

Forest Management

Nut in a Shell

By Tim Albritton, State Staff Forester, Natural Resources Conservation Service

This article is the first in a series dedicated to the forest management information needs of small landowners.

Over the years I have been asked by countless landowners to give them a quick and easy formula for forest management, often without the opportunity to see the property. To offer a helpful summary of such a diverse subject is, to say the least, a difficult assignment.

Such a recommendation, if followed, could prove costly to a landowner. For a forester to adequately assess a forest stand and develop sound management recommendations, a thorough survey or timber cruise is necessary. A careful survey equips a forester to estimate the quantity of timber that exists on a given area according to species, age, quality, size, possible products, or other characteristics. This process takes time, even for an experienced forester.



NRCS Forester Tim Albritton examines a longleaf seedling with landowner Jerry Brown.

Many landowners are reluctant to pay a forester for advice or pay for the development of a management plan with detailed recommendations. However, these same people do not hesitate to pay a doctor, a lawyer, or a certified public accountant for advice or services. This way of thinking is puzzling. I guess the

old saying is true, “Free advice is often overpriced.” But the truth is, the best forest management advice will come from an experienced forester who takes time to ask you questions about your goals and objectives and then walks your property.

Having said all that, I realize that some landowners still believe the State Staff Forester with the NRCS should be able to offer them a summary of forest management in a nutshell, so to speak. So despite some misgiving, I decided to develop a helpful summary of management principles. A management principle can serve as a guide in a variety of timber types, regions, and areas of the state.

By definition, a *principle* is a basic truth or assumption from which other decisions can be made. Another word that fits this description is *axiom*, a self-evident truth that requires no proof. My goal is to offer a list of management principles that a landowner could adhere to and begin building a foundation for future forest management.

Here are my management principles:

- 1. Develop a long-term goal.** With any worthwhile endeavor, you need to set some goals that go beyond the current season. Years pass with increasing regularity, and before you know it, 5, 10, or even 20 years will go by. Without some tangible goals, you will find yourself wishing you had done one thing or another. So set some long-term goals and get started.
 - J. C. Penny said, “Give me a stock clerk with a goal and I’ll give you a man who will make history. Give me a man with no goals and I’ll give you a stock clerk.”
- 2. Recognize the need for diversity.** Managing your forest for diversity can help prevent future problems with insect and disease issues, as well as create future opportunities with a variety of products to sell. There is certainly nothing wrong environmentally or economically with an even-age single-species forest management approach. There will always be a place for commercial forest production in Alabama. However, a landowner owning a small tract may want to consider a more diverse approach.



- Diversity is very important if wildlife management is an objective. The three basic things wild animals need to survive are food, water, and cover. Habitat needs vary, depending on which animal is being managed, and so should the management.
- In his article entitled, "Are Foodplots Wildlife Management?" Joel Glover, Wildlife Biologist with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, states, *"Diversity of habitat is the key to successful wildlife management."*
- 3. **Manage for vigorous growth of native species.** Suppression is a frequent cause of death in the forest, more than most landowners realize. One way to prevent this natural cause of tree mortality is to monitor stand density. When a stand is overcrowded, prepare to thin. Maintaining vigorous growth will also help prevent common insect pests such as the southern pine beetle.
- In your hardwood stands, watch out for non-native species that are invading our forests. Species such as privet, tallow tree, and Chinaberry tree are invading our natural woodlands and have little or no commercial value. They need to be eliminated; they are using up sunlight, water, and nutrients that your native trees could be utilizing.
- 4. **Be a good steward.** The land you are managing was owned by someone before you, and it will be owned by someone after you have passed on. You cannot take it with you. At least let it be said of you after your time is done, "He left it in better shape than when he found it."
- In years past, in order to be certified in the TREASURE Forest Program, landowners were asked to sign a creed. Five of the six statements in the creed mentioned stewardship. The creed is not used any more, but remains a worthwhile document for landowners to consider.

We live in a fast food, microwave society, and I suppose forest landowners will continue to seek a quick and easy management recommendation rather than a well-planned methodical approach. So don't be surprised by my answer if you ask me in a Hardee's parking lot, "How should I manage my forest land?"

My response will be that you should follow a few basic principles such as: develop a long-term goal, recognize the need for diversity, manage for vigorous growth of native species, and always be a good steward. That is the best I can do over a biscuit. But if you have time to enjoy a nice steak dinner with me, I will be able to share more with you than forest management "in a nutshell." 🍷



Landowner Barnett King discusses long-term forestry goals with NRCS Forester Tim Albritton.

Forest Management Resources

The following list is provided to assist you in finding a forester:

- Your county Alabama Forestry Commission office or visit: www.forestry.alabama.gov/ServiceProviders.aspx
- the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service at www.al.nrcs.usda.gov
- the Alabama Chapter of the Association of Consulting Foresters at www.alacf.com
- the Alabama State Board of Registration for Foresters at www.asbrf.alabama.gov