

Steedley Farm: Four Generations of Stewardship

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Kaye Steedley's great-grandparents were among the first settlers to make their home in the Lamar County town of Millport. When they arrived from South Carolina, they found a true land of opportunity in rich clear streams, healthy forests and productive soil.

The land was good to them, providing logs for homes, fertile soil for crops and abundant wildlife to help feed growing children. In return, they practiced wise stewardship and taught their children and grandchildren to love the land, to protect it and make it productive.

Kaye and L.C. met on their first teaching assignments in Choctaw County. They soon became engaged and when discussing their future, they planned to one day own a small farm with a few cattle and a garden. Only a few months into their marriage, Kaye's maternal grandmother needed to sell her

78-acre home place and the young couple could see the promise of a fulfilled dream. "We really didn't have the money

to buy it, but we stepped out on faith," Kaye said. "I was the only grandchild interested in buying it. I had many won-



Regular burnings and thinnings have promoted excellent growth in pine stands.



L.C. and Kaye raised wild turkeys last summer after their mother was killed.



The surviving juveniles were released onto the farm.



Deer often browse near the Steedley's front yard.

derful memories of spending time with my grandmother on the farm and I wanted to have it for my family." They worked on the place during visits home until they moved back to Millport in 1965. Throughout their marriage they purchased adjoining land, and today have the rare distinction of owning more than 400 acres of forestland handed down through several generations on both sides of Kay's family. They own third generation land on her maternal grandmother's side, which includes her mother's child-

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Kay's sunflower garden, planted to attract birds and other animals, often attracts people from the nearby community who marvel at the beautiful flowers.

hood home, and fourth generation land on her father's side. They are following her ancestor's example of true stewardship by devoting their time and resources to preserving much of its history while ensuring its place in the future of Alabama's forests.

The management objectives for Steedley Farm are economically productive timber management that provides an ample wildlife habitat for both game and non-game species.

Timber Management

High-grading was a common practice in the South in the early 1900s and it had yielded poorly stocked timber throughout the Steedley's property. After consultation with Dan Lassetter and Harold Jordan of the Alabama Forestry Commission, they decided to clearcut and regenerate to a more productive loblolly pine. The regenerated area was chemically site prepared and replanted with superior loblolly pine seedlings.

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The pine plantations are on a 30- to 35-year rotation until harvest. Regular thinnings are scheduled at 15 years and on an as needed basis until the final harvesting. The Steedleys purchased pruning saws and, using knowledge gained from a forestry short course, pruned the remaining trees themselves. A regular prescribed burning program every three years has reduced fuel and encouraged a healthy wildlife population.

The acreage now boasts 187 acres of planted pine flourishing under careful management and excellent site selection. The additional 70 acres of hardwood and pine/hardwood mixed stands prevents erosion along drains and provides wildlife habitat.

Wildlife Management

Steedley Farm is a haven for wildlife. They have made a special effort to provide as much natural forage and shelter for the animals as possible, rather than relying on artificial means. Several miles of permanent firelanes and about two miles of access roads are maintained to prevent erosion and to serve as linear wildlife openings for deer and ground-nesting birds. Bahia, rye and clover have been planted on roads and firelanes to prevent erosion and as wildlife foods. Windrows have been retained for habitat enhancement.

Nine wildlife food plots totaling 11 acres are generously scattered around the acreage. The food plots, targeted for win-



Excellent roads make for easy travel throughout the farm.

ter grazing, include Ladino clover, rye grass, wheat, oats, corn bicolor and chufas. L.C. limes the food plots so the soil can make better use of the fertilizer they apply.

Permanent food plots also include apple trees, peach trees and sawtooth oaks. In the last two years, 24 fruit trees and 10 berry bushes were added as an orchard for deer and other wildlife. Six supplemental salt licks for whitetail deer have been on the property for more than 25 years. More than 200 acres of mixed hardwood stands are essentially left in their natural state for wildlife.

Steedley Farm has a 20-acre wetland area, two wildlife watering holes exclusively for the benefit of wildlife and a two-acre pond for recreation is stocked with catfish.

Thirty Eastern bluebird boxes were cleaned out last winter and they discovered that nesting birds had used all but

two of them. Two wood duck boxes revealed 36 eggs. Squirrel feeders, a butterfly/hummingbird garden, and one-half acre planted in wildflowers are maintained for game and non-game species.

A certified falconer completing graduate work in falconry selected Steedley Farm as the location for release of a red-tailed hawk that had been under medical care for more than 12 months. The edge effect around 84 acres of pastureland offered irregular edges, making their farm an ideal location for the protected species to be reintroduced to the wild. The 18-month-old bird, named "Chipper" for Chipper Jones of the Atlanta Braves, remains in the area and is frequently seen hunting along the periphery of the clearings.

As retired educators, the couple enjoys the opportunity to host forestry field days for adults and children. One of their favorite activities is hosting the Lamar County Forestry Judging and Soils Judging contests each year.

L.C. and Kaye are very active in the award-winning Lamar County Forestry Planning Committee, serving on committees responsible for the forestry short course, Arbor Week observances and FAWN. They are also charter members of the Lamar County Chapter of the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association.

They say they have been blessed with good health in their retirement and are looking forward to many more years of working side by side on their TREASURE Forest. From the first piece of property purchased in 1963 to a recent purchase in 2000, the Steedleys are piecing together a truly unique family TREASURE Forest. 🏡



L.C. and Kaye enjoyed the 2000 Alabama Landowner and TREASURE Forest Conference with daughters Jan and Nan.