \$35000 be made for fire protection work for the Federal fiscal year beginning July 1, 1924. The motion was seconded by Mr. LaMaistre. Motion carried.

While it may seem silly to look back at the old minutes from our Commission meetings, I find it to be a fascinating way to better understand our history. During our centennial year, we intend to take a close look at the history of the Alabama Forestry Commission and how we have developed over the years. We will have numerous events to observe this occasion for our employees, landowners, elected leaders, and others who have been, and continue to be, impacted by the work this agency does. So, stay tuned in 2024 to see what events will be held near you, and participate when you can. Also, be sure to tell our employees "Happy Birthday!"

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Kay Ivey

ALABAMA FORESTRY COMMISSION
Jane T. Russell, Chair
Chris Langley, Vice Chair
Caroleene Dobson
Robert P. Sharp
Thornton Stanley
Robert N. Turner
Joseph H. Twardy

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Rick Oates

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The Alabama Forestry Commission supports the Alabama Natural Resources Council's TREASURE Forest program. *Alabama's TREASURED Forests* magazine, published by the Alabama Forestry Commission, is intended to further encourage participation in and acceptance of this program by landowners in the state, offering valuable insight on forest management according to TREASURE Forest principles. TREASURE is an acronym that stands for Timber, Recreation, Environment, and Aesthetics for a Sustained Usable REsource.



“
...their hearts still belonged to “Alabama the Beautiful”
”

Deer Step

By Mollie Kate Erwin, Communications & PR Intern, Alabama Forestry Commission

Sprawling across gorgeous acreage in Lauderdale County rests the 2023 Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award winner “Deer Step.” Brian and Kathy Burgess are the proud owners of Deer Step and have been since 2015. While their careers had taken them to Texas, their hearts still belonged to “Alabama the Beautiful,” which led to the original purchase of 1,500 acres to develop a family property. Always vacationing at various state parks and scenic areas, Brian and Kathy’s admiration of the outdoors has been a staple aspect of their relationship for many decades, so it only felt natural to make the purchase. The property was well-loved but had been neglected and required some work. The Burgesses dove in headfirst and never looked back.

From day one, they sought guidance from various agencies and organizations to ensure that good forest management practices were implemented, including the Alabama Forestry Commission, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, as well as consulting foresters and wildlife biologists. Some of the individuals who aided them were even the same people who helped Brian’s dad many years ago!

Their initial objective at the time of purchase was timber when the makeup of the land was 75 percent hardwoods and 25 percent pine plantations. Ten percent of the hardwoods were removed and replaced with shortleaf pines which are native to the area but not

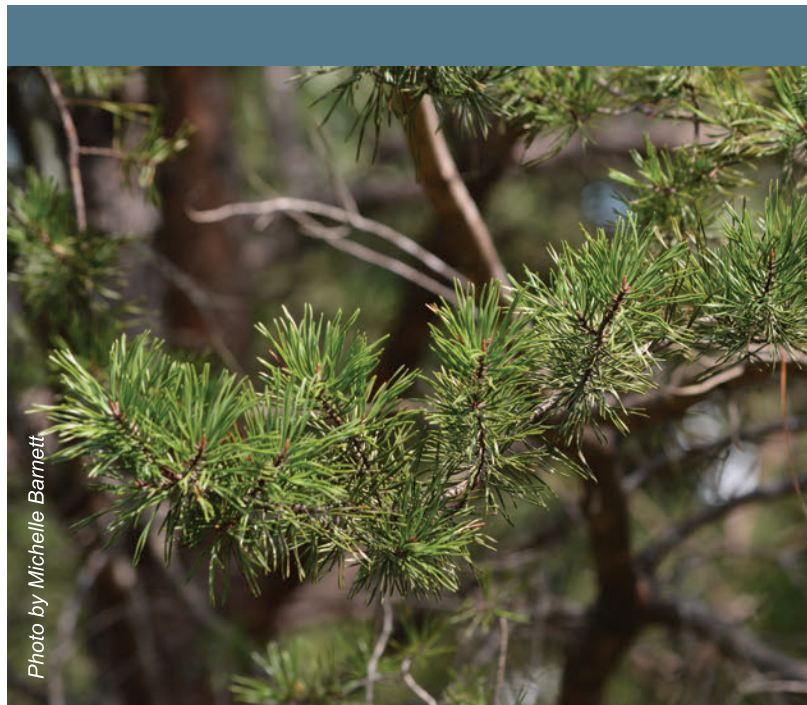


Photo by Michelle Barnett

(Continued on page 6)

Deer Step

(Continued from page 5)

commonly found. The primary timber objective has carried well over the last eight years with a large portion of the property being a mix of white oak and other hardwoods, shortleaf, and loblolly pines. They have visions of restoring some of the land into a Pine Savannah as it was many years ago.

Brian especially values the importance of prescribed burning. He enjoys carrying out the process and reaping the benefits in the following months. He found the Prescribed Burn Manager Certification program especially helpful to ensure he is always safe and productive while burning. Through managing the forests, the family receives the immediate satisfaction of watching the flora and fauna thrive, while the long-term goal remains timber investment.

Throughout the course of ownership another objective has emerged: wildlife. The Burgesses love providing better habitats to foster growth in wildlife populations on their property and in



Photos by Michelle Barnett



Persimmon tree & fruit from Deer Step's orchard



Photo by Kelvin Daniels

the community. This love of wildlife translated into the start of a local cooperative that forges an agreement among dozens of landowners to improve their properties for the benefit of wildlife habitats. At their most recent gathering they had more than 40 forest landowners in attendance totaling approximately 20,000 acres of land in Lauderdale County. A special guest speaker was also in attendance promoting the benefits of TREASURE Forest.

The Burgesses want their neighbors and friends to understand what they have come to realize, that the choices they make as individual landowners impact all the citizens of Alabama. By coming together and brainstorming ideas on how to improve, not only do the landowners benefit, but the citizens of their county do as well. They lead by example, creating designated wildlife areas and planting various fruit trees for an ample food source including apple, pear, persimmons, and even blueberries and plums in the orchard. The turkey population may be declining across the country, but not at Deer Step; they are experiencing record high populations for the property. Brian and Kathy also wish to reestablish the bobwhite quail which has been a point of excitement in the family, along with the sightings of white tail deer.

Instilling the responsibility in the next generation of the importance of conservation and land management is also very important to the Burgesses. They have hosted field days and youth hunts to commit to this value of theirs. They plan to host more events in the future after the completion of several projects to make the property a safer and more enjoyable environment for the kids. Part of the property borders the Tennessee River providing enjoyment and recreation in abundance. The property also features several streams and a pond with plans of expansion in the future. Along with these amazing water aspects, the property contains about 20 miles of hiking trails for the more adventurous spirits.



Becoming landowners has been a dream 20 years in the making. Even as young children, Brian and Kathy both have early memories of being outside and loving nature. Brian recalls running along a creek until his dad would whistle for dinner. Kathy lovingly carries the philosophy her parents instilled in her from a young age to leave God’s earth better than she found it. It is with these memories in mind that they want this property to become a generational labor of love, creating those same memories at Deer Step for their daughter and her family. Their granddaughters have really taken to the place. Even with all the available big-city entertainment, the girls prefer to be out in nature. They especially love ‘riding the land’ and watching the variety of wildlife in its natural habitat, particularly the butterflies, for which they have recently created habitat by planting assorted wildflowers. When they are not riding utility vehicles around the property, they sit in a stand to observe which creatures and critters will come close.

Something special that Brian and Kathy have done as a commitment to the idea of a generational property is planting a tree for each of the girls. When Kathy was young, a tree was planted for her and her friend, and they took a picture in front of it anytime they were together. Over the years, the girls can take photos with their special trees, watching the trees grow as they themselves grow..

Brian and Kathy credit much of their success to everyone that has helped them along the way. They like to think of the Helene Moseley recognition as a “community award,” feeling extremely privileged to receive this honor but also knowing they would not be where they are today without the many agencies who provided insights, advice, and helped to grow them as landowners. After having spent time here, Brian and Kathy have come to realize that this is a place to appreciate the little things they don’t get to enjoy in Houston. To start her day, Kathy loves to wake up and watch the wildlife in the mornings. They enjoy sitting on the porch and listening to the songbirds and the crickets at nighttime. These little things that are often taken for granted are thoroughly enjoyed at Deer Step.

The advice they wish to share with any forest landowners just starting out is to have patience; everything cannot be accomplished in a day, or even a year or two. Good things take time. The value of a well-thought-out plan is priceless. And finally, utilize the great resources that are available in Alabama. The Burgesses plan to retire at Deer Step and are excited for the many opportunities the future holds. 🏡



Photos by Michelle Barnett



Photo by Elishia Ballentine

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of TREASURE Forest!

By Tim Albritton

Retired State Staff Forester | USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service | Alabama

Martin's Meadows TREASURE Forest in Monroe County
Photo by Michelle Barnett

Fifty years ago, a group of state leaders in natural resources began framing an idea. The concept was to develop a program to recognize private landowners for practicing good stewardship and multiple use management. That program was named TREASURE Forest. If you're reading this article, you're holding a copy of *Alabama's TREASURED Forests* magazine in your hands, which means you are probably already familiar with the program. However, for those who do not know, TREASURE is an acronym that stands for Timber, Recreation, Environment, Aesthetics, for a Sustained Usable REsource.

To create this program, it took the collaborative efforts of a team of people from several agencies. These agencies and their staffs worked tirelessly over the next year or two to draft, field test, develop guidance, and ultimately roll out the program to the public.

Final approval came from the Alabama Forestry Planning Committee (now the Alabama Natural Resources Council) in October of 1974. The very first TREASURE Forest certification was awarded to W. Kelly Mosley for his "Pineland" property in Marengo County near the Myrtlewood community. Mr. Mosley went on to have a significant impact on the TREASURE Forest Program and forestry as a whole.



It is hard to put into words the impact the TREASURE Forest Program has had on the image of forestry in Alabama. The TREASURE Forest concept was used as the model for the national Forest Stewardship Program that is still being used in many states.

The first TREASURE Forest certification was awarded to W. Kelly Mosley for his "Pineland" property in Marengo County

The program has also had an incredibly positive impact on the natural resources of the state. Thousands of private forest landowners have voluntarily endeavored to make on-the-ground accomplishments to improve wildlife habitat, enhance forest health, increase recreational opportunities, improve aesthetics, and much more.

TREASURE Forest certification is earned by private landowners who display their commitment to manage their forestland for multiple use on a sustainable basis. This recognition program includes a numbered and signed TREASURE Forest certificate, as well as a TREASURE Forest sign to display on the property. When the award is given, the land is called a certified TREASURE Forest and the landowner is called a TREASURE Forest landowner. Since the inception of the TREASURE Forest Program in 1974, more than 2,241 TREASURE Forests have been certified, collectively totaling approximately 1.98 million acres of Alabama forestland.

The program has also brought foresters and wildlife biologists together with private forest landowners to work in partnership and provide professional recommendations for land management. This unique facet of the program is significant in that it helps provide an on-going relationship between the landowner and natural resource professionals that lasts for years in many cases.

TREASURE Forest has truly made an impact in our state over 50 years and is deserving of a celebration! To recognize this mile-

stone in the history of the TREASURE Forest Program, the Alabama Natural Resources Council (ANRC) will host a celebratory event at the Alabama Landowner Conference in October of 2024. Information on these events will be posted on all the agency web sites and social media outlets associated with the ANRC and published in *Alabama's TREASURED Forests* magazine. We invite the public to join us in this 'uniquely Alabama' program. 🏠



New TREASURE Forest Certifications

Created in 1974 by the Alabama Forestry Commission under the vision of former State Forester Bill Moody, TREASURE Forest designation is earned by private forest landowners who affirm the principles of multiple-use forest management. It is this forest landowner recognition program that inspired the national Forest Stewardship Program which began in 1991. TREASURE is an acronym for Timber, Recreation, Environment, and Aesthetics for a Sustained Usable Resource.

Congratulations to these landowners who recently earned their TREASURE Forest certifications! 🏡

Landowner	County
<i>Frank Brown</i>	<i>Calhoun</i>
<i>Theodore Gilbert</i>	<i>Barbour</i>
<i>John Kennedy</i>	<i>Pike</i>
<i>Mary Moran</i>	<i>Monroeville</i>
<i>Eric O'Bryan</i>	<i>Henry</i>
<i>James Reynolds</i>	<i>Pike</i>
<i>Horace Ward</i>	<i>Winston</i>



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A Look Back in Time at a Priceless Gift

*By Joel Neighbors, Retired AFC Forestry Specialist, Coosa County;
Roger Vines, Retired Agent, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Coosa County;
and Blake Kelley, Retired AFC Forester, Coosa County*

The TREASURE Forest program has enjoyed great success in the state of Alabama, due in large part to the tireless efforts of its county forestry planning committees. The professionals and landowners who give their time and effort to serve on these committees are to be commended. The three of us were personally involved with the Coosa County Forestry Planning committee for many years. This article is an attempt to pay tribute to those who have served, and an encouragement for others to do likewise.

At least one of us is a NASCAR fan, who likes to compare the formation of the Coosa County Forestry Planning Committee to the creation of a new race team. Believe it or not, NASCAR is truly a team sport. When a new NASCAR team is organized and all the team members are selected, the hope is that the ‘chemistry’ will be there for them to work together in unison. If all the members’ individual strengths can somehow mesh without conflict for a team effort, good and possibly great things can happen. Races can be won. If the chemistry is really good, championships can be won!

In 1988 a new forestry planning committee was formed in Coosa County and the ‘chemistry’ was definitely good. The team jelled and worked together for years promoting the TREASURE Forest concept and 4-H youth activities. Many TREASURE For-

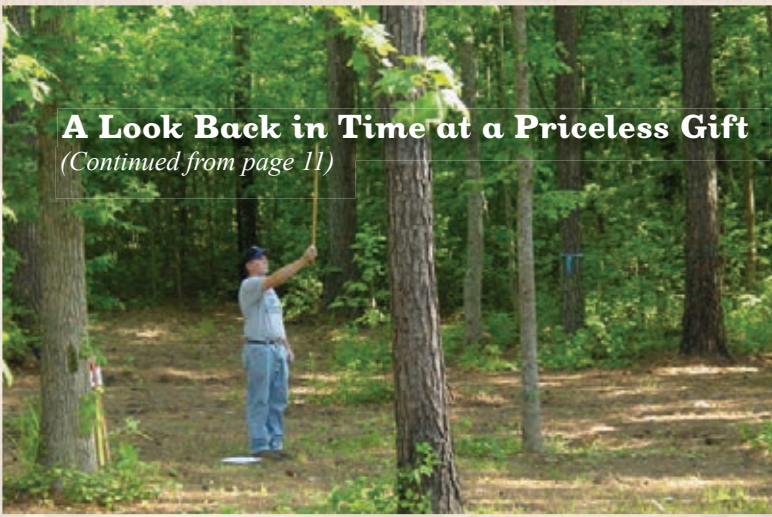
ests were certified and yes, many state and national 4-H forestry and wildlife judging championships were won!

TREASURE Forest Success

What does it mean to have a TREASURE Forest? It’s the title of the magazine after all! In a nutshell, it is managing a piece of property for multiple objectives in an exemplary manner. The TREASURE Forest recognition was the benchmark and model for most, if not all, national landowner certification programs. Coosa County was the benchmark for the benchmark. The best of the best, that was Coosa County. Once assembled, the Coosa County team hit on all cylinders! The program was so successful because it was embraced by the community. Along the way, many landowners were assisted and educated. Those landowners then reached out to other landowners, and it just kept growing. Affecting landscape-scale change is all the talk in the forest management world today. This team was ahead of its time, reaching a group of landowners and influencing landscape-scale change. When the team members began to retire, Coosa County led the way in the number of TREASURE Forest certifications. The next generation of the “team” has continued and is still in the lead today with 125 TREASURE Forest certifications. This outpaces the next closest county by close to 30! *(Continued on page 12)*

A Look Back in Time at a Priceless Gift

(Continued from page 11)



4-H Success

The 4-H Club program has been around since 1909 as the youth outreach arm of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, teaching young people skills through project work such as canning, cooking, raising livestock, woodworking, citizenship, public speaking, and much more. By the 1990s, a couple new programs came along called Forestry Judging and Wildlife Habitat Judging to provide training in natural resources management. The Forestry Planning Committee served as the perfect partner in these activities. Over the years that followed, Coosa County has found much success in both programs.

In the forestry program, students learn tree identification, timber measurement, compass and pacing, forest diseases, and basic forestland management. The wildlife program involves learning about wildlife identification, wildlife foods, habitat management practices, and developing land management plans. These are skills they may one day use in a career or even in managing their own lands.

The judging teams are comprised of junior teams (9-13 years of age) and senior teams (ages 14-18). Teams compete in district and state events, and then the state-winning senior team moves on to the national competition. From 1987 to 2007, the youth from this small county won 15 state championships and six national championships (three in forestry and three in wildlife), plus several teams placed second or third at the national events. This is a result of hard work by these young people and the diligent training by members of the county planning committee.

A few of the members of this 'dream team' included Joel Glover, Wildlife Biologist with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; Blake Kelley, Buddy Adcox, Ricky Porch, and Joel Neighbors with the Alabama Forestry Commission; Melinda Luker and Roger Vines, Alabama Cooperative Extension System; Annette Spivey, Coosa County Soil and Water Conservation District; Raymond and Sarah Shaw, Doug McConnell, Sarah Baldwin, and many other local landowners. These individuals gave it their all and realized that perhaps the best thing Coosa County had to offer its youth was the great outdoors. Perhaps no one realized the long-term impact the team's influence would have on the lives of these 'kids,' many of which went on to pursue a successful career in natural resource fields. Now, more than twenty years later, here is what a few of those 'kids' have to say:

"The older I get, the more I am convinced God puts certain people in your life at specific points in time. Growing up, I had the privilege of being on several 4-H teams coached by Mr. Joel Glover, Mr. Roger Vines, and Mr. Blake Kelley. Their passion for conservation, wildlife habitat, and public service affected me in a profound way, and their mentorship influenced my career and my life. Today I serve as the Wildlife and Rare Plants Program Manager for the National Forests in Alabama, and I even had the opportunity to work alongside Mr. Joel on the TREASURE Forest Committee for a few years. I've had the honor of helping manage some of Alabama's most unique natural resources, and I will forever be grateful for the teaching, guidance, and inspiration they gave me."

Ryan Shurette, Wildlife Biologist, USDA Forest Service

"The time and dedication this group of people provided to us as young kids was invaluable. Yes, I learned about forestry and wildlife, but they also helped me gain confidence and courage which created a strong foundation that carried me into a career in forest management. For this, I am forever grateful."

Jessica Kelley Blackwell, Forester, USDA Forest Service

"The program taught as much about leadership as it did natural resources. The two led me into a field, and eventually a business, that has taken me places I would have never found otherwise. I'm forever indebted to the men and women that volunteered their time, knowledge, and unwittingly groomed a generation of successful kids. Because of them, things have just come 'natural.'"

Will Neighbors, Biologist, Wildland Services



“Joel’s famous line when he introduced me to someone was ‘he was one of my 4-H kids.’ Although I did not take a career path in forestry/wildlife like others did, I gained a wealth of knowledge from these individuals in managing my own property. Without the help and recommendations from these men, my family and I would not have been able to create the truly ‘treasured forest’ we have today. Not only were these individuals helpful in managing our property, but I also consider each one to be a dear friend. We have spent countless hours in the woods together discussing projects, hunting, etc. As I think back, each one of these guys had families of their own and had other things on their plate. However, each one of them made sure their ‘4-H kids’ were taken care of. They made sure the kids of Coosa County were introduced to the outdoors and knew what it had to offer. They all truly love Coosa County and want nothing but the best for it.”

Philip Neighbors, Tallapoosa County Engineer

“I learned so much from this group of mentors in my formative years about all the tools you will need to be successful in life. Some of these being attention to detail, the spirit of competition, turkey hunting, and luck. There was a lot of luck in all those wins we racked up in 4-H, however they always told us that luck is where preparation and opportunity meet. I have never forgotten about that ‘luck’ now in my 22nd year with the Alabama Forestry Commission.”

John Goff, Forest Protection Division Director, AFC

“At the time, I took for granted the selfless hours these men and women spent mentoring the youth of Coosa County about all things, forestry, wildlife, leadership, life, etc. Now, I am older than they were then, with a family and job. I realize the things they sacrificed to ensure that we as the next generation were provided the opportunities to be as prepared as we could for the next challenge, whether that was forestry and wildlife competitions through the 4-H program, or just the next phase in our life. Before us was a group of individuals who understood the importance of working together to provide expertise in each resource area from the Forestry Commission, Department of Conservation, Extension Service, and private landowners. This model is one that I carry out today as a Hazardous Fuels Program Manager with the Bureau of Land Management. I understand the importance of interagency collaboration and cooperation to achieve a common goal of reducing the impacts of wildland fire on the landscape and improving habitat for wildlife. I have served as a mentor of youth within the 4-H shooting sports program; hunter mentor program; Outdoor Days for middle school programs; public education events; interagency collaboration meetings between Wyoming State Forestry, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Wyoming Game and Fish; and the list goes on . . . This was the example I was shown and one that I carry out today. When I was a youth, these folks set the standard, the bar, the example of being a true steward of the land, caring for the natural resources, and setting up the next generation for success.”

Rance Neighbors, Hazardous Fuels Program Manager, Bureau of Land Management

As evidenced by the testimonials from some of ‘our kids,’ you **can** have a positive impact on the lives of those you choose to reach out to and in turn, benefit our natural resources in a champi-

onship winning way. Never underestimate the influence you may have – it can be good or bad – on the youth with which you spend time. The greatest gift you could ever give them is a positive influence, no matter how small it may seem at the time. Over the years, membership in the county planning committee has changed as folks age and retire, but the spirit of these former members lives on through the lives they touched, and the forest stewardship endeavors they championed. Coosa County is a better place to live and recreate because of the efforts of past and present iterations of the Coosa County Forestry Planning Committee. 🏠





Photos by Alan Cressler

Prairie Grove Glades

By Andrew Nichols, Registered Forester

From the rolling hills of the Tennessee Valley to the white sand beaches on the Gulf, Alabama’s many landscapes have been credited by scholars as a ‘hotspot of diversity.’ Alabama is considered the most biodiverse state east of the Mississippi River. One truly unique property is hidden away in Lawrence County, a rural county in northwest region of the state. Most people know Lawrence County for being the home of four-time Olympic Gold Medalist Jesse Owens and for containing the northern half of Bankhead National Forest. Locals know it for contiguous agricultural fields broken up by mountainous terrain. The transitions between these fields and mountains create landscapes that can be quite distinctive. Prairie Grove Glades, owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), features such a landscape.

The largest intact cedar glade complex of its type in Alabama, Prairie Grove Glades is home to at least 12 rare plant species, which is why it was purchased by TNC. Just a short walk from the gravel county road, visitors will see why this preserve is special. Exposed flat limestone outcroppings and shallow soil make up a large amount of the groundcover, with small islands of cedars and hardwoods scattered throughout the site. These islands are also home to rare plant species such as Harper’s umbrella, Alabama larkspur, and prairie Indian plantain.

The shallow soils and open limestone rocky areas do not allow quality trees to develop a deep enough root system to survive, due to the poor nutritional value of the soil. Soils are very dry, especially in the summer and the area is typically very warm from a lack of a midstory or overstory. However, plant species that can tolerate these harsh conditions are typically found grow-

ing throughout the rocky terrain, including yellow and white Alabama glade cress. These open areas do not require any form of human intervention such as mowing, spraying herbicide, or mulching.

When it rains, the glades tend to hold water much longer in lower areas, allowing species such as glade quillwort and yellow sunnybells to thrive and flourish. Other flowering plants species include purple topped Nashville breadroot and Tennessee milk vetch. The largest of three Alabama populations of lyrate bladderpod, a threatened plant species provided protection under the Endangered Species Act, also occurs within the boundary of Prairie Grove Glade.

Management activities include prescribed burning and protecting the fragile ecosystem from any unnecessary vehicular traffic. TNC representative Chuck Byrd stated that the preserve has been difficult to manage, primarily due to Alabama’s weather patterns. Multiple burn plans have been written for the glades, but the area is often either too dry or too wet to burn. Because of the short window of opportunity that TNC can conduct a burn on the site, species such as privet have started to encroach into areas near the road. Thankfully, the landscape somewhat ‘manages itself’ with the help of mother nature. Since many of the cedar glades that once existed have since been bulldozed and built on, preservation of such sites should be a top priority.

If you plan to visit Prairie Grove Glades, directions can be found on The Nature Conservancy’s website (nature.org). Springtime is the best time to visit. I recommend good walking shoes and plenty of bug spray. If it has rained a day or two before your visit, it may be a good idea to bring an extra pair of socks and shoes!

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Alabama's Carnivorous *Pitcher Plants*

*By Ray Metzler, Threatened & Endangered Species Specialist/Certified Wildlife Biologist
and Shannon Anderson, FIA Forester
Alabama Forestry Commission*

From on who you ask or what you are reading, Alabama typically ranks either 4th or 5th in overall biodiversity [nationally]. Many folks recognize that Alabama ranks at the top in aquatic biodiversity, but did you know that we also rank 1st in pitcher plant diversity?

Pitcher plants are members of the *Sarracenia* genus. *The Alabama Plant Atlas* and the *Alabama Natural Heritage Section* database both indicate that seven of the eight species which occur in the United States are present in Alabama.

Description

Sarracenia are perennial herbaceous plants that grow from a well-developed rhizome that can maintain dormancy for decades until the canopy is open enough to support upright growth. One

might ask, “What is special about pitcher plants?” The most unique fact about pitcher plants is that they are carnivorous, being one of four genera of carnivorous plants that occur in nitrogen poor soils in wetlands found throughout the state. Pitcher plants have modified leaves (trap leaves) that form a tube or ‘pitcher’ used to capture and digest prey. Five of Alabama’s pitcher plant species have vertical tubes extending up to 30 inches tall. Two species, *Sarracenia rosea* and *Sarracenia psittacina*, have tubes that grow horizontally along the ground. Trap leaves have an extension commonly called a hood (also known as an operculum) over the opening that limits rainwater from entering.

The plants lure potential prey by excreting an irresistibly sweet nectar from their leaves. Expecting a good meal, the insect lands at the leaf’s opening and slips on the slick, waxy surface.



Alabama canebrake pitcher plant
Photo by Alan Cressler



Pitcher plant hybrids in Escambia County
Photo by Alan Cressler

The unfortunate insect then falls into a reservoir full of digestive fluids that contain enzymes. By trapping and slowly digesting insects and sometimes small invertebrates such as lizards, these plants have creatively evolved to exist in this challenging habitat. These carnivorous lifestyle adaptations not only allow pitcher plants to absorb nutrients (especially nitrogen and phosphorous) that are usually lacking in wet/boggy soils, but also enhance survival in areas that are inhospitable to many other plants.

Typically blossoming in spring, the flowers of the plants are most often umbrella-shaped and red, yellow, or pink in color. Pitchers emerge after flowers bloom and survive through fall but begin to wither away as insect numbers decline. Non-tubular/non-carnivorous leaves (phyllodia) are produced to sustain the plant photosynthetically through the winter months.

Habitat and Distribution

Alabama's pitcher plants typically inhabit fire-maintained pine savannas, wet prairies, or seepage bogs. Historically, Alabama landscapes burned frequently, and pitcher plants adapted to low intensity fires that limited encroachment of trees and shrubs. They are sun-loving plants that thrive in soils with significant subsoil water flow and low nutrient content. These soils are typically acidic and often have a high sand content.

Green pitcher plant, *Sarracenia oreophila*, is a species that occurs in the mountainous areas of northeast

Alabama into Georgia and North Carolina. The Alabama canebrake pitcher plant, *Sarracenia alabamensis* ssp. *alabamensis*, is endemic to Autauga, Chilton, and Elmore counties. Winged pale pitcher plant (*Sarracenia alata*), yellow pitcher plant (*Sarracenia flava*), whitetop pitcher plant (*Sarracenia leucophylla*), parrot pitcher plant (*Sarracenia psittacina*), rosey pitcher plant (*Sarracenia rosea*), and Wherry's pitcher plant (*Sarracenia alabamensis* ssp. *wherryi*) are limited to the southern portion of Alabama's East Gulf Coastal Plain – the region with the widest distribution and abundance of pitcher plants in the state. *Sarracenia* species are known to hybridize and many naturally occurring hybrids have been observed in Alabama.

Status

Why should we care about these unusual plants? For one, they are rare. The green pitcher plant and Alabama canebrake pitcher plant are both listed as endangered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Green pitcher plants occur at fewer than 20 sites in its entire three state range. The native Alabama canebrake pitcher plants, once found on 28 sites in the state, are now limited to 11 sites in Autauga and Chilton counties.

The presence of pitcher plants provides opportunities for forest landowners to truly have a unique, aesthetically pleasing landscape. Because they are a fire-adapted species, all sites with pitcher plants should be managed regularly with prescribed burns to discourage succession, open the canopy, and

(Continued on page 18)



Sarracenia psittacina - tubes grow horizontally along the ground. Photo by Alan Cressler



Sarracenia rosea
Photo by Alan Cressler

Alabama's Carnivorous Pitcher Plants

(Continued from page 17)



Pitcher plants occur in nitrogen-poor soils in wetlands found throughout the state.
Photo by Ericha Nix



Leucophyllia flower and pitcher
Photo by Patrick Thompson

limit encroachment of woody and invasive plant species. The fire releases nitrogen needed for the plants to survive and reduces competing vegetation such as yaupon and gallberry.

Overall, it is believed that approximately 98 percent of pitcher plant sites have been modified or destroyed because of factors including urban and rural land development, forest conversion, and ecological succession. Plants do not receive the same federal protections as animals under the Endangered Species Act; however, most private forest landowners, guided by stewardship principles and good will, value the presence of pitcher plants and manage these sites accordingly. Primary management includes prescribed burning, removal of non-native invasive species, and maintaining hydrology functionality. Forestry activities in and around pitcher plant sites should include pre-harvest planning to minimize impacts to the water table or drainage of the land. This ensures ecological and hydrological functions remain unchanged.

Commensals and Unique Characteristics

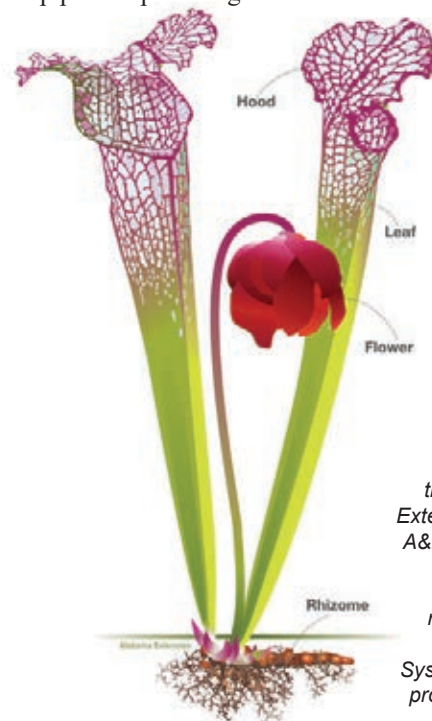
Several other species rely on pitcher plants and these bog habitats for survival. For instance, pitcher plant moths nearly complete their whole life cycle inside the pitcher plant. The adult moths only lay their eggs along the inner wall of the pitcher plant. The larvae grow and feed on the plant, only to pupate and fly to another pitcher plant to start the cycle again. Other creatures, such as the green lynx spider, gain (or steal) a meal from the pitcher plant by camouflaging and ambushing the insects seeking the plants' nectar.

Lastly, pitcher plants, as is the case with other plants, may have medicinal uses. Native Americans treated smallpox and skin cancers with extracts from pitcher plants. Perhaps validating these historical accounts, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently conducted a study that showed that pitcher plant extracts can be effective at treating 4T1 mammary carcinoma!

Where to See Pitcher Plants in Alabama

Often, pitcher plants are located in seepage sites that are relatively small in acreage and relatively unknown. As an example, AFC staff members have found two whitetop pitcher plant sites during the past seven years, both less than 500 square feet, while conducting work activities within Geneva State Forest. However, Alabama does have one of the largest pitcher plant sites in the United States which is open to public viewing. The Nature Conservancy, Alabama State Lands Division, and the Forever Wild Land Trust have cooperatively acquired approximately 2,100 acres in Baldwin County – the world's largest carnivorous plant community. This site, collectively known as the Splinter Hill Bog is very close to exit 45 (Perdido/Rabun) on Interstate 65. Or consider visiting Weeks Bay Pitcher Plant Bog which is also located in Baldwin County near Foley. Although the boardwalk and parking area are closed for renovation at the time this article is being written, they are expected to reopen in the summer of 2024.

Enrich your next trip to Alabama's beaches by stopping at the Splinter Hill Bog complex or Weeks Bay Pitcher Plant Bog to view some of Alabama's most unique and visually appealing whitetop pitcher plant bogs and native habitats. 🌿



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CLASSROOM IN THE FOREST | Dixon Center Pushes Hand Work, Dirty Hands

Auburn students get real-world, practical experience in forestry and wildlife management at the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center near Andalusia.

Photos by Maggie Edwards

***By Maggie Edwards
Alabama Farmers Federation***

Tucked away under longleaf pines and cypress swamps stands a hidden gem in Alabama’s Wiregrass region. “The goal was to build a place where Auburn University (AU) students, professionals, and private landowners could learn about forestry and natural resources,” said Joel Martin, the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center (SDFEC or ‘Dixon Center’) director. “Solon Dixon wanted to give people the opportunity to sit in a classroom and be in the woods at the same time.”

The Dixon Center, located outside of Andalusia, was gifted to AU by Solon and Martha Dixon in 1974. The family donated the homeplace; 5,350 acres; and \$500,000 to build the first facilities.

“The Dixon family land dates back to the 1850s,” Martin said. “Solon and his brother, Charles, gathered land and built a timber industry over time, owning sawmills and pulp mills.”

That land now houses a summer camp for 60-80 college students a year. Students often call it “Solon Dixon,” paying homage to the man responsible for their classroom in the forest. “Solon was often quoted saying he wanted a place where students could get their hands dirty,” Martin said.

The center welcomed its first group of AU forestry practicum students in 1980. In 2012, the center’s first wildlife practicum took place.

“This camp is a great course to introduce people to forestry,” said Tony Logan, who was at Solon Dixon in summer 1987. “I had been exposed to the industry because my dad was a forester, but some of my classmates had not. I learned a lot and learned how to do things right.”

Thirty-one years later, Tony’s son, Cal, stepped onto the soil of the Dixon Center. “It means the world to me to follow Dad’s footsteps. Being a forester was always my dream,” said Cal, who serves on the Alabama Farmers Federation State Young Farmers Committee. “Seeing his class picture at summer camp was a surreal moment for me. It is special to know my dad went through the same things I did, and now we are business partners at Cliff A. Logan and Associates, the



forest management service my grandfather founded.”

Spending a summer at the center is a requirement for students in AU’s College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment. The Logans of Greene County agree it was the most influential part of their college experience. “Summer camp was a great opportunity to create friendships, but it also exposed me to the science behind forestry,” said Cal, who attended in 2018. “Students sit in a classroom and learn about mapping and walk out the door and do it. The opportunity to put what you are learning into action the second you learn it helps you remember it so much better.”

“The Dixon Center has impacted hundreds of lives, giving each AU student the tools needed to succeed,” said John Gilbert, SDFEC assistant director. “This is coursework that gives students hands-on and experiential learning opportunities,” continued Gilbert, who spent summer 2001 as a student at Solon Dixon. “Wildlife students come as juniors and seniors, while forestry students are rising juniors. This is our forestry students’ first field experience. For many, it’s their first class in forestry.”

The forestry summer program is broken into nine-week intervals, with each week focusing on a new class. Classes include forest mensuration, forest biology, field surveying, forest operations, and forest management.

Current student Brooks Milling spent his summer learning the ropes of forestry. “I have picked up a lot of knowledge and have learned more than I ever could in a classroom,” Milling said.

“Solon Dixon is a treasure,” said Federation Forestry and Wildlife Divisions Director William Green. “Forestry is Alabama’s top industry with over 23.1 million acres of forest land,” continued Green, an ex officio member of the AU College of Forestry, Wildlife

and Environment board. “The Dixon family left this as a way to educate students but also act as a production forest to pay for itself. It is a living museum.”

In addition to AU summer practicum, the center hosts natural resources groups throughout the year for professional development and hands-on learning. That includes the Alabama Forestry Commission and its recently revamped Forestry Academy.

“I don’t know if it was a vision or just how it was built, but all these front porches are gathering places for students and their instructors,” Martin said. “As much learning happens in those rocking chairs as it does in the classroom.”

Gilbert echoed Martin, adding there’s a difference in being at the center and sitting in a lab on campus. “This center builds a network of lifelong friendships and gives students an experience they will not get anywhere else,” Gilbert said. 🏠



Current student Brooks Milling



Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center Director Joel Martin and Asst. Director John Gilbert are integral to the center’s success, spending time in the class room and woods teaching Auburn students. Gilbert attended forestry practicum as a student in 2001.

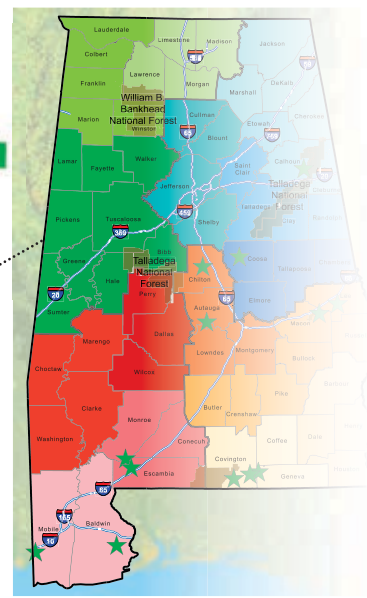


Father-son duo Tony and Cal Logan of Greene County attended the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center during their time at AU.



Tombigbee Work Unit

*By Tim Browning, Registered Forester, Work Unit Manager
Alabama Forestry Commission*



Lamar, Fayette, Pickens, and Sumter counties make up the Tombigbee Work Unit. The name Tombigbee originated from the colonial Fort Tombeche (Fort de Tombeché) in Sumter County, which was once a popular trading post, exactly 270 miles upriver from Mobile. Established by French soldiers in 1736-1737, this archaeological site is currently owned by the University of West Alabama. The Tombigbee River drains all of Lamar County, most of Fayette County, all of Pickens County, and about half of Sumter County, while the remainder of Fayette and Sumter counties drain into the Warrior River.

Geographically, the Tombigbee Work Unit runs long and narrow approximately 138 miles from north to south bordering the state of Mississippi. It is a very picturesque drive from Detroit in northern Lamar County to Ward located in southern Sumter County. The northern most part of the work unit is steep and somewhat rocky with a heavy clay soil just beneath the topsoil. As you travel south and near the Tennessee-Tombigbee River, the world seems to change a bit as you enter the 'Blackbelt Region.' Blessed with fertile prairie soil that is underlain by thick limestone bedrock, this area is mostly flat with few hills.

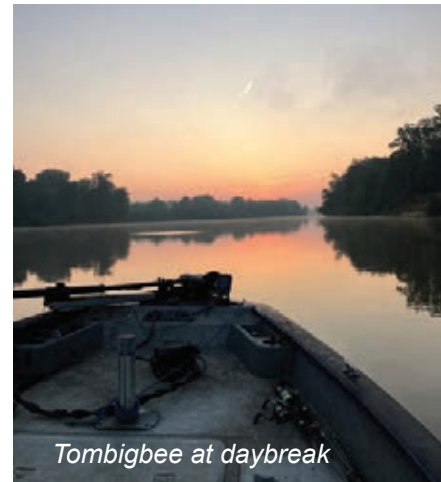
In the Blackbelt Region, certain hardwoods flourish with fewer pines dominating the landscape. Historically, this was very productive ground for agriculture where much of the area was cleared, de-stumped, and tillage began about 1820. Scientists tell us that this rich soil is the product of the environment millions of years ago. Marine plankton grew in seas, and their carbonate skeletons accumulated into massive chalk formations that still preserve some of the best marine fossils in the U.S. The Black Belt arc was the shoreline of one of those seas, where large amounts of chalk had collected in the shallow waters. The area was home to a diverse aquatic ecosystem that

drained and left the mollisole we are blessed with today. That chalk eventually became a fertile soil highly suitable for growing crops.

Given the terrain and fertile soils, it should come as no surprise that the timber industry flourishes here. Weyerhaeuser Mill in Millport is the largest dimensional lumber mill for the company in this area, and Enviva recently broke ground on the world's largest pellet mill in Epes. This area is also home to numerous other privately-owned smaller mills specializing in 'old growth' pine timber as well as bottomland hardwood mills.

Our offices receive a lot of requests from landowners for stand management recommendations (SMRs) including cost share programs, prescribed burning, management plans, forest certifications, and recreation management. We are also home to a rich and diverse area adjacent to Tuscaloosa, Birmingham, and other smaller metropolitan areas where forest management has seen a well-documented shift to more wildlife and recreation management over the last 25 years or so. A significant number of absentee landowners have purchased 1,000 to 10,000 acres for a family farm to escape big city life and enjoy a quiet starlit night or hear the multitude of songbirds at daybreak.

Forester Jonathan Norton is stationed in Suligent at the Lamar County, along with Forest Ranger Jonas Freeman and Northwest Region Fire Specialist Karl Byrd. Work Unit Manager Tim Browning and Forest Management Specialist J.R. Harbison work out of the Pickens County office in Carrollton. Forestry Specialist Rusty Smith staffs the Sumter County office in Livingston. The total population of our work unit is around 60,800 for the combined four counties. We are very rural, and most of the families here are deeply rooted. We are strong, we are family, we are Tombigbee! 🏡



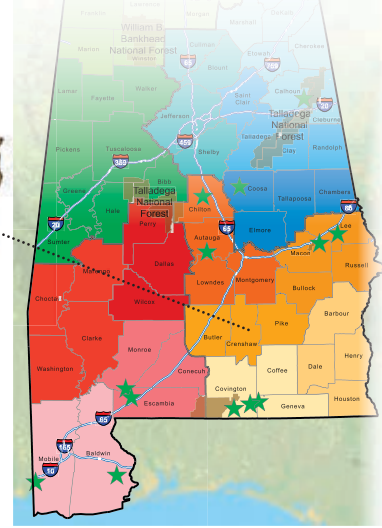
Tombigbee at daybreak



Tour on the Tombigbee River



A landowner presented with his Tree Farm certification



Pigeon Creek Work Unit

*By Jeremy Lowery, Registered Forester, Work Unit Manager
Alabama Forestry Commission*



Small communities are the heart of this work unit, including the Pigeon Creek community that is named after a local creek. What was portrayed in the movie “Sweet Home Alabama” as a vast waterway is a meager perennial stream used for recreational activities including hunting, fishing, hiking, canoeing, and many other adventures.

Covering Butler, Crenshaw, and Pike counties, the Pigeon Creek Work Unit area is comprised of a land mass of 2,062 square miles, including 4.1 square miles of water. Primarily made up of timberland and farmland, most of the employment is provided by logging, farming, and auto manufacturing. Population centers include the cities of Troy, Luverne, and Greenville with a total of 65,254 residents (according to the 2020 Census).

In Butler County, auto manufacturing, forestry, and poultry drive most of the economy. Boise Cascade in Chapman has roots back to the W. T. Smith Lumber Company, which then became Union Camp, then International Paper, and later Coastal Forest Products. No matter which name, the company has been a long-standing provider of jobs for the area.

Auto manufacturing, forestry, and poultry also contribute to the economy of Crenshaw County. The H.E. Browder Veneer Company, long-standing forest product mill in Highland Home, produces many hardwood products.

Pike County is home to Troy University, with other drivers of the economy including retail, forestry, poultry, Lockheed Martin, and Kimber Manufacturing. Rex Lumber’s recent opening has provided a great outlet for timber in the area.

While the work unit has an office in each county, the personnel embrace a team work ethic in the completion of tasks. The workload is primarily dedicated to establishing firebreaks, conducting prescribed burns, administering Environmental Quality Incentives Programs (EQIP) and Conservation Reserve Programs (CRP), writing management plans, as well as certifying landown-

ers in Tree Farm, Stewardship Forest, and TREASURE Forest programs. However, wildfires always receive top priority. In the last year, the crew has responded to 52 wildfires covering approximately 351 acres.

Throughout the year, personnel in each county also conduct landowner workshops and educational programs such as Classroom in the Forest. One of the main events is assisting the Butler County Forestry Planning Committee with coordination of the Butler County Natural Resources Youth Camp held at Mussel Creek lodge. A truly unique program in the state, the camp hosts 25-30 kids every June from each school in the county. The students have completed the 6th grade and are selected by their teachers as a reward for their work. The three-day camp introduces them to land navigation, fire extinguishers, tree identification, butterflies, wildlife footprints, predator management, drones, native plants, bird of prey, water quality, snakes, animal skull identification, and wilderness skills. The last day is devoted to firearm safety and handling. With the oversight of local conservation officers, the children enter competitions with rifles, shotguns, bows, and black powder rifles. The camp culminates with an awards ceremony with prizes!

The work unit is currently manned by seven employees. Forester Jacob Hill, along with Forest Rangers David Jackson and Tripp Thrash, are in the Pike County office. Forestry Specialist Supervisor Chris Jones and Forest Ranger Kholon Brown staff the Crenshaw County office. Forestry Specialist Steve Perdue recently retired, leaving Forest Ranger Jesse Davis and Work Unit Manager Jeremy Lowery in the Butler County office. Every person plays a vital role in the deliverance of service to the forest landowners in the work unit, and we strive to protect our natural resources. It is always our goal to leave a good impression of the Alabama Forestry Commission with everyone we encounter. 🌲

WELCOME TO THE CENTENNIAL CLUB, ALABAMA FORESTRY COMMISSION!

Since 1921, the Alabama Farmers Federation has proudly partnered with groups like the Alabama Forestry Commission. Together, we've spent more than a century fighting for the values and vision of Alabama farmers and forest landowners — and look forward to the next 100 years.



AlfaFarmers.org





HISTORIC CEMETERIES

of Alabama

*By Todd Langston, Forest Management Specialist
Alabama Forestry Commission*

Historic' cemeteries [according to the Alabama Historical Commission] are those recognized as being 75 years old or older. Many of these cemeteries are scattered across the wilderness of rural Alabama. Most are small family burial sites that date back to the mid-to-late 1800s.

The area of the state that I am most familiar with is northeast Alabama, in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. I cut my teeth in this part of Alabama as a young forester, cruising timber tracts in the mountains of Jackson County. Some of my fondest memories of my walks in these mountains are the discovery of various historic cemeteries. They sometimes seem to appear out of nowhere during the long days of up and down the mountains. You can almost always bet that the discovery of an old cemetery will be after locating an old homesite, commonly found on the last 'flat' bench before the top of the mountain. Such benches were the most favorable sites for growing corn and other grains as well as raising livestock. Old homesites are also usually located near a mountain spring, which was essential to the subsistence of life on the mountain.

These sites were selected for several reasons. Some were chosen because they were the easiest places to dig and were not inundated with hard limestone rock. Other reasons could include

proximity to an existing 'wagon road,' which would have made it easily accessible. Many of these sites became family specific and would be used for decades. In his blog *My Appalachian Life*, Roger Hicks said, "the first and most eventual graveyards in Appalachia were usually located on a piece of high ground, often with a good view of the surrounding area. They were often the favorite spot of the head of the household. There was also a common belief that on the Resurrection, the dead in Christ would arise with the first rays of the morning sun. The higher elevations usually got morning sunshine earlier than low lying ground. It was also common for graves to be placed with the face of the dead toward the sunrise."

Decorations for these burial sites could be as simple as a sandstone, limestone, or wooden marker, to an elaborate headstone or vault. When the early settlers were making their way west, they often buried their dead right where they died, due to the urgency to keep moving. Most could not afford to carry their dead to their final destination, due to health concerns and distance remaining to travel. Once these family cemeteries were established, the grave decorations were as simple as a flowering tree or bush, with the occasional adornment of wildflowers picked on the journey to the graveside. Due to the lack of resources and the eventual death of caring family members, many of these burial plots have been lost.

(Continued on page 26)



Historic Cemeteries of Alabama

(Continued from page 25)

I have since moved on from my timber cruising days. Now working for the Alabama Forestry Commission in Jackson County has given me the privilege to help manage some beautiful and diverse properties in the northeastern part of the state. These opportunities have recently led me to locate and explore the Jacks Family Cemetery in Francisco and the Rice Family Cemetery in New Hope. Both burial sites have graves dating back to the mid-1800s. The Jacks cemetery has a large contingent of graves marked only by sandstone rocks at the foot and head of the grave. There were very few graves with modern headstones and those appeared to be placed recently. The Jacks cemetery is located adjacent to an old wagon road on a high point above a waterfall. Located on top of McKinney Mountain, the Rice Family Cemetery is also adjacent to an old wagon road. Although this cemetery contains more modern headstones, the graves still date back to the mid-1800s. The majority of these graves are facing East.

The Alabama Historical Commission (AHC) does a great job in helping preserve these historical cemeteries.

The AHC will help with the following:

- Provide historical designation for cemeteries through the Alabama Historic Cemetery Register.
- Assist those in purchasing a historical marker or plaque for cemeteries.

- Make information available on cemetery laws and offer support to law enforcement when needed.
- Issue permits for substantial work in cemeteries at least 75 years old or older.
- Inform the public about general cemetery preservation guidelines.
- Provide grants (when available) to cemeteries that are open to the public and provide educational programming.

The AHC does not:

- Provide legal assistance or legal advice.
- Arrest or prosecute individuals who violate Alabama's burial laws. This is the responsibility of local law enforcement.
- Maintain cemeteries.
- Provide advice to an organization regarding how to obtain non-profit status.
- Perform Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) or other types of remote sensing.

For any questions regarding historic cemeteries, please visit www.ahc.alabama.gov or contact Leanne Waller-Trupp at the Alabama Historical Commission, 468 South Perry Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36130-0900 | 334.230.2653 or leanne.trupp@ahc.alabama.gov 🏠



ALABAMA FORESTRY COMMISSION TURNS TO

ARCGIS 'STORYMAPS' TO DETAIL ITS WORK



*By Abi Dhakal, GIS Manager
Alabama Forestry Commission*

In Alabama, where more than two-thirds of the state is covered in forestland, the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) is tasked with protecting and sustaining these woodlands, as well as educating people about the benefits of all 23 million acres of forests.

As the leading steward of Alabama's forests, the AFC has increased its use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology over the past few decades when conducting certain forestry activities. Recently, the state agency moved from using desktop-based GIS to implementing ArcGIS Online and ArcGIS Enterprise applications, which have enabled staff members to expand what they can do with the technology. With the right infrastructure in place, AFC executives Rick Oates and Will Brantley decided in 2022 to present the work, initiatives, and accomplishments of the agency in an ArcGIS 'StoryMaps' narrative - a digital storytelling format for the citizens of Alabama who are served by the agency. For the first time, the AFC was also able to submit its annual report to the Governor in the same format.

Fostering Seamless Collaboration

The features and technology of ArcGIS StoryMaps presented the opportunity to assemble maps and apps in one place. This software could collect and display *geospatial* information of various forestry activities such as forest stewardship implementation, invasive species management, forest pest detection and control, best management practices (BMPs), prescribed burns, wildfire suppression, and emergency response alongside the *non-geospatial* information such as pictures, videos, audios, and narratives. This would give landowners, industry stakeholders, governmental partners, and the public a one-stop website to understand how the agency accomplishes its mission to "protect and sustain Alabama's forest resources using professionally applied stewardship principles and education, to ensure the state's forests contribute to abundant timber, wildlife, clean air and water, and a healthy economy."

(Continued on page 28)

ALABAMA FORESTRY COMMISSION TURNS TO ARCGIS 'STORYMAPS' TO DETAIL ITS WORK *(Continued from page 27)*

Developing an attractive web page — featuring photos, videos, audio recordings, web maps, and other applications (apps) to tell the AFC's stories as they unfolded every day — was intended to make it easy for anyone to understand the agency's diverse involvement in forestry management activities across the state.

Important in the development process of the AFC's StoryMaps was the workflow at the agency that mandates keeping location information in the database for all forestry activities conducted where GIS applications are not used. With the AFC's old GIS, employees could map forestland owners' properties, but any work such as prescribed burns or invasive species control could only be documented in the agency's database — not in GIS. The standard practice of recording the latitude and longitude information of each work site in the database allowed the employees working on the narrative in StoryMaps to seamlessly incorporate this data. Now, the GIS team can easily take the location and other information stored in the database and generate maps of the AFC's work and accomplishments.

An Interactive Record of Work and Accomplishments

The resultant StoryMaps narrative begins with a message from Alabama's State Forester Rick Oates, who says that the AFC's varied activities are intended to provide "a rich, diverse, and both naturally and socially accommodating forestry infrastructure in Alabama."

The navigation bar consists of nine sections that introduce readers to the agency and its work, depicting highlights from each of 18 administrative work units across the state, sub-divided to facilitate optimum management and analysis of the state's forestry resources. Within these work units are where the registered foresters and forest rangers — the 'building blocks' of the Alabama Forestry Commission — work directly with landowners and stakeholders, as well as in partnership with other entities and organizations to benefit the people, environment, and natural resources of the state. Work unit employees often work across different counties within the work unit to help each other alleviate manpower shortage pressures. The greatest strength of the work unit is to concentrate on the personal relationship between landowners and cooperators. This allows the work unit to provide landowners with effective leadership and services to achieve their unique, individualized objectives and goals.

AFC employees fight wildfires, conduct prescribed burns, and assist in eradicating invasive species and forest pests across Alabama. In all 67 counties, they provide tours and educational programs for landowners, school children, the public, government officials, and volunteer fire departments. AFC foresters take measurements in forested plots throughout the state's woodlands to provide the agency with the most up-to-date forest data available, and they equip forest landowners with the tools they need to properly manage their properties. The AFC also puts great emphasis on best management practices for forestry (BMPs), as well as urban forestry, with staff members leading public awareness and education campaigns. Additionally, the agency coordinates natural disaster and emergency responses, whether clearing roads and assisting citizens in the wake of tornados and hurricanes, or creating maps for landowners whose property has been devastated. All these agency activities are reflected and summarized in the pictures, videos, and text blocks throughout the StoryMaps.

Finally, scrolling through the narrative, viewers can see heat maps that illustrate various threats and areas where forest health is of concern — whether due to insects, disease, or wildfires. Several dashboards show the AFC's accomplishments for the year including prescribed burn areas, recent wildfire activity, and Alabama's forest resources such as timber production by wood type across the state.

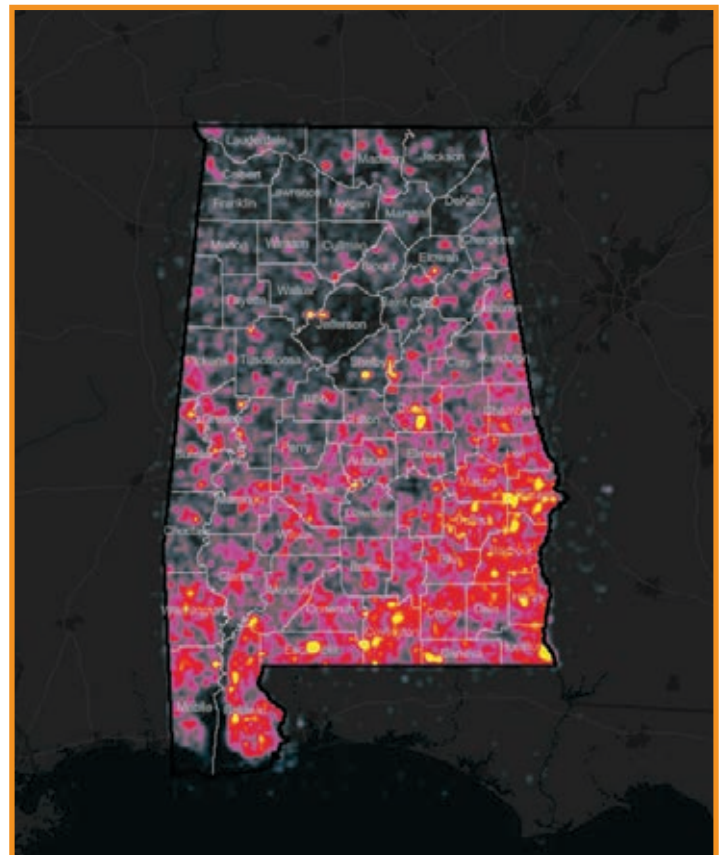
Positive Reception Sparks Ongoing Project

Since the public-facing AFC StoryMaps was initially released in late summer 2022, it has accumulated more than 8,000 views — a number that continues to grow each day. The National Association of State Foresters ran a story about it in its weekly newsletter in January 2023, and *esri's ArcNews* publication also featured a story about it in the Fall of 2023.

Internally, being able to use ArcGIS StoryMaps to continually build and then present the AFC's annual report to the governor made the whole process much easier. The project went so well that AFC staff members used the app again to build the agency's 2023 annual report. "The ability to update the story as things are occurring — using heat maps for fire occurrence and dashboards for dynamic accomplishment tracking — is greatly appreciated by agency leadership and the various program managers who otherwise invested significant amounts of time and effort in the production of the annual report each year," said Dan Chappell, Assistant Director of the AFC's Forest Management Division.

To see the AFC StoryMaps narrative, visit forestry.alabama.gov and take the 'virtual tour.' For more information about this project, email abi.dhokal@forestry.alabama.gov.

Heat Map of prescribed burns



OUR PEOPLE . . .



Photo by Brett Boyd



After 100 Years, We're Still Protecting the TREASURE Forests that Improve the Earth and Enrich the Lives of Future Generations





AFC Mailbox

Letters from Landowners

December 12, 2023

To Rick Oates:

On 12/7/23 we had a controlled burn get out of control at 2684 County Highway 24, Springville, Alabama. We were amazed at the community turnout and the help that was provided. Holly Springs, Pine Mountain, Straight Mountain, and Springville fire departments, and the Alabama Forestry Commission all came to help.

We had cleared a small hill to the west of the house last year to plant wildflowers. We can see the hill from the windows of the house. We decided to do more clearing this year. Allen has lived here 30 years and has done numerous burns with no problems. We just got married this September. I came from Oregon, so I have a healthy respect for fires. Summer forest fires are an annual thing where I lived. Allen was able to do a little bush hogging on the hill, but due to steepness and not being able to see stumps he was limited. I tried to burn some blackberry brambles but could not get them lit. I went a bit farther down the hill and got fire creeping up the hill under the vegetation. It mostly cleared the ground but was leaving the taller parts untouched.

A slight wind was going uphill, so we just managed the uphill part. The fire went east below the house which we did not expect. But it was clearing nicely so we just stopped it at the lawn. We thought the lawn would stop it by itself, but we had to run down hoses to stop it. I worked on stopping the fire on the east side and Allen worked on stopping it on the west side. The ground is steep. We both got it stopped down to the fence line. Below the fence line it gets really steep and then there is a 20-foot cliff. The fire went downhill, against the wind. It got past the fence line and into terrain two people could not manage. It started going sideways and then back up into unburned areas. We had been managing it for about three hours and I was running out of endurance.

I called 911. It had been smoking a lot and we are on the edge of a ridge on Straight Mountain. It was pretty visible and someone had already called it in. Fire trucks were up on the road looking for us. I ran up in the golf cart to open the gate. Our property is 56 acres. It's mostly wooded. 20 acres are off the back of the mountain.

At this point Allen was down on the east flank and has the fire under control and was able to stop it at a stone bluff outcropping. He stayed with a shovel and put out any flare-ups.

But the west flank up the wildflower hill was on fire and headed for a dense wooded area full of down trees. The fire crews got

trucks up there and got the top of the hill put out quickly. The crews were blowing fire breaks in the leaves on the top of the hill and on the fire edges with leaf blowers.

But the fire had gone down below the fence line and off the cliff. To get down there you had to go farther west and down a very steep embankment and double back. Guys took down backpacks of water and rakes to try to get the fire below the cliff. It was all manpower and totally unreachable with the fire truck hoses. At one point they were hauling chainsaws down there to move logs. I am afraid to go down where they did just hanging onto trees. I don't know how anyone did it with a chainsaw or leaf blower.

I called at about 3:30. Crews were firefighting by 3:45. It was full dark by 5:00. Crews were still down the cliff and firefighting in the dark with headlamps. A neighbor brought over a bobcat and cut fire breaks on the east side and the top of the hill on the west around 7:00. Everybody left around by 8:00 pm.

The Forestry Commission came the next day 12/8 and checked everything in the morning. We still had a few smoking stumps and logs in the black. But they were dying down and there was no other sign of smoke. Unfortunately, about 10 am we saw big plumes of smoke coming from down below the cliff. We called 911 again. Holly Springs, Straight Mountain, and the Forestry Commission came quickly. Crews went down off the back of the mountain and found stumps that had been throwing embers. With leaf blowers and rakes they got it all out in about three hours. That night it rained half an inch. Thank God.

The next morning 12/9 the Forestry Commission came to check again. The mountain was covered in a dense dripping fog that day. The scent of smoke had been reducing all morning. That night we got another 1.25 inches of rain.

On 12/10 the Forestry Commission came and walked the perimeter of the fire. All the logs and stumps were out. Nothing was smoking.

You guys rock! I had blisters and had fallen several times and I know many of you did too. But you got it done! We could not have done it without you!

Lessons learned for us: Always have fire breaks in place. Never let fire get to that fence line and into terrain we can't manage. And drought makes a real difference in how fire behaves in the same location from year to year.

Thank you,
Cybele Kane McLemore & Allen McLemore
Springville, Alabama

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FRINGETREE

By Greyson Matthews, FIA Forester



Fringetree, a small tree with showy clusters of white flowers, goes by several different names including old-man's beard, Grandsy gray-beard, white fringetree, and flowering ash. All these names have one thing in common, in that they are referencing the beautiful flowers that appear in April to May. The fringe-like flowers are truly one of a kind, and when in full bloom, the tree can look like a large white beard due to the numerous, drooping clusters.

Fringetree (*Chioanthus virginicus*) is a member of the olive (*Oleaceae*) family. The leaves of fringetree are opposite in arrangement like ash, maple, and dogwood. They may grow to around 30 feet in height and can have multiple branching stems, which is why it can easily be considered a large shrub or small tree. The fruit is a small, bluish black drupe that is eaten by mam-

mals and birds. Fringetree is mainly considered an ornamental tree because of the unique flowers, and due to this species not having major problems with diseases or pests.

It could be argued that fringetree is underused as an ornamental. Its beautiful flowers rival that of dogwood, redbud, and southern magnolia, yet fringetree is far less common to see in a neighbor's yard. The trees are adaptable to many different soil types, can be planted along borders, or planted in groups to fill in larger gaps around buildings. They are also more disease and pest resistant than many other common ornamentals, and they will start flowering when they are still seedlings. The next time you need to plant an ornamental in the yard, consider planting a fringetree. You will truly appreciate how unique and beautiful this tree is when flowers start appearing in late spring! 🌳