



Practice What You Teach

*By Joel D. Glover, Certified Wildlife Biologist,
Alabama Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries*

As a high school Ag teacher at Lineville High School, Lamar Dewberry realized his students were out of their element competing for FFA crop production proficiency awards. Much of the small amount of corn grown in Clay County wasn't even used for food! Since Clay County is a forest and wildlife county, Lamar began to promote natural resource management and his students were quick to grasp the concepts. Soon they were excelling in both state and national contests. Not only were they preparing for and winning contests, the students were putting their knowledge to work on family property. After assisting a freshman student in obtaining Junior TREASURE Forest certification, Lamar realized it was time for him and his wife Felicia to begin working on getting their property certified. It was time to demonstrate that he was practicing what he was teaching.

As with many potential TREASURE forest landowners, the Dewberrys had been working hard on their property before they heard of the TREASURE Forest program. At this point in time, growing timber for a monetary return was a necessity, and the wildlife associated with good timber practices was simply a bonus. Therefore they began their quest by selecting timber production as their primary and wildlife as their secondary objective, following TREASURE protocol. Working together in a partnership with the Good Lord, the couple began with 35 acres of poor quality land. Soon they had acquired more property, and based on their many accomplishments toward their goals, they were soon certified as a TREASURE Forest.

Over the past 23 years, it has been my good fortune to know and work with hundreds of TREASURE Forest landowners and many Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award winners. I have observed many desirable traits in these landowners. They each understand that as the famous football coach Vince Lombardi stated, "The dictionary is the only place where success comes before work." In addition, they are normally driven to strive for excellence. Encompassed in this desire is the progression these landowners go through from having a primary and secondary objective, to embracing all of the TREASURE forest objectives. The TREASURE Forest program was designed to promote multiple-use management. The Dewberrys have not deviated from this pattern.



Over the years, while growing timber remained important, wildlife and recreation began to play a larger role in their management philosophy. Forest recreation was pretty much the only recreation Lamar knew growing up in rural Clay County. Building tree houses, hunting whatever was in season, fishing and wading in the creek were his usual pastimes. Today the entire extended family enjoys hunting and recreational outings on the property.

While everyone enjoys a property that is pleasing to the eye, not everyone will put forth the effort needed to enhance the aesthetics of a property. An aesthetic forest can be a functional healthy habitat if managed correctly. Most will agree, a thinned pine stand looks good. A thinned stand that is prescribed burned is often even more appealing. Understanding this, the Dewberrys are regularly thinning and burning their pine areas. In addition, they've added longleaf pine stands to their portfolio. Not only do longleaf produce great timber, with proper management they provide valuable early successional habitat and are arguably the most aesthetic pine species. After Felicia earned her real estate license and the family opened their own real estate business, Mountain Streams Realty, they began to appreciate the value of aesthetics even more.

Possibly unaware, Lamar has embraced the TREASURE Forest objective of environmental education since 1978 when he chose Ag Education as his major at Auburn. Late in his career, he realized educating students about the environment had deeply affected the lives of many of them, as they had decided to pursue natural resource management as their profession and applied the concepts on their property. Lamar says he learned a lot right along side the students.

Although Lamar retired as a professional educator in 2003, I'm not so sure that isn't when his teaching really took off. Being free from his day job and now running the family farm, he had all kinds of time on his hands. I jest. Although very busy, Lamar was now in a better position to share the farm with others. While the education of young people is extremely important, there may be several years before they have the opportunity to put their knowledge into practice. Adult landowners on the other hand, have the ability now, yet often lack the know-how. By making their property available for tours and demonstrations to groups of

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all ages and by serving on committees that organize and promote educational activities, the Dewberrys have been able to educate a wide range of people concerning proper forest management. They have embraced these roles on a local and state-wide basis. Based on these exceptional educational efforts and the excellent stewardship of their property (which now encompasses 800 acres), Lamar and Felicia were named as winners of the Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award.

Another favorite quote from Vince Lombardi says, “The spirit, the will to win, and the will to excel are the traits that endure.” Lamar and Felicia demonstrate this type of resolve. Not only have they won the highest TREASURE Forest honor possible, they have gained much recognition for practicing what they teach. The duo has garnered an NWTW Wild Turkey Woodland Award and been recognized as the Alabama Tree Farm of the Year. They were designated as an Alabama Farm of Distinction and were named the Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year for Alabama. In addition, they were selected to receive the Governor’s Conservation Achievement Award for Forest Conservationist of the Year. While the recognition associated with their many accolades has allowed them to reach even more people with the multiple-use conservation message, it is not the impetus for their efforts.

Recently Lamar testified before members of the United States Congress concerning the importance of the family farm and the need to support farmers. In his remarks he said, “Nothing is more pleasing than walking through a beautiful, well managed forest. The water is clearer, the air is fresher, the soil is more stable, and wildlife is more abundant.” This statement gives some insight into his stewardship philosophy.

While researching this article I found a quote from Lamar and Felicia that sheds a lot of light . . . “We are privileged and blessed by being able to own the property we own and being able to manage it for a time. One day it’ll be someone else’s. God just let us own it for a little while, and we’ll try to do the best we can with it while it’s ours. That’s the way we look at it as we manage it and use it, and hope that when we get through with it, it’ll be in better shape than it was when we got it.”

Reading that quote, many would probably ask, “Why would anyone spend so much time and effort on something that is only temporary?” I’ll answer that one for you, because the Dewberrys understand something we all need to understand, today may be the only day we have. It’s a gift, that’s why we call it the present.

While many landowners have received recognition for good stewardship, few have amassed a resume equal to Lamar and Felicia Dewberry. While they will admit they have worked hard, they are quick to point out that they have been richly blessed. They have shared their property, passion, and knowledge with family, friends, and other landowners and students. They profess God, family, and stewardship, and I’m thankful they practice what they teach. 🙏

