

ALABAMA'S

TREASURED FORESTS

A Publication of the Alabama Forestry Commission



Issue No. 1 - 2025

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A Publication of the Alabama Forestry Commission

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ON THE COVER:

A rare snowy day in Alabama.

Photo by Daniel Green

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.

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Message from the *STATE FORESTER*

Everyone who regularly reads *Alabama's TREASURED Forests* magazine knows that during 2024 we celebrated 100 years of the Alabama Forestry Commission's service to Alabama. Speaking for the 250 current employees, we are proud of the long history of this agency and our work on behalf of Alabama's citizens.



Rick Oates, State Forester

I'd like to thank Governor Ivey and the legislators who helped us commemorate this milestone in the agency's history. She opened her home, the Governor's Mansion, to host a reception honoring the agency. Members of the Legislature participated in numerous events to recognize the AFC during the year. Several sponsors (see page 31) made these celebrations possible by contributing to our Centennial fund. Lastly, I need to thank the dedicated employees who contributed to planning and conducting all the events we held throughout the year. While the list is far too large to list them individually, know that it took an army of people to successfully highlight the impact of the agency over the last 100 years.

You may remember an article in the last issue of the magazine sharing a few predictions our staff made about what forestry in Alabama will be like in the year 2124. While you, like me, may not be completely convinced that some of those predictions will come true, I do know that forests will definitely be part of Alabama's landscape in the next century. And, whatever our forests look like, this agency will be ready to meet the needs your heirs have regarding their forests at that time.

I want to thank our employees, both current and past, for their hard work on your behalf. They are always willing to give of themselves and their time to work hard protecting your forests and, beyond that, the people of this state. Over the last two months, our firefighters fought 132 wildfires burning 1,796 acres; 23 of those fires, covering 767 acres, occurred on Christmas Eve through the day after Christmas. This means that 28 of our employees were away from their families during the holidays. I want to say a big THANK YOU to those brave men and women.

As I sit here writing this letter from my dining room table on a snow day when roads in Montgomery were deemed 'impassable,' I just reviewed a report from the Alabama Emergency Management Agency regarding emergency responses during the snowstorm on January 21-22. In Lee County, I noted that our personnel were dispatched to rescue stranded motorists on I-85 at 3:00 a.m. on the morning of January 22. They were also tasked with hauling cots to emergency warming centers that day. In Baldwin County, we even had AFC employees transporting emergency medical services personnel to places where ambulances could not travel to help them assess patients. Again, a big THANK YOU to our employees for getting out of their warm beds to go out and assist people in need.

These actions demonstrate the commitment our people have, not just to forestry in Alabama, but also going beyond the call of duty to assist others wherever and whenever needed.

Whatever our forests look like 100 years from now, I feel certain that the men and women of the Alabama Forestry Commission, as their predecessors have done, will stand ready to help. Please join me in thanking all of them for their service to Alabama.

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.

MARTIN'S MEADOWS

By McKenzie Gay

Southwest Alabama is home to a precious piece of property known as “Martin’s Meadows” – a magnificent 275 acres of land that evokes years of precious memories and landowner success, and that secured the prestigious Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award for 2024. The property is owned by Jess Martin and is located near Beatrice, a small town in Monroe County.

Born and raised in Beatrice, Jess Martin inherited this land that his parents purchased in the 1950s. The original tract was around 120 acres of pastureland and was used as a cattle and hog farm. Having several meadows scattered throughout the property, Jess says the name “Martin’s Meadows” just seemed natural. More acreage was added over the years, and in the early 90s, the family got out of the cattle business and began planting pines on their land.

“I want this land to be better after I’m dead and gone than it was when I first got my hands on it,” says Martin. His primary management objective as a TREASURE Forest landowner is timber production. Most of Martin’s Meadows is home to loblolly pine, but it also contains about 15-20 acres of longleaf. The property has very few hardwoods. Jess says that the site index for this land is certainly more suitable for pines, and he’s a firm believer that ‘you shouldn’t try to fit a square peg in a round hole.’ Pine trees thrive on his land, so pine trees it is!

Martin says that wildlife/recreation and aesthetics are ‘a very close second’ in terms of objectives for his farm. He enjoys using the land for hunting and fishing, and his pride and joy has been seeing children in the family get their “firsts” here, whether it was killing a huge 8-point buck or catching a small fish – it’s a trophy to those that experience it. For Jess himself, quail hunting is what

(Continued on page 6)

Martin's Meadows

(Continued from page 5)

he engages in the most, and the burn rotations for his property are primarily geared toward quail.

Most of the pine trees in Martin's Meadows were planted between 1999 and 2002, and prescribed burning for the timber is on a two-year rotation. Since beginning this burn schedule, the wildlife has benefitted well, with the deer and turkey populations on the property increasing substantially.

The property also includes a pond, approximately 3 acres in size, which was built for the cows after Jess's father originally bought the land. It now serves as the perfect spot for recreational activities, or simply a peaceful view to enjoy while sitting in a rocking chair on the porch of the cozy cabin that overlooks the water. The cabin was built in 2006, constructed solely out of logs from the local area. Jess built it himself with the help of a friend, and he quickly decided to move out there and enjoy living life in the woods.

Jess Martin's love for the outdoors was inherited from his dad. As a little boy, the two of them spent much of their time outside – checking cows, hunting, fishing, managing the small amount of timber they owned at the time, or just enjoying the fresh air. Jess says the reason is simple why he continues to take care of this beloved property: he wants to share his love for the beautiful open air with everyone. He regularly welcomes groups of people to Martin's Meadows on the weekends and during holiday seasons.

Hurricane Ivan altered Martin's management plan when his barn was taken out by the storm in 2004, but it turned out to be more of a blessing than a misfortune. The barn was initially in place for the benefit of the original cattle farm, so Jess rebuilt it as a pavilion that could be used for fellowship with his friends and family. This open-air pavilion now accommodates the family Thanksgiving, hosting between 80-100 people each year. In addition to family gatherings, Martin's Meadows has served as a venue for several weddings and receptions, class reunions, and high school graduation parties. The Beatrice Town Council also holds meetings in Mr. Martin's pavilion annually. He always keeps his property available for any community organization to use his facilities.

The accommodations at Martin's Meadows are also perfect for the landowner tours and Learn & Burns that have been hosted over the years. In October of 2023, the Southern Regional Forestry Field Day and Landowner Tour was held at Martin's Meadows, which had eight vendor booths and approximately 130 people in attendance. Jess has hosted a variety of other forestry education events, such as a Deer Management Workshop and a trapping seminar for predator control.

Maintaining a place such as Martin's Meadows is always a work in progress, but Jess Martin expresses extreme gratitude toward the resources that have helped get him to this point. He has sought guidance from agencies and organizations such as the Alabama Forestry Commission, Alabama Forestry Association, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, all of which have played a crucial role in the creation of successful management plans, conducting prescribed burns, and setting up

educational events held on the property. His plans for the future of the land are to continue to grow and produce pines and logs, as well as to keep up the aesthetic value and provide an enjoyable place for people to gather.

It is evident that Jess Martin has put a commendable amount of hard work into making Martin's Meadows the place it is today, and his story is a prime example of the success that good stewardship can bring. Prior to receiving the 2024 Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award, Mr. Martin was presented with the Tree Farmer of the Year Award in 2022. He was also recertified in Stewardship Forest. He is involved in numerous local community groups such as the Monroe County Chapter of the Wild Turkey Federation and the Monroe County TREASURE Forest Association, as well as the Alabama Forestry Association. He is also a life member of the Alabama Wildlife Federation.

"I don't own this land – the good Lord does, and He put me in charge of it for however long I'm gonna be here. I just want to be a good steward of it." And a good steward he has certainly been. 🌲





TREE FARM

The Sign of Sustainability



Contact Cole Browning at
cbrowning@alaforestry.org
to learn how to get your sign.

New TREASURE Forest Landowners

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 new TREASURE Forest landowners!



Landowner	County
<i>Tom and Barbara Rutledge</i>	<i>Barbour</i>
<i>Renfroe Preservations LLC</i>	<i>Bullock</i>
<i>Lavonda Hardin & Brady Burns</i>	<i>Cherokee</i>
<i>Justin Bonner</i>	<i>Choctaw</i>
<i>The Marley Place LLC</i>	<i>Dale</i>
<i>John Gray</i>	<i>Russell</i>
<i>Brewer Family Trust</i>	<i>Tallapoosa</i>

Forestry & Wildlife Seminar MARCH 21

Montgomery, Alabama

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INTRODUCING “Submittable”

THE AFC's New ONLINE Service Application Portal for Landowners

*By Rickey Fields, Prescribed Fire Program Manager and
Owen Andrews, Cogongrass Coordinator, Alabama Forestry Commission*

Since the agency was created in 1924, landowners who needed our services would simply reach out to their local county Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) office. Their names were placed on an unofficial ‘list’ to receive prescribed burning or dozer services. This process has now been streamlined to ensure that the agency provides services efficiently by implementing a new “Submittable” program. Used by numerous businesses and governmental agencies, this online program allows us to build custom projects tailored to the needs of our private landowners by collecting data and ensuring review of their submissions by agency personnel.

Going forward, when private landowners want to request AFC services, they will simply go to our agency homepage (forestry.alabama.gov) and click on the Landowner Assistance Application Portal. If they are already on the Direct Landowner Services page, the service fees are followed by a ‘click here to apply’ option. Either way, they will be automatically taken to the Submittable ‘Login’ where they can quickly create an account. A brief questionnaire asks for contact information, property location and description, followed by which services are requested. Landowners will also have the option to upload maps, provide proof of ownership, or enter anything else pertinent to their request.

Once an application is submitted, a notification will be sent to AFC field personnel who will schedule a site visit with the landowner to determine if the requested services can be provided. When the site visit is completed, field personnel will ‘accept’ or ‘decline’ each application based on the total number of requests received, complexity, smoke screening assessment, and the work

unit's capacity to provide the services. An email will automatically be sent to the landowner in which the field personnel will briefly explain why the request was accepted or declined. If accepted, the landowner will be notified to finalize the application process. If declined, the landowner will be directed to the AFC's Service Providers database (also on the website).

Landowners will also be able to access the agency Submittable program through the AFC's soon-to-be-released mobile app which will be available free of charge.

Currently, the AFC is accepting applications for fall 2025 site-preparation burns through May 1, 2025. Applications for understory burns will be accepted from August 1 through November 1, 2025. Landowner applications for firebreaks and other dozer services are accepted continually throughout the year.

Additionally, Submittable is utilized for many of our forest management programs. In the past, we have used it for the APHIS Cogongrass Program, the Hurricane Michael Block Grant, and the CARES-funded landowner assistance program. Submittable allows AFC program managers to quickly assign work to the appropriate personnel and track progress more efficiently.

Submittable will ultimately enable the agency to better serve its landowners in the long term, although we realize there will be an initial learning curve. We can currently track how much prescribed burning AFC personnel have completed; however, it is difficult to track how much burning we are NOT completing. Submittable will alleviate this issue by helping us to determine if we need to add or reallocate personnel and resources to work units that have an increased demand for prescribed burning and dozer services. 📱



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What happens when you give a self-proclaimed ‘tree nerd’ carte blanche within a city park? Anything! In Daphne, Noel Yoho produced the Native Plant Trail around the perimeter of Daphne Central Park’s disc golf course. Introduced in the Summer 2024 issue of *Alabama’s TREASURED Forests*, Daphne’s planted trail aimed at presenting examples of native species that homeowners could expect to flourish in their yards and providing alternatives to some of the invasive species seen throughout local properties. For Jean Cox and the city of Trussville, the result is the Cahaba River Tree Trail!

In this issue, we will look at the Cahaba River Tree Trail which focuses on introducing some of our favorite native trees to the people who walk, bike, and lounge along the Trussville Sports Complex Trail System. Installed along the Trussville greenway, the Cahaba River Tree Trail is located near the pickleball courts and ball fields, so it is convenient for families that are congregating for all manner of sporting events. And it is close enough that those who cannot tolerate “one more ballgame” can escape to the shade and relative peace of the nearby woods.

The story of the Cahaba River Tree Trail begins with one passionate, energetic woman, Jean Cox. The first thing you learn about Jean is that she loves trees. Like many of us at the Forestry Commission, she appreciates what incredibly beautiful, complex, and fascinating organisms they are. She sends pictures of cool trees she encounters on vacations to other tree nerds, and she is always ready to learn a little bit more about any tree. She loves trees for everything they supply, from the various products we use every day to cleaner water and air, to quality animal habitats, to improved mental health for all. And, as the executive director of Friends of Pinchgut Creek, she understands the unique contributions of riparian forests (those along waterways) to human and animal life.

Pinchgut Creek runs through downtown Trussville, parallel to US Highway 11, and what little native riparian forest remains to protect its banks, and the surrounding watershed is not on public property. However, Pinchgut drains into the Cahaba River and the City of Trussville owns property along the Cahaba that still retains native riparian forest. This beautiful parcel of native forest provided a great place for Friends of Pinchgut Creek to fulfill their mission of education and community involvement while celebrating Jean’s favorite organisms – trees! What better place to explain the importance of riparian forest habitats and their contributions to our quality of life than an interpretive trail through such a forest? Thus, the Cahaba River Tree Trail was conceived.

There was a good bit of work between that conception and the unveiling. The portions of the existing trail system that would be used as well as the trees that would be involved needed to be identified. Funding for quality signs had to be secured. Even the source of information for the signs needed to be found and permissions sought.

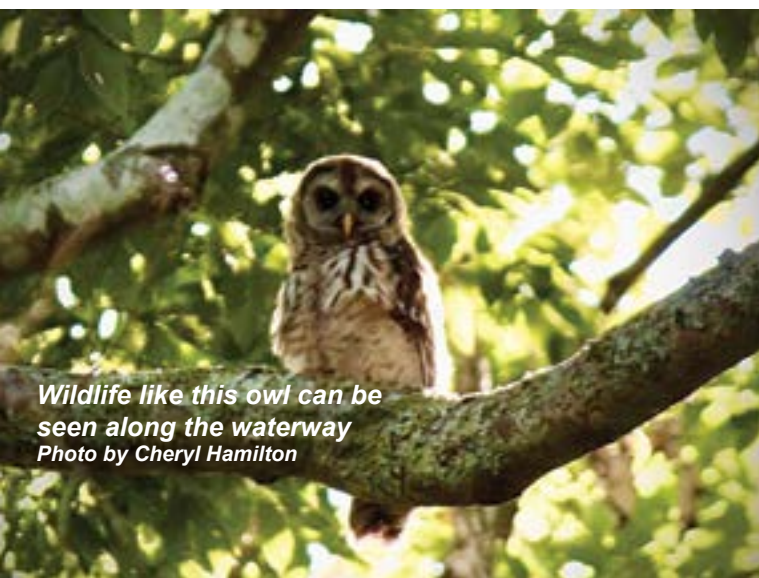
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For the Love of Trees: The Cahaba River Tree Trail

*By Katie Wiswall
Registered Forester, Certified Arborist,
Urban & Community Forestry Partnership Coordinator
Alabama Forestry Commission*



Bottle Brush Buckeye
Photo by Cheryl Hamilton



Wildlife like this owl can be seen along the waterway
Photo by Cheryl Hamilton



Photo by Jean Cox

The Cahaba River Tree Trail (Continued from page 11)

While Jean solicited tree identification (ID) help from arborist and forester Henry Hughes – as well as from AFC foresters Tim Roberts, Josef Greene, and Katie Wiswall – other members of the group began making contacts and soliciting participation. The City of Trussville (one of Alabama's newest Tree City USA participants) gave its blessing to the project and contributed money. Alabama Scenic River Trail – whose trails are the fluid ones that people can canoe and kayak – stepped out of their canoes to provide funding for the informational tree plaques. A former editor of the Trussville Tribune provided digital copy for the tree ID plaques. Premier Fence of Birmingham donated to the cause by installing the trailhead and pedestal signs for free. The Cahaba River Society and Friends of Pinchgut Creek contributed sweat equity to the project – Jean said they were incredibly lucky to have amazingly talented volunteers.

While the Cahaba River Tree Trail may be the brainchild of one 'tree nerd,' it was accomplished through the hard work of many volunteers and donations of time, money, and expertise from an array of partners. As a result, there are 21 trees on the trail identified with informational plaques that include a QR code so people can choose how much they learn about each one. They can read what makes each tree unique as they encounter the tags along the trail, or take a deeper dive into explanations of common name origins, uses for the trees, identification tips, and more as they follow the QR code back to a dedicated web location (<https://pinchgut.org/cahaba-river-tree-trail/>).

Because of the enthusiasm, vision, and energy of Jean Cox and her fellow board members at Friends of Pinchgut Creek, Trussville now has a dream of an interpretive trail dedicated to tree identification winding along the upper reaches of the Cahaba River, itself a biological gem! 🌳



Photo by Crystal McGough

Jean's advice for someone who wants to add an interpretive trail to their community:

- *Decide on your focus, then take a walk to figure out the best route and find the most impressive trees.*
- *Check to see if any local nonprofit groups share your interest. Network with as many conservation groups as possible, neighborhood civic groups, or historic societies depending on the site. Reach out to the tree commission in your town. When you reach out to groups that share your goals, partnerships happen easily. If you can't find a group to partner with, start one.*
- *Step one to finding great volunteers to work on community projects is to ask your friends. Also, use social media to reach out to volunteers and others who might want to join you.*
- *There are plenty of people out there who love trees. Find them and make cool things happen in your community together.*



MANAGEMENT ON THE EDGE

Photos by Tim Roberts

By Timothy Roberts, Forester, Alabama Forestry Commission

From school to the field, many foresters spend their time seeing and hearing the same things about forest management and how it should be done. Aptly coined ‘cookbook forestry,’ a standard set of practices are followed as equivalent of standard ingredients leading you to a standard result. A straightforward recipe is a great thing to have if all you’re looking to do is give a 30,000-foot view of what forest management is. Though laypeople may believe this is the only or best management approach, there are many ways to tackle the same issues.

With 93 percent of Alabama land being privately owned, not all landowners have the same acreage to accomplish such adequate economic timber operations. Additionally, all land is not created the same. Soil types, topography, average rainfall, and species vary greatly in the state. Alongside these factors, the boom in residential growth is causing changes to the overall landscape. Alabama is seeing fewer and fewer acres of generational land, and fragmented land is becoming more common, leading to limited ability to rely on the ‘cookbook’ forestry management methods. This is especially true in the more urbanized areas of the state.

In some places in Alabama, we are frequently seeing forest lands stray from strict tree farming. More often now, practices and regimes focus on wildlife management and recreation, especially as you get closer to the wildland-urban interface or the outskirts of highly populated areas of Alabama. In Jefferson County, most land falls somewhere in a wildland-urban interface. The outreach I typically receive here about management follows along these lines, “I

have 15 acres of old-growth oak trees. I did some research online and found that a forester could help me with having my timber purchased by someone, could you tell me what I need to do?”

Unfortunately, I usually must explain that the removal of timber from properties this small would cost money instead of making any. At this point, I offer to come take a look around the property and explain that there may be other options for what practices they can implement. Many times, I’ve found landowners don’t really wish to grow and sell timber, they simply want a place to relax away from the city or the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Most landowners I’ve encountered are interested in having a place where their grandkids can come be in the woods and learn to hunt, walking trails so they have their own private park, a place to watch birds or create a butterfly sanctuary, and the list continues. The one thing I have noticed is the trend for people to no longer be interested in the cookbook timber income forests of the past, calling for more creativity and thought in plans overall.

The growth that Alabama is experiencing will probably not slow down any time soon. The fragmentation of land will continue to even the most untouched areas of the state, and the same land that has been in the middle of nowhere for decades may end up as a part of the wildland-urban interface. We may even be called upon as I sometimes am to do some urban forestry for a single tree in a yard. For these reasons, we should always remember that there is more to forests than trees and try not to rely on ‘cookbook’ forestry. 🌲

POND CONSTRUCTION

By Perry L. Oakes, PE

*Program Coordinator for Alabama's Erosion and Sediment Control Program
(Retired State Conservation Engineer, Natural Resources Conservation Service)*

Ponds constructed by private forest landowners in Alabama can provide recreational, wildlife, and firefighting benefits, as well as provide one of the most aesthetically pleasing attributes to the property. They can be as simple as a small dug pond for wildlife, or as complex as a large watershed-type embankment pond. In any case, proper pond construction must be preceded by proper planning and design.

The state of Alabama now has a Safe Dams Law, and this makes it most important that dams be properly designed, constructed, inspected, and maintained. Dams are classified according to hazard level. Note that dams classified as 'high hazard' (potential for loss of life downstream should the dam fail) have the highest design criteria and requirements for construction and maintenance. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) still maintains technical expertise for pond planning, design, and construction; however, the agency can only provide financial and technical services for irrigation and livestock ponds in the state. Recreational, wildlife, or firefighting ponds should be planned, designed, and have construction oversight from a Professional Engineer (PE) registered in Alabama.

Planning and Design

Adequate planning for a pond involves several steps. Site selection is very important, as the soils must contain sufficient clay to hold water and prevent seepage. The topography must also be considered since this can drastically affect the economics of building a pond on the site. The watershed must be large enough to yield enough runoff water to maintain an acceptable water level in the pond during drought conditions, but not be so large that expensive overflow and bypass systems are needed to control the runoff. Finally, the pond should not affect adjacent properties.

Each pond site is unique and therefore requires an individualized design. The hydrology of the watershed must be determined to get an accurate account of different storm runoffs. A smaller magnitude storm is used to design the pipe overflow system (principal spillway), and a larger magnitude storm is used to design the auxiliary (emergency) spillway which allows the runoff from that storm to safely bypass the dam. Future conditions must also be considered when designing the pond. Changes in a watershed such as clear-cutting or urbanization can significantly change the volume and rate of runoff produced by the storms.

Pond sites that involve a total of one or more acres of land disturbance during

construction are required to have a National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit issued from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM). This permit requires that a Best Management Practices (BMP) plan be developed and implemented to control erosion during construction and requires monitoring the BMPs to ensure they are functioning properly.

Even if the site is less than one acre, the landowner and contractor are still required to implement an erosion and sediment control plan that meets current state requirements, although no permit is required. A simple way to minimize land disturbance is to clear the pool area only after the dam is near completion. This provision creates a basin to trap the sediment produced when the area above the dam is cleared. In all cases, vegetation should be established to control erosion as soon as possible during and especially after construction.

Wetlands are another area that must be considered. Federal wetland regulations such as Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and Swampbuster provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985 may apply to private landowners who construct ponds in areas considered to be wetlands. Before starting construction, check with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to see which specific laws and regulations apply to

you. In some cases, a permit or additional planning assistance may be needed. If a perennial stream (solid blue line on a topo map) or an intermittent stream (dashed blue line on a topo map) are shown on the pond site, or if wetland-type soils are manipulated or covered, then a 404 permit from the USACE will probably be required (check with your local USACE office).

Construction

The earth-moving work is the costliest component of pond construction and must be done properly to ensure the dam does not leak, creating maintenance and safety hazards. Topsoil to be used later in vegetation establishment should be salvaged and stockpiled as one of the first operations of construction. After the topsoil has been salvaged, the foundation of the dam must be properly prepared by excavating a trench down to rock or an impervious layer of soil material. Trench excavation can be hazardous work. Cave-ins can occur if the walls of the trench are not sloped correctly. When an impervious layer has been reached, the earthfill process begins.

The central portion of the dam, called the core, must be constructed of good clay material and all the earthfill for the dam must be adequately compacted. The two main ingredients of good compaction are compactive effort and moisture. Heavy equipment and/or sheepfoot rollers should be used to ensure the soil receives adequate compactive effort, and the moisture content of the soil must be monitored. Soil that is either too dry or too wet will not properly compact, regardless of the compactive effort.

During the construction process, the dam should be slightly overbuilt to allow for settlement, which will occur over time. If the top of the dam is to be used for a road, it should have a top width of at least 12 feet. The side slopes of the dam should have at least three (horizontal) to one (vertical) slope that is easy to maintain.

The principal spillway through the dam is designed to control runoff from a smaller design storm and has several key compo-

nents. The pipe through the dam is often referred to as the 'barrel pipe.' A drainage diaphragm system should be designed and installed around the barrel pipe to ensure seepage water from the pond does not cause soil piping between the outside surface of the barrel pipe and the earthfill of the dam. Good compaction of the earthfill around the barrel pipe and a properly installed drainage diaphragm system is extremely important. This area is often the weakest portion of the earthfill and where most dams fail.

The vertical pipe attached to the barrel pipe at the front of the dam is called the 'riser.' This riser must be adequately sized to deliver water to the barrel pipe and is usually one to two pipe sizes larger than the barrel pipe. A trash rack must be placed on the riser to keep floating debris from clogging the pipe system. Often overlooked is the fact that, due to buoyant forces, the riser tends to float. This should be prevented with a properly sized concrete counterweight at the base of the riser.

The principal spillway pipe system can be constructed of many kinds of materials such as steel, corrugated metal, and various types of plastic. The height of earthfill placed over a plastic pipe is more limited than for most other types of pipe. The outlet of a plastic pipe must be protected from damage by fire.

An alternative to the traditional barrel and riser type of principal spillway is a siphon system, which can be used especially when a pipe on an old pond needs to be replaced. The old pipe is often pumped full of concrete grout and the new siphon system installed without having to cut the dam all the way through to replace a barrel pipe. Details on a siphon system are available from the NRCS.

The auxiliary or 'emergency' spillway for the pond is designed so runoff from larger storms can be carried safely around the dam. The spillway is generally located on one end of the dam in undisturbed soil and should be established and maintained to a good stand of grass. The flow through the

auxiliary spillway should be shallow, slow, and uniform to minimize the possibility of the spillway eroding and causing failure of the dam.

Construction is not complete until vegetation has been established on the dam, auxiliary spillway, and all other disturbed areas. Topsoil salvaged and stockpiled at the first of construction should be spread uniformly over the surface of the dam and auxiliary spillway, when needed, to enhance vegetation establishment. A soil test should be used to determine lime and fertilizer requirements. After seeding, the entire area should be mulched with straw to control erosion during grass establishment and to conserve moisture.

Before closing the valve and storing water in the pond, the pond bottom should be sampled, and a soil test done to determine the pH and any lime required for optimal water quality. This is the best time to correct pH problems that translate from the soil of the pond bottom to the water in the pond.

Maintenance

Once the pond is completed, certain maintenance will be needed. Vegetation must be maintained by mowing and occasionally fertilizing. Trees should not be allowed to grow on the dam or in the auxiliary spillway. Debris should be removed from the trash rack periodically. The pond may need additional lime treatments to correct pH problems. Fish will need to be stocked and occasionally restocked in the pond for recreational use. Fertilizer may be needed to enhance the quality of the water for fish. Beaver control may also be needed since these animals occasionally will try to block the principal spillway pipe.

A pond that has been properly planned, designed, constructed, and maintained can provide years of beneficial service to a landowner. 🏡

Editor's note: This article was updated from a story previously published in the Summer 1996 issue of Alabama's TREASURED Forests magazine.



*Riser pipe with
concrete ballast*



Installing a diaphragm drain

Northern Flicker

Downy

Yellow Bellied Sapsucker

Woodpeckers

Bird Photos by Joe Watts unless otherwise stated

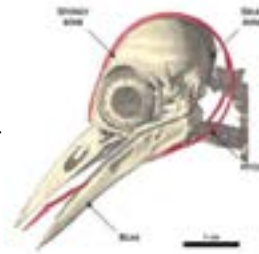
*By Ray Metzler, Threatened and Endangered Species Specialist, Certified Wildlife Biologist
Alabama Forestry Commission*

A quick internet search indicates woodpeckers are found on every continent except Antarctica and Australia. They are most abundant in South America and South-east Asia. A total of 23 woodpecker species occur in the continental United States. One of these species is the ivory-billed woodpecker which is often considered to be extinct. Eight of the 23 species are known to occur in Alabama. Most of our eight species are widespread and can be found easily.

What makes a woodpecker a woodpecker?

From their name, it should be fairly obvious that woodpeckers get their name because they like to “peck on wood.” They peck or hammer on wood for several reasons including, but not limited to, mating and communication, searching for food, making a nest, and claiming territory.

The anatomy of a woodpecker has many features that distinguish them from other birds and allow them to ‘peck’ or ‘drill’ into trees without harm. A sharp, chisel-shaped bill allows them to excavate holes while a long, sticky tongue makes easy work of removing food from crevices and tunnels in wood. Their tongue wraps around the skull and attaches at their nostrils. Scientific reports regarding a woodpecker skull vary from describing it as ‘spongy’ to being hard enough to protect the bird from injury without cushioning impacts. Most reports indicate there is very little space between the small brain and skull, which minimizes the amount of ‘rattling’ or ‘sloshing around’ while the bird is feeding or drilling on wood. A woodpecker skull is said to be able to absorb the force of an impact 1,200 times greater than gravity. Most birds have four toes with three facing forward and one backward. Woodpeckers also have four toes but two face forward and two backward. This toe arrangement is referred to as zygodactyl, allowing them to cling to trees and wooden structures. They also have modified feathers called ‘bristles’ over their nostrils to minimize the risk of inhaling wood chips while pecking or drilling into trees and wood. Woodpeckers generally have stiff tail feathers they use to help prop themselves up while drilling into a tree.



Alabama's woodpeckers

The **pileated woodpecker** is Alabama's largest woodpecker. It is my favorite because I enjoy listening to their raucous call and watching their undulating flight while sitting in a tree stand during Alabama's archery deer season. Their call can be heard for fairly long distances during the fall and winter months when trees have dropped their leaves. Their mostly black body is about 17 inches tall with white patches on the neck and wings. The red crest on the head is easily seen while perched in a tree or in flight at relatively short distances. Pileated woodpeckers inhabit forested areas with mature trees and snags, home to carpenter ants and wood-boring beetle larvae – their primary food source. Mated pairs defend their territory throughout the year. Nest cavities may be used by many other species for shelter after fledging occurs.

The two smallest species in Alabama are the **hairy and downy woodpeckers**. They are difficult to tell apart but there are some telltale things to look for: 1) Hairy woodpeckers have a beak about as long as their head, while a downy beak is about half as long as the head, and 2) hairy beaks are more chisel-like, while a downy beak is much more like a songbird. I recently read on an internet site the best way to tell them apart: if it looks like it would easily fit in your pocket, it's a downy. If it looks like it would be difficult to fit in your pocket, it's probably a hairy. As a reminder, woodpeckers are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and it is illegal to collect them in any manner without a permit. Downy woodpeckers are often seen flitting around on smaller branches and bushes while hairy woodpeckers are typically seen on the trunk or larger branches. Hairy woodpeckers have solid white outer tail feathers while downy woodpeckers have some black striping on their outer tail feathers.

The most common in Alabama, the **red-bellied woodpecker**, is often misidentified as a red-headed woodpecker. The red-bellied woodpecker stands 9-10 inches tall and has a red or pinkish belly that is only visible if the bird is hanging upside down. A bright red patch extends from the top of its head, in the male, and down the back of the neck, in both sexes. They are a common sight at backyard feeders along with downy, hairy, and pileated woodpeckers. For several years now, a red-bellied woodpecker has used the aluminum flashing on the soffit and fascia of my family's home as a place to announce his presence during the spring. I suspect this



Red-Cockaded (RCW)
Photo by Andrew Lydeard

Red Bellied

Red Headed

of Alabama

is being done to attract a mate but can't be positive. I am glad we have aluminum flashing covering the wood fascia as this woodpecker would have certainly made a mess without it! It is incredible how loud the 'drumming' is, and it always amazes me that its head can sustain the impacts of the metal flashing.

The **red-headed woodpecker** has a completely red head which contrasts with its black and white body. Both sexes are similar in appearance and are easy to identify. Unlike many other woodpeckers, redheads don't normally excavate holes in wood to feed. They typically catch insects while flying and are one of only four North American woodpeckers known to store food. Furthermore, it is the only one known to cover stored food with wood or bark.

The **red-cockaded woodpecker** (RCW) is the least abundant of Alabama's woodpeckers and was recently downlisted from 'endangered' to 'threatened' under the Endangered Species Act. It favors old growth, open canopy longleaf pine habitat with a reduced woody mid-story and a well-developed herbaceous layer. Suitable cavity trees are typically 80 years of age or older and suffer from a fungus that causes the heartwood to rot – allowing the woodpeckers to excavate a cavity more easily. Populations have grown in Alabama since being listed as endangered in 1970. Providing suitable habitat and artificial 'cavities' has greatly benefitted recovery efforts of this species. Installing an artificial cavity or insert requires operating a chain saw on a ladder approximately 20 feet above the ground. I recently watched U.S. Forest Service personnel install inserts in suitable trees in Tuskegee National Forest. RCWs can be found on all of Alabama's national forests except for the Bankhead National Forest in northwest Alabama, as well as a few different private lands. Look for the wide white bands painted on trees that indicate a 'cavity tree.' It is the only Alabama woodpecker to excavate a nest cavity in a live tree.

The **northern flicker, or yellowhammer**, is Alabama's state bird and the most widely distributed woodpecker in the United States. Its breeding range extends into Alaska and much of Canada.

It is one of the few woodpecker species that migrates. They feed primarily on ants and beetles, digging for them on the ground, with their slightly curved bill. A flash of yellow color in the wings and a white patch on the rump are distinctive characteristics to look for when seen in Alabama.

If you see a distinctive horizontal row of holes in your trees, you may have a **yellow-bellied sapsucker** present. They are not your typical woodpecker that drill into trees and then feed on excavated insects. They make distinctive holes or sap wells in trees arranged in horizontal rows in which they probe for sap and any insects trapped in the sap. Yellow-bellied sapsuckers are medium-sized birds with black and white barring on their backs and a yellow belly and chest. Their breeding range includes much of Canada, the upper Midwest, and New England states, extending south into southern West Virginia. They are generally found in Alabama only during the non-breeding season months (fall through spring).

Management Implications

Management activities can be viewed in two ways: 1) doing things to provide habitat for woodpeckers, and 2) controlling damage to wood structures. Woodpeckers are generally not a species or group of species for which one would consider improving habitat quality, unless you happen to have red-cockaded woodpeckers on your property. In the case of red-cockaded woodpeckers, habitat is limited, and providing mature, open canopy longleaf pine with a well-developed herbaceous layer is key. All woodpeckers can benefit from having snags left in place to provide food sources and nesting cover. Snags may also be much more attractive for feeding and nesting sites than the wood siding on your house.

Woodpeckers can be persistent and will probably require physically excluding them from your wooden structures to minimize damage. Installing netting from the outer eaves down the side of the building is highly effective but can be expensive. You may want to try some simpler, less expensive methods before installing an exclusion net. Some of the less expensive, but inconsistent control techniques include placing plastic owls or hawks, streamers, spinners, and windsocks on or near the wooden structure being damaged. Playing recorded distress calls of woodpeckers, followed by raptor calls, can act as a sound deterrent. I will say, this is one reason why my wife and I chose to build a brick home with vinyl/aluminum soffit and fascia. We wanted it to be as maintenance-free with limited opportunities for external damage as possible. I am thankful that our red-bellied woodpecker only uses the aluminum fascia for a short time during the spring! 🦜



Artificial cavity

Photos by Ray Metzler

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WHITE OAK INITIATIVE CONTINUES WITH ITS MISSION

*By Dan Chappell, Assistant Director, Forest Management Division
Alabama Forestry Commission*

Photo courtesy of White Oak Initiative

When the White Oak Initiative was launched in 2017, everyone involved knew that, for any positive impact to be achieved, there would have to be a commitment for the long haul. The concerns that were being raised at the Initiative's formation were not new, nor had they arisen quickly, nor could they be addressed easily.

To once again thrive, the level of conservation work needed by the upland hardwood forests of much of the eastern half of the US is dauntingly high. However, the goal of this collection of stakeholders is to focus attention on that very work. From there, through ever-improving scientific study and applied knowledge, the next step is to continuously optimize the forestry practices that will yield the best forest outcomes at a reasonable level of cost. Finally, as a practical matter, many practices that are beneficial to the long-term health of upland forests – oak species in particular – require monetary investments today. Working with partners that provide helpful cost-share funding to landowners, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service, is within the scope of work of the Initiative. For that matter, so is working at the level up from that with the legislative partners that are responsible for allocating dollars to the cost-share agencies. It will take much-dedicated effort from across a spectrum of landowners, foresters, technicians, professors, and policy makers to see positive improvements to young oak regeneration and subsequent oak recruitment to larger size classes as it grows. However, I can report that this effort is being made.

Before moving on, I should offer a quick review of a few key issues affecting the hardwood forests that this Initiative is working so hard to address. To begin, the area of interest for the Initiative is very large. The native range of white oak (*Quercus alba*) is

bounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Great Plains to the west. It takes in the Florida Panhandle and east Texas, as well as southeastern Minnesota, southern Maine, and even parts of Ontario. Particularly important 'hot spots' are historically found in upland areas of Arkansas/Missouri and Kentucky/West Virginia. There are few upland areas of Alabama where white oak is not found. Despite this extensive range, and the fact that the data from the Forest Inventory and Analysis survey says volumes of this tree have never been higher since record-taking began about 90 years ago, there remains serious concern. Why should this be?

In short, the oak-rich forests that we enjoy today are a legacy of the land use practices of 100+ years ago. As practices and conditions on the ground have changed, so too are the forests changing in ways that will result in a very different type of forest that will be inherited by our descendants 100 years from now.

While once common, frequent low-intensity fire and widespread livestock grazing are now much less so. In time, the limitation of disturbances that would result in more sunlight reaching the forest floor leads to a change in species composition, with oak saplings either being outcompeted by species more tolerant of low-light environments or being out-competed by faster-growing light-loving species such as yellow-poplar in high light environments such as post-clearcut. Mid-light environments (20-50 percent) are not as easy to manage as either full-shade or full-sun. Without action, the projections show there will be far fewer large oaks, as the current shortage of vigorous seedlings and saplings in the stands of today will not be sufficient to replace mature trees that will eventually give way to mortality or harvest. As oaks have quite a different natural history from species such as our southern pines, this is not a problem

(Continued on page 20)

WHITE OAK INITIATIVE CONTINUES WITH ITS MISSION

(Continued from page 19)



Dr. Lhotka identifies thick poplar competition

easily addressed by simply planting the trees today that we desire to have with us in the future. Although planting white oaks and other hardwoods may be an element of the larger conservation strategy, it will be imperative for landowners and managers to do as much as reasonably can be done to shepherd existing quality natural tree seedling and sapling stock into the forests of the future. Education on how to set about doing this will be increasingly important if results are to be achieved.

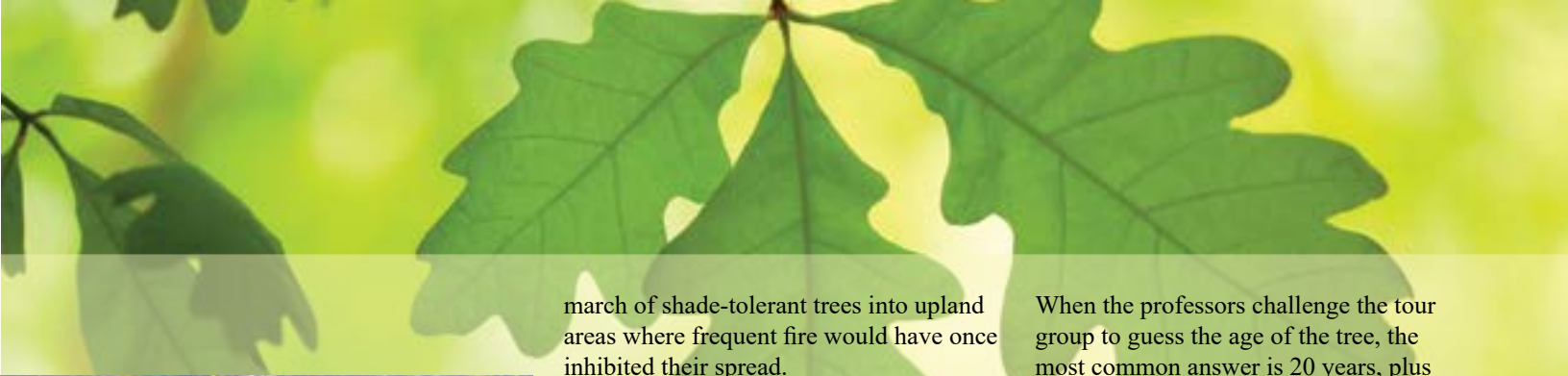
In early September 2024, I was privileged to attend the White Oak Silvicultural Training put on by the University of Kentucky Extension and the White Oak Initiative. The classroom portion was given in Lexington and the field visits occurred in Berea Forest, one of the oldest scientifically managed forests in the nation, about 10,000 acres in extent. This was a very good session to attend as the soon-to-retire Dr. Jeff Stringer was leading the way, although clearly making the effort to pass the reins to some of the younger professors coming up, such as Dr. John Lhotka, Dr. Lance Vickers, and Dr. Jacob Muller. Their task will be to take

leadership roles in the upland hardwood conservation efforts of the coming years.

Looking back over the past 40 years or so of work in the field of oak research, you will not have to look far to find Dr. Stringer's name. In addition, his ability to communicate with audiences has made him an ideal choice to lead his state's extension efforts. You never fail to learn when he is speaking about oak. He has the gift of communicating complex ideas to non-specialists.

To use a phrase that came up many times during the two-day event, white oak has a "conservative growth strategy." Looking at how well current mature hardwood forests are stocked with large white oaks, this strategy clearly has worked well. We looked at charts showing the relative shade tolerance of different hardwoods. For example, yellow-poplar thrives in full sun and will grow very quickly given a full-sun environment. For that matter, so does loblolly pine, which is why planting it in site-prepped, full-sun, post-clearcut locations can, by design, very rapidly lead to a healthy new stand of young trees. On the other hand, you can have very shade-tolerant trees such as American beech, which can persist and slowly grow in low-light understory conditions beneath taller, shadow-casting canopy trees for a long time. Oak trees, as a rule, fall somewhere in between the two extremes, with species such as scarlet oak preferring conditions close to full sun, while white oak seedlings can germinate and live as understory seedlings for years in the shade. Note that I said 'live,' not 'grow,' at least not upwards. As part of that "conservative growth strategy," seedling white oak tends toward investing its limited available energy into establishing an impressive root system that is ready to fuel upward growth when some sort of disturbance comes along that takes out sun-grabbing canopy trees, thus allowing partial sun to penetrate to the forest floor. I learned that those established root systems are ready and able to stump sprout if an established oak itself succumbs to disturbance. Any larger white oak you see in the forest today is more likely to have once been a stump sprout from an established root system than it is to have been germinated from an acorn that has to build its root system from scratch over many years.

The frequency of fire disturbance and the presence of large grazing mammals, wild and in more recent times domesticated, served for centuries to maintain the eastern hardwood forests in a patchy state of constant change and partial openness. White oaks as a species seem to have thrived under these conditions, as they are also surprisingly resistant to fire mortality. The research shows that timing and intensity of fire are key considerations. Cooler, dormant season burns do not lead to high rates of mortality among white oaks with established bark, whereas hotter fires during the growing season can cause significant losses within a stand, although stump sprouting will be highly likely to occur. Consider the fallen leaves of many common dry-site upland oaks. In a partially sunny environment, oak leaves can effectively dry out and curl up making a nice fuel bed of litter to carry a fire across a stand, helping to knock back competing vegetation and provide more open canopy space for surviving oaks to step into and fill with their own crowns. Conversely, the fallen leaves of the thin-barked, fire-avoidant red maple hold moisture and accumulate in such a way as to provide impediments to damaging fire reaching the vulnerable main stem of the tree. Current studies are underway that show how even small changes to tree composition lead to major changes in fire ecology – changes not easily overcome by managers looking to turn back the clock on the



Dr. Lhotka identifies area of competition control



Angel White Oak Champion Tree

march of shade-tolerant trees into upland areas where frequent fire would have once inhibited their spread.

The white oak, which receives extra attention due to its high commercial value, and eastern oak in general, is under pressure due to a perfect storm of factors. The last century has seen much less disturbance on the landscape, with effective rural fire control efforts playing a major role. Although these efforts have undoubtedly saved lives and property, the effect on the ground has been profound in less desirable ways as well. As undisturbed closed forest canopies have spread over the landscape, white oaks remain in the canopy that are 80–100 years or older, and sometimes much older. However, the needed advanced-regeneration-sized trees are largely missing from the understories due to intense competition from trees that would be eliminated from stands that were more open and/or were impacted by more frequent disturbance than is now common. Unlike light-seeded species that can more easily blow into new areas and exploit openings in forest canopies, the heavy-seeded oaks, with their conservative growth strategy, don't spread easily into unoccupied areas. As the old saying goes, "the acorn does not fall far from the tree," and although small mammals do relocate and bury acorns in new locations, as a rule, if a given site does not possess small oaks today, it will not possess large oaks (or small oaks, for that matter) tomorrow, in the absence of human management. Although worthy of its own discussion, I will quickly mention the high density of white-tail deer in today's forest as being a challenge to white oak regeneration as well.

Another fact that I learned in Kentucky was that almost everyone is a poor judge of tree age for smaller oaks. Keep in mind that we are talking about Kentucky, where tree growth is slower than in Alabama, but the principle would still apply here. The professors have numerous examples of being on landowner properties on field days and encountering, let's say, a 6-inch diameter white oak in a shaded location amongst the larger sawtimber-sized trees.

When the professors challenge the tour group to guess the age of the tree, the most common answer is 20 years, plus or minus. Taking a core sample, it is not uncommon to find that the tree is closer to 80 years old or even older.

On the plus side, we learn that white oak is a very hardy tree that can live for decades on a very small diet of light and resources. On the negative side, this highlights yet another challenge. Across the hardwood region, clearcuts are not as common as they are in pine-dominated forests. As we mentioned, with pine being light-loving, it is possible to start the next stand of fast-growing, desirable trees directly from a full-light environment. Landowners and loggers must be more selective when working in the slower-growing hardwoods. Good forest practice has been to leave such a 6-inch white oak in the stand during a harvest treatment, as it will respond well to a partial harvest opening up the growing space, and hopefully getting more light to the tree and others like it that will allow for rapid 'release' and a growth spurt that will get oaks into the upper canopy where they will finally be able to pack on steady growth year by year. What we now know is that there is a big difference in how vigorous a response you can expect from similar-looking 6-inch diameter trees. If 30 years old, then the tree's response may be remarkable. If 90 years old, probably much less so, even though to the untrained eye the two look very similar. Flatter tops versus more apparent 'leaders' are a good indication of more mature versus younger, more vigorous white oaks. Management must aim to create conditions with many more of those ready-to-respond 30-year-olds on site if the goal is to eventually have large-diameter oaks occupying prime growing space within the forest.

The White Oak Initiative has produced several useful publications through its Landowners for Oaks series. See whiteoakinitiative.org. White oak conservation efforts will continue to gain attention within Alabama. As always, AFC foresters will be excellent sources for this information. 🌳

A photograph of a rustic wooden bridge crossing a small stream in a wooded area. The bridge has a simple truss design with wooden planks for the deck. The surrounding forest is dense with trees, some showing autumn foliage. The water in the stream is calm, reflecting the bridge and the trees.

EFFICIENT TIMBER TRANSPORTATION:

Economic Necessities & Infrastructure Challenges in Alabama

Photos by Mollie Kate Erwin

*By Al Jones, Senior Forest Economic Development Representative
Alabama Forestry Commission*

One of the critical economic factors enabling timber owners, sawmills, and forest industry manufacturers to achieve acceptable returns on investment is the ability to transport timber across the shortest, most efficient routes. With transportation costs now reaching \$5.00 to \$6.00 per mile, extended routes due to weight or other restrictions on shorter routes can easily erode potential financial gains. Efficient transportation not only reduces costs but also minimizes impacts by decreasing fuel consumption and emissions.

Currently, there are approximately 16,000 bridges in the state of Alabama. Alarmingly, more than 2,000 of these structures have statutory weight limitations, restricting their use to vehicles weighing less than 80,000 pounds due to various structural deficiencies. This situation poses a significant challenge for the timber industry, which relies heavily on the ability to transport large loads efficiently.

The responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of about 1,950 of these bridges falls on the shoulders of county commissions. With many bridges advancing in age, the number of structurally deficient bridges is expected to rise in the coming years. This increasing number of deficient bridges underscores a critical need for upgrades and repairs, particularly in counties where public funds are limited, and other priorities often take precedence.

To address this pressing issue, the Alabama Legislature enacted the Rural Logging Efficiency Act of 2023, funded through the Alabama General Fund Budget Act of 2024. Through this legislation, the Alabama Forestry Commission was tasked with adopting program rules and administering the Logging Efficiency Grant Fund. This fund aims to support the maintenance, repair, replace-

ment, and/or construction of bridges on rural public county roads. A total of \$1.7 million has been allocated for these grants.

For the purposes of this grant, ‘bridges’ are defined broadly to include not only traditional bridges but also culverts and storm-water piping that, when completed, allow for the maximum legal vehicle weights. This comprehensive definition ensures that a wide range of critical infrastructure in rural areas can be addressed under the grant program. ‘Rural area’ means any unincorporated area within the state, or any incorporated area within the state with a population of 2,500 inhabitants or fewer, according to the most recent federal census. ‘Rural bridge’ means a load-restricted public bridge located in a rural area that is posted to limit commercial or school bus traffic.

Applications for these grants may only be made by county commissions. Each county commission that applies will be limited to one application. The maximum amount of funding to be applied for through this opportunity is \$400,000 per application; however, county commissions have been encouraged to submit applications for bridge projects requiring less than the maximum funding. An application for more than one bridge is allowable if it does not exceed the grant ceiling and each bridge meets eligibility requirements.

Rural bridge grant applications will be prioritized according to the amount of matching contributions committed by an applying county commission, as well as the rural economic impact of the proposed project. Emphasis will be placed on proposed projects benefiting forest products production.

The Forestry Commission has appointed a seven-person advisory committee which will review and prioritize rural bridge



grant applications. Committee members include two persons actively engaged in logging, one person affiliated with the forest products industry, one forest landowner actively involved in managing timber for harvest, one elected county commissioner, and one person who serves as a first responder in a rural area. The rural bridge grant advisory committee will make recommendations to the Commission regarding which applications should receive funding, and to what extent they should receive funding. The Commission will retain official grant awarding authority.

The availability of these funds is a vital step towards improving the transportation infrastructure necessary for the timber industry. By ensuring that rural routes can support the weight of timber transport vehicles, these grants will help maintain the economic viability of the timber industry in Alabama. Additionally, improving bridge infrastructure will have broader benefits for the public, including enhanced safety and reliability of transportation routes.

State Forester Rick Oates emphasized the significance of this initiative, stating, “The Alabama Forestry Commission is excited to offer this innovative economic resource, which will benefit all levels of the forestry sector and signals a commitment to our state’s rural economy. We extend our gratitude to Governor Kay Ivey and the Alabama Legislature for their support in providing these necessary funds. We anticipate receiving applications that align with our goal to enhance transportation routes by upgrading substandard bridges, ultimately reducing costs, and providing new efficiencies for timber owners and businesses.”

Completed applications from county commissions must be submitted back to the Alabama Forestry Commission by close of business on March 14, 2025. Award announcements are expected by late Spring 2025.

Broader Implications and Future Outlook

In conclusion, the ability to transport timber efficiently is essential for the economic success of timber owners, sawmills, and forest industry manufacturers in Alabama. With transportation costs steadily rising, the impact of deficient infrastructure should not be underestimated. The Rural Logging Efficiency Act of 2023 and the associated grants represent a crucial investment in the state's infrastructure, addressing both immediate needs and future challenges.

Furthermore, beyond the immediate economic benefits for the timber industry, the initiative to repair and upgrade rural bridges holds broader implications for the state's overall infrastructure. Improved transportation routes will not only facilitate the movement of timber but also enhance accessibility and connectivity for rural communities. This leads to increased economic opportuni-

ties, better access to services, and an overall improvement in the quality of life for residents in these areas.

Looking ahead, it is crucial for state and local governments to continue prioritizing infrastructure investments. Sustainable development of transportation networks and infrastructure can create a more resilient and adaptable economy. Collaboration between public and private sectors will be key to ensuring that the necessary funding and resources are available for ongoing maintenance and future projects.

By addressing the infrastructure challenges head-on, Alabama can set a precedent for other states facing similar issues. The successful implementation of the Rural Logging Efficiency Act can serve as a model for how targeted legislation and funding can drive positive change and support economic growth in rural areas. Ultimately, by investing in infrastructure today, Alabama can secure a more prosperous and sustainable future for its timber industry and beyond. 🌲





*By Brad Lang, Northwest Regional Forester
Training & Safety Director
Alabama Forestry Commission*

A Good Employee Is Always Learning

The people of Alabama have a tremendous asset available to them in the Alabama Forestry Commission. This agency is the bridge of education from the landowner to the professional forestry world. We employ the most foresters in the state, and most counties also have forestry ranger technicians to assist with forestry advice.

In 1979, the agency launched an intense, new employee training called the Forestry Academy. This educational resource operated until 1994 when, due to budgetary reasons, the Academy was terminated. The purpose of its design was to train new hires to provide the best forestry assistance to Alabama landowners by serving them more efficiently. Building good relationships with landowners and helping them in making generational decisions has always been an important role our employees play.

I was fortunate to serve in that capacity for 19 years before I was tasked by our agency leadership with a new role in 2020 to bring back the Forestry Academy and train our new hires. Their vision for this new Academy was simple: to better serve the public, provide our employees with the knowledge and tools to safely and consistently perform the essential functions of field-level jobs across the state, and improve communications between the field and state headquarters. Our highest priority is to best serve the landowners across Alabama in the safest way possible.

The Academy would be comprised of two semesters: four consecutive weeks in the fall learning fire-related activities and developing leadership skills, and four consecutive weeks in the spring gaining forest management knowledge to assist private landowners. The first session consists of orientation to the Commission, advanced first aid and CPR, wildfire suppression strategies and tactics, tractor operations within the wildland fire environment, defensive driving, and wildland chainsaw utilization. The second session covers forestry training such as silviculture and tree measurement; dendrology; urban forestry; stewardship programs including TREASURE Forest, Tree Farm, and Forest Stewardship; forest health, insects, and disease; threatened and endangered species; as well as media relations and information technology.

Although the world was just starting to recover from a pandemic in 2020, the Academy was re-instated in October of that year. It seemed daunting then, but in reality, it was the perfect time, as we were all hitting the reset button on life. A total of 27 new employees, hired in the fiscal years of 2019 and 2020, were the first class to attend this newly ‘rebooted’ Forestry Academy at the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center in Andalusia. To kick off each year, various government and organizational leaders address the group, motivating them to be their best. The spring session culminates with graduation featuring a keynote speaker which has included Gov. Kay Ivey, Judge Chris McCool, and Ms. Connie Rowe.

The Forestry Academy is providing training for all new hires and the occasional veteran employee who voices interest. The AFC is no different than other businesses and organizations – turnover is an issue. Our longtime, experienced people are retiring, and new employees are coming in at an average rate of 16-18 field and program personnel each year. It is the agency’s goal to get these new hires the training and tools they need to serve the public as quickly and efficiently as possible. Even though these new employees may know the technical content, they must be introduced to the Commission’s philosophy and standards. Whether training them to be good firefighters or to make sound management recommendations, it is our goal to provide productive, quality employees to assist the public.

While developing new personnel to be competent and safe at their job is the ultimate goal, a secondary benefit of this Academy

emy is bringing the employees together. Spread over 67 counties across the state, relationships can be difficult to build and maintain. The Academy allows all its participants to engage and interact with all job levels throughout the AFC. This includes members of our lead team spending a week at a time with the participants. Opening all doors to the agency increases communication from the top to the bottom.

A few past graduates have noted that this was the overwhelming benefit they gained from the Academy. "It's been great to get to know your colleagues from all areas across the state and be able to converse with them about matters we face," stated Marshall County Forest Ranger Technician Luke Holden.

Wiregrass Work Unit Manager Thomas Moss agreed with that notion and added that coming from a predominantly forest management background, the Academy prepared him to advance his knowledge of and training in wildland fire suppression. This is the most dangerous job we perform and why we train in this area first.

Not everybody comes to the agency understanding the tremendous responsibility it takes to learn both wildland firefighting and assisting the public with forest management advice. The job is demanding, yet exciting at times. Landowners have a large investment in their tree farming activities and trusting that there is a defense against wildfires is important to them. Tuscaloosa Forestry Specialist Roy Davis said, "Learning how to serve the public was the best skill set I developed while at the Academy."

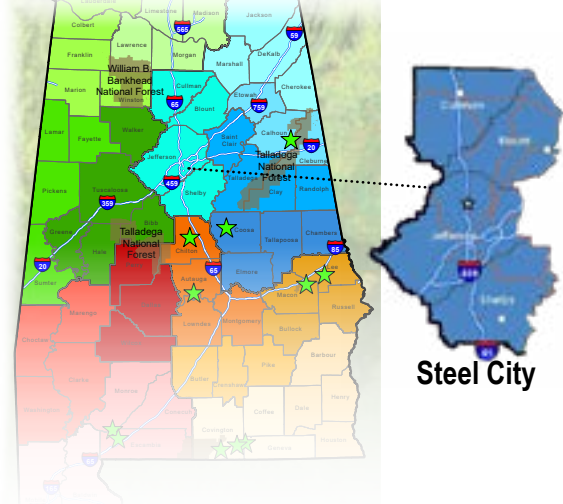
The AFC Forestry Academy is an all-hands-on-deck venture that could never be successful without all the employees involved. This starts at the top with support from the commissioners that govern the agency, as well as the divisional and regional staff that hold leadership positions. However, it doesn't stop there. We are blessed with an experienced veteran field staff that performs in instructor positions to pass along what they have learned throughout their careers in wildfire and forest management on both in-state and out-of-state details. Anytime these instructors are assigned to the Academy, the county employees fill their shoes in protecting their home units and ensuring landowner assistance is being provided. It is truly a top-to-bottom effort and builds on all the staff support.

Finally, this endeavor would be extremely difficult logistically and financially without the support and assistance of the Solon Dixon Center. Director Joel Martin and his team do an amazing job hosting us and giving us the 'keys to the city' when we arrive. From classroom setup to the kitchen staff, to maintenance and housing crew, they provide a top-notch training facility to make all this happen.

Every day, the world is changing and the need to develop new employees also changes. The Academy has been a great addition to ensure our vision for the AFC is shared. It is a privilege to be the director of this training every year and develop relationships with our new hires. It is teaching our people to be better public servants and ensuring their commitment to the job. It also takes a huge commitment from the employees to complete the Academy as they are away from their family and friends for an extended time. This dedication teaches them to persevere through the task at hand.

Since the reboot, the fifth Academy class will graduate this spring. So far, 95 students have graduated. With the connections these new hires make with veteran employees, they are poised to have the most resources available to them to do a great job. Two things I always stress to the students during the Academy: 1) A good employee is always learning, and 2) Go forth and do great things! 🙏





Steel City



Steel City Work Unit

*By Juan Merriweather, Registered Forester,
Work Unit Manager, Alabama Forestry Commission*

Named for the abundant iron ore located in the area and the storied history of Alabama's iron and steel industry, the Steel City Work Unit is comprised of Jefferson, Shelby, Blount, and Cullman counties. With ample supplies of iron ore, coal, and limestone, north Alabama and the Birmingham area were well-positioned to be a center for iron and steel manufacturing in the South. The industry began to flourish around Birmingham in the late 1800s, with southern investors and northern bankers coming together to finance the large capital investments required, while northern and midwestern engineers provided technological expertise. The largest of these blast furnace complexes was owned by the Tennessee Coal, Iron & Railroad Company and the Sloss-Sheffield Steel & Iron Company.

Located in the largest metropolitan area in Alabama and known for significant urban growth, the Steel City Work Unit is home to the most 'Tree City USAs' in the state including Alabaster, Birmingham, Blountsville, Chelsea, Columbiana, Cullman, Gardendale, Homewood, Hoover, Irondale, Leeds, Montevallo, Mountain Brook, Oneonta, Trussville, and Vestavia Hills.

Although we accomplish an abundant amount of urban forestry, the staff still performs traditional forestry as well. Oak Mountain State Park in Shelby County, which started as a 940-acre park established by the Alabama State Lands Act of 1927, has grown to 11,861 acres, making it Alabama's largest state park. This large land area provides the widest variety of outdoor activities of any state park. Also located in Shelby County, the Cahaba Wildlife Management Area offers great opportunities for hunters and wildlife enthusiasts to enjoy Alabama's natural resources. While we do not manage these areas, we have conducted prescribed burns

for Oak Mountain and suppressed numerous wildfires within the Cahaba Management Area.

Along with these established sites, the Steel City Work Unit engages with private citizens who own forestland. We provide landowner tours, stewardship plans, Best Management Practices guidance, tree identification, and measure potential 'champion trees' as well. Recently letters have been sent to landowners whose properties have been identified with potential southern pine beetle (SPB) infestations. As an agency, the Forestry Commission identified more than 10,000 SPB spots across the state in 2024 and we are working alongside the USDA Farm Service Agency to support these landowners in suppressing future outbreaks within their standing timber.

Each county office in the work unit assists the local Soil & Water Conservation District with its Annual Water Festival. These events utilize volunteers to help teach local fourth graders the significance of water conservation, watersheds, and protection. We also conduct a wide variety of school programs including Smokey Bear and fire prevention presentations.

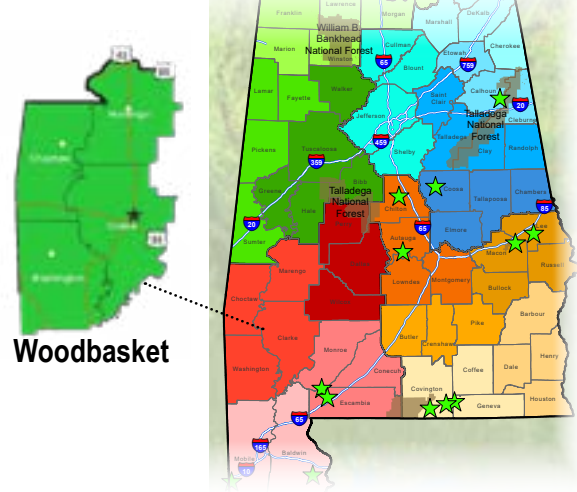
Steel City personnel consists of Forester Mary Claire Gamble and Forestry Specialist Supervisor Jason Downs in Cullman County; Management Specialist Matt Tucker in Blount County; Foresters David Holley and Josef Greene in Shelby County; Forest Ranger Byron Dale, Retired Employee Albert Mayo, Forester Tim Roberts, Work Unit Manager Juan Merriweather in the Jefferson County office in Gardendale, along with Northeast Regional Forester Jason Dockery, Urban & Community Forester Katie Wiswall, Forester/Best Management Practices Coordinator Carey Potter, as well as Dispatch employees Brian Brooks and Carson Otwell. 🌲





Woodbasket Work Unit

*By P. Bayne Moore, Registered Forester, Work Unit Manager
Alabama Forestry Commission*



Comprised of Choctaw, Clarke, Marengo, and Washington counties, the Woodbasket Work Unit lies in the southwest portion of the state adjacent to Mississippi. Historically, Washington County was home to the first Alabama Territory Capital, St. Stephens, in 1817. Marengo County is home to Demopolis, “The City of the People,” colonized by French Bonapartists who founded the riverfront city in 1817 only to discover they were misled and had built the city outside of their allotted four townships from the U.S. government. Choctaw County was formed mostly from the last Choctaw land cession treaty in 1830 and as a result, has retained a large portion of the First American tributary and place names. Clarke County was the site of a series of 1808 stickball games between the Choctaw and Creek nations of the First Americans to settle a disputed boundary line. After the Choctaws won the series, the boundary was established as the watershed line between the Tombigbee and Alabama rivers. The woodlands and rivers of the Woodbasket Work Unit are treasures in an area rich in history and lore.

Located in the east Gulf Coastal Plain, the work unit covers a total land area of 2,375,641 acres, 88 percent of which is forested. Most of this forestland is softwoods (loblolly, shortleaf, longleaf) at 57 percent, with mixed hardwood/pine stands at 12 percent and solid hardwood stands making up 31 percent. Within this plain, three river watersheds discharge water to the Gulf of Mexico. The Escatawpa River drains a small sliver on the western boundary; the Alabama River drains the eastern edge; and the Tombigbee drains the middle portion and by far most of the area. While the north one-half of Marengo lies within the Black Prairie/Flatwoods region, the southwest corner of Marengo and all of Choctaw, Clarke, and Washington lie within the historic Longleaf Range. All the counties in the Woodbasket Work Unit have river bottoms that make up a portion of their land area; however, much of the remaining topography ranges from marsh flats to gently rolling, to narrow ridges with steep slopes, to strongly dissected.

An extensive network of forest products mills is scattered throughout the Woodbasket Work Unit including three pulp and paper mills, one oriented strand board (OSB) mill, seven pine lumber mills, four pole and piling mills, four hardwood sawmills, one hardwood veneer mill, and one plyboard mill. Interestingly, 11 of the mills lie along the Highway 43 corridor. From Thomasville south to Mobile has long been four-laned, and the stretch from Thomasville north to Tuscaloosa is finally in the construction phase.

The Woodbasket Work Unit has a moderate wildfire load when considered as a whole; however, Washington County alone historically stays in the top 10 for the hottest wildfire counties in the state. In Fiscal Year 2024, Woodbasket wildland firefighters responded to 151 wildfires totaling 3,000 acres. Of that number, 52 percent of

the fires or 82 percent of the acreage were in Washington County. Prescribed burning in the work unit ranks among the highest in the state, with 2,249 acres burned in FY 24. Additionally, the staff works closely with and provides training for the 51 volunteer fire departments within the work unit. When not extinguishing wildfires, conducting prescribed burns, or working with VFDs, Woodbasket personnel are busy educating youth on fire prevention and natural resources by participating in Fire Prevention Week, Classroom in the Forest, and Forestry Awareness Week Now (FAWN). To help educate the public, the staff participates in landowner tours and presentations on forest health, non-native species, forest pests, how to sell timber, and Best Management Practices (BMP) inspections on logging jobs. They also give forest landowners guidance in forest management by meeting on-site to discuss their needs and writing stand management recommendations or management plans for properties.

Currently, the Woodbasket Work Unit is short-staffed with only eight personnel and one southwest regional person: Forestry Specialists Allan Johnson and Lemoral Coleman in Choctaw; Work Unit Manager Bayne Moore, Forestry Specialist Jim Dixon, and Southwest Region Fire Specialist Billy Carlisle in Marengo; Management Specialist Jake Brown, Forestry Specialist Supervisor Kevin Crawford, and Forest Ranger Luke Williamson in Clarke; and Management Specialist Jon Gunter in Washington. All are dedicated employees who perform their jobs skillfully, know the people of their county and interact with them well, traverse the work unit routinely, and consistently make themselves available and accessible. We are actively seeking to fill two ranger positions in Washington and a forester position in Choctaw.



MEMORIAL

Remembering *S. Wayne Strawbridge*

April 17, 1942 – December 2, 2024



Wayne Strawbridge of Tuscaloosa died on December 2 at the age of 82. He retired as Northwest Regional Forester from the Alabama Forestry Commission in 2008. He began his career with the agency in 1965 after receiving his Bachelor of Science in Forest Management from Auburn University.

With 42 years of service, he was the agency's longest-serving employee at the time, according to then-State Forester Linda Casey. At his retirement, Casey said, "You think about 42 years with the Forestry Commission and the knowledge that he's gained over those years. You just don't replace that kind of experience."

Born on April 17, 1942, Strawbridge grew up in Lamar County. After finishing Sul-ligent High School, he entered pre-veterinary studies at Mississippi State University in Starkville. He later transferred to Auburn, changing his major to forestry. Starting with the AFC at the Birmingham district headquarters, he moved to the Tuscaloosa district office in 1967, eventually being promoted to assistant district forester in 1977.

Over the years, Strawbridge witnessed many changes in the forestry world, not only in how the agency detected wildfires, from lookout towers to airplanes; but also, in a decrease in wildfire acreage and an increase in the number of volunteer fire departments; as well as attitudes and trends in forestland ownership. Among his accomplishments was finding the land for the AFC Northwest Region office on U.S. Highway 82 west of Northport while he was district forester in 1983. The property was transformed from scrubby underbrush to wooded grounds surrounding a rustic-style office.

A memorial service was held on December 6 at Tuscaloosa Memorial Chapel. Strawbridge was preceded in death by his first wife, Deborah, and daughter, April. He is survived by his wife, Sylvia; one son, Brian (Mary); and two granddaughters. 🕊



MEMORIAL

A Tribute to Boyd Kelly

By Corky Pugh

*Retired Director of the Wildlife and
Freshwater Fisheries Division, ADCNR*



With the untimely passing of Herbert Boyd Kelly, Jr. on September 1, 2024, the Alabama natural resources sector lost a true champion. Described by those who knew him best as a man of many diverse interests and master of each, he was revered for his plain-spoken, sheer intellect. Fiercely loyal and totally dependable, he could be counted on in every conceivable situation.

For many years, Boyd administered Forest Fund, the multimillion-dollar workers' compensation self-insurance trust fund affiliated with the Alabama Forestry Association. However, much more significantly, his impact as a lobbyist for forestry interests was broader and of greater scope.

We first met during a political campaign of significance in Alabama in the mid-1980s. During the very first conversation we ever had, Boyd looked me dead in the soul, and said, "All we want is good government." His plain-spoken, straightforward approach bespoke his calm, deliberate, steady nature and ability to focus on things he could do something about.

Boyd was the only person I've ever known who talked slower than I do. For a period of several years, we went bream fishing together one afternoon a week unless the weather was too cold. The conversation between the two of us in a johnboat would slow down to the point that a normal human being could not understand it.

One of Boyd's common speech patterns was, "Well now...." followed by an interminable pause. The inflection was monotone with even emphasis on both words, almost as if they were hyphenated. The pause was so long that you were wondering if he had lost his train of thought. Far from it — he was pondering.

When Boyd Kelly pondered on something, he analyzed every aspect of the matter to its culmination. His analytical skills were unsurpassed, whether in business, politics, or recreational pursuits such as turkey hunting. To cap it off, he was patient beyond belief.

His attention to basics, ability to predict outcomes, and patience made him one of the best turkey hunters to be found.

The legitimate interests of Alabama's forest landowners were at the forefront of Boyd's lobbying efforts. The natural linkage between active forest management and wildlife-associated recreation resulted in lobbying for what was in the best interest of wildlife resources and those who benefit from them as hunters and landowners. Ninety-three percent of Alabama forest lands are owned by private landowners, the vast majority of whom are small, non-industrial private forest landowners. Wildlife is by far the primary reason for owning forest land in Alabama, and wildlife-associated recreation, mostly hunting, has driven forest land values in the southeastern U.S. for decades. Because of this, very often Boyd's lobbying efforts were on behalf of these almost 300,000 family woodland owners.

Boyd's effectiveness as a lobbyist was in large part due to the long-standing personal relationships he had built with legislators and other governmental officials, legislative staffers, and a large cadre of fellow lobbyists. Lobbyists play a key role in providing information and insight to elected officials. Boyd had such a breadth and depth of knowledge on natural resources issues, and could be relied upon to offer such honest, forthright insight, that he was looked to as a source of advice and input by a wide spectrum of legislative members.

Another key reason for Boyd's effectiveness in the legislative arena was the absence of a big overblown ego. He felt no need to ever say, "Look what I just did." Therefore, he didn't unnecessarily burn bridges. Lobbying involves killing more legislation than passing legislation. If all the bad bills that are introduced each session passed, the resulting public policy would be intolerable. There is no telling how many bad bills were killed by Boyd Kelly without anybody ever knowing he did it.

Alabama forest landowners, hunters, anglers, and other wildlife enthusiasts were indeed well served by Herbert Boyd Kelly, Jr., and the proud legacy of good public policy he left will live on to serve our interests for generations. 🙏

I want to take this opportunity to add a personal note about Boyd Kelly. When I started at the Forestry Association in 1993, Boyd was already a forestry legend. For me, fresh out of college and new to Alabama, Boyd's quiet demeanor and 'interminable pauses' were intimidating. But once I got past that, and realized that was just Boyd, he became a mentor and friend; one I could always count on for solid advice and wisdom. Even after we both moved on from the AFA, I still called on Boyd for help...his interminable pauses still intimidated me, but I knew that some good advice would follow. I will miss one of my greatest mentors but am thankful that he took the time to get to know and help me. Thanks Boyd, I hope you are still chasing turkeys up there!

*Rick Oates,
State Forester*

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Letters from Landowners

To Mr. Rick Oates
State Forester

Mr. Oates, I have received the Treasured Forests publication for over 60 years and I enjoyed your message on Towermen equal to any that I have ever read.

I was a temporary towerman on the Bald Rock Mountain tower in the late 1950s for my dad E. J. Riddle who was Ranger of St. Clair County for 25 years. Dad was having trouble hiring a replacement and I was out of college for the summer and agreed to do the job on a temporary basis. My Uncle Nolan Riddle was a patrolman and a former towerman and he taught me the ropes.

I enjoyed the job much better than working as a standby laborer. Dad finally hired a handicapped man with a peg leg and my job was to give him on-the-job training. This was a tough assignment but he finally could perform the job. He was the towerman until retirement and then a woman was hired for the job.

Many years later we hired a young woman engineer at the Army Missile Command that had just graduated at Auburn. She was proud to let me know how much her grandmother enjoyed her work as a "tower man."

Thanks again for bringing back the good memories of being a tower man.

Sincerely,

Rex Riddle
Madison, Alabama

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Southern Magnolia

(*Magnolia grandiflora*)

By Bonnie Coleman, FIA Forestry Management Specialist, Alabama Forestry Commission

There's always been a special place in my heart for southern magnolias. They were easily distinguishable trees to me as a child, with their dark green, glossy leaves and excellent branching with a thick canopy that made it, what I considered, nature's jungle gym. Many memorable days were spent playing in and around these trees. They're often associated as ornamentals due to their evergreen foliage and beautiful flowers, but they also carry their own presence and display beauty in the natural woods.

The southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) is one of about 100 species of trees in the Magnolia family. Given time to reach full maturity and growth, it typically reaches 80 feet tall and 2-3 feet in diameter. It has evergreen and leathery leaves that are alternate, simple, elliptical to ovate to oblong, typically 5-10 inches long and 2-3 inches wide. The leaves also have an auriculate base, an entire margin, and a short, pointed apex. Coloring consists of a dark, glossy green above with a lighter brown-hairy underside. The twigs are stout with pubescence and typically a mottled green-black color. The terminal buds are elongated and flattened, up to 2.4 inches long, with a single bud scale covered with pale pubescence.

Southern magnolia has a few other common names, one of which is large flower magnolia which describes the beautifully

large showy flowers that bloom in the late spring to early summer. The flower is typically 6 to 9 inches in diameter and has 6-12 petals. Not only are the southern magnolia flowers beautiful but they also produce a very fragrant aroma that some may say deserves its own candle scent. The aggregate fruit is cone-like and approximately 3-4 inches long and 2 inches in diameter. The color is shiny bright red to rust-brown. Once the fruit matures in fall it releases fleshy seeds, which are consumed by a variety of birds and small mammals.

The bark of the southern magnolia is typically brown to green-brown, smooth or loose flakes that can turn scaly when older. The wood displays a light white to dark green-brown color that is heavy, hard, and straight-grained. It is commonly sold as yellow-poplar, and its uses include pulpwood, veneer, paneling, crates, furniture, trim, framing, and boxes.

Magnolia grandiflora is typically found in the southern half of the state near bottomlands, streams, swamps or low uplands with moist soils. It is also a shade tolerant species that does well with a heavy overstory. They also seem to withstand much of what Mother Nature can bring with strong winds, and the mature trees are fairly fire resistant.

Next time you see a southern magnolia, I hope you stop and appreciate the beauty it brings to our state with its presence. 🌿

