



"He Restoreth My Soul"

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At an early age growing up in Troy, Paul Langford realized the importance of forests and trees . . . from living on the corner of Willow and Maple Streets, to walking up and down Pine Hill everyday to and from elementary school. As a child, he played in the woods and spent many weekends and summers at his grandparents' homeplace in Covington County. He learned that his grandfather had grown up on one farm, and his grandmother was born and raised on another, just a short distance away. When they married, they built their home on land that was situated right between the two families' properties. Some of his favorite memories are of listening to his grandfather talk about the past . . . while he didn't always understand the meaning at the time, he knew there was something special about those "Piney Woods."

Probably the most influential occasions happened when he was walking in the woods with his father. A typical boy, Paul was more interested in the creeks, rabbits, and other critters, while his dad (an assistant County Agent for Pike County at the time) looked at the trees. These walkabouts together on his father's property in Covington County continued many Saturdays well into his teen years, even when the family moved to Tallassee where his father became superintendent at Auburn University's Agricultural Experiment Station. It was there that Paul chose to work in the fields for small pay during summers while in high school, to avoid the *real* hard work of picking and freezing fruits and vegetables with his mother!

The lesson that Paul took away from all these combined experiences was simply this: trees are good. It's a lesson he obviously

learned well. In 2002, he achieved TREASURE Forest certification on his property and it became a Certified Tree Farm. In addition to being selected as the Covington County Outstanding TREASURE Forest Landowner of the Year in 2005, Paul was also the recipient of the Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award for the Southeast Region in 2007. Yet he still attends forestry education programs regularly in order to learn even more about the day-to-day management of his forestland. Langford is an avid supporter of the Longleaf Alliance, and an active member of the Covington County Forestry Committee.

But How Did He Get Here?

Following graduation from Auburn in 1970 with Bachelors and Masters Degrees in Mechanical Engineering, Langford moved to Tampa, Florida to pursue his career. Twelve years later, he and wife Jan, an attorney, moved to Pensacola where they have lived ever since.

During the 1990s, a series of life-changing events took place: serious health issues, closure of the Westinghouse plant where he had worked as an engineer, and the death of his father. After much soul searching, reassessment, and planning, he took early retirement. It was a move that required a great deal of courage, but he had to not only care for his elderly mother who had Alzheimer's disease, but also be personal representative for his father's estate which encompassed approximately 2,000 acres of land. It was about this time that Langford said he fully realized the significance of two scriptures, "Proverbs 3:5-6 and Romans 8:28 are real for me."

When his mother died in 2003, the family property was distributed between Paul, his sister, Sue, and brother, Bill. He and his brother later traded land partials so that all of Paul's property was in a contiguous block, and a couple years later he purchased 25 more acres from a cousin.

Management Accomplishments

Good stewardship is the overall factor in managing his 650-acre TREASURE Forest. Although he is an "absentee" landowner, he is extremely involved. Each acre has been examined to determine the most beneficial management practices that can be applied that consider wildlife habitat enhancement, environmental protection, and aesthetics, as well as timber production.



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Langford hired Sizemore and Sizemore of Tallassee to develop a management plan on the portion of the land he had inherited. This plan has been followed and amended as needed. He purchased quarterly aerial photographs and used the ArcView mapping program to stand-map the property in much greater detail (related to history, soils, burning, plantations, wildlife, sales, etc.). He obtains technical assistance from consultant foresters, qualified forestry vendors, and agency representatives in managing the property. Timber sales are handled through a consultant.

Much of the prescribed burning is performed by Paul and other family members. Not only has he been through prescribed burn training to become a certified burn manager, he also served three years on the first Alabama Prescribed Fire Council steering committee. According to Langford, "Pines are happier and breathe easier after burning!" He has now added a pesticide applicator permit to his skills.

Timber is the primary objective on the property and is very aggressively managed. The poor-quality stands were identified and harvested, then replanted in either containerized longleaf or loblolly pine following chemical site preparation and burning. Most of the pines (33 plantations) were hand-planted, and Paul says he has only one regret . . . "If I had it to do over, I would plant it ALL in longleaf."



The stands are thinned on a timely basis. Each sale is marked to ensure the best trees are retained. Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) boundaries are marked to limit the sale boundary, as well as prevent the accidental encroachment of logging equipment. Langford also established over six miles of permanent firelanes.

Wildlife is the secondary objective, with native species encouraged on the property. The SMZ provides more than adequate mast, nesting sites, cover, and water resources for wildlife. Prescribed burning is used to promote browse, provide bugging and nesting sites for turkey, as well as hardwood control. Most stands have maximum edge due to irregular shapes and various sizes.

Food plots and openings are used for wildlife enhancement as well. A two-acre kudzu patch that was chemically eradicated and spot-treated over a couple

years is now utilized as a food plot. Two other openings have been planted in oak, dogwood, and other hard and soft mast trees. Winter and summer cover crops are maintained annually, and openings are mowed to provide bugging opportunities for turkey.

Aesthetics are important also. Trash along the county roads and Poley Creek is cleaned up on a routine basis. Although gates and fencing is used to control access, Paul has hauled out several washing machines, refrigerators, and other appliances that have been dumped into the creek on a public road on his property. Dogwood and almost 200 acres in other bottomland hardwood trees (50 years old and older) are retained for their aesthetic value as well as wildlife benefit.

While the most important recreational benefits are working and managing the property, hunting is also utilized. Culverts, fords, water bars, and turnouts were installed to facilitate vehicular access as a form of recreation. The forest roads are maintained annually, with culverts checked and cleaned out to prevent blockage.

Preaching What He Practices

Passionate about educating the public and other landowners about the benefits of prescribed fire, Paul promotes the practice at every opportunity. In 2006, approximately 30 landowners and foresters attended a Vegetation Management Tour, hosted by Langford, to look at a mechanical mulching demonstration, herbicide application on longleaf pine, and a prescribed burning program. He hosted 50 landowners for the Southeast Region tour during the 2008 Alabama Natural Resources Council Forestry Field Day. Forestry students from Lurleen B. Wallace Community College have visited the property a couple times to look at various management challenges including Ips beetle outbreak, aerial chemical application drift, and other aspects.

Past, Present, and Future

Langford credits his father as “The Source” . . . “He not only passed down this land to us, but also his love of the land, and so much more.” Now he looks to his uncle as his “indefatigable Mentor” . . . Dr. John Langford, also a Covington County Tree Farmer and Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award winner (featured in the Spring 2002 issue of *Alabama’s TREASURED Forests* magazine). However, as is the case with many TREASURE Forest landowners, Paul can’t help but worry a little and wonder what the future holds for this land he has carefully nurtured over the past few years.

He wishes to leave his property as productive timberland providing multiple uses for the benefit of his wife and daughters. He stated, “I’ve made sure that Jan knows AFC forester Mike Older and consulting forester Jack Fillingham well enough, so that if something happens to me, she would feel completely comfortable working with them.”

Even with his four daughters scattered across the U.S., Paul has tried to instill a love of the land in them, just as his father did for him. Of the two oldest, Tara lives in Georgia and Amy in Colorado, with families and concerns of their own. Of the two youngest, Catherine lives in Chicago . . . she loves the woods and the land, has helped him take inventory, kill privet, plant and take care of mast trees . . . but she doesn’t like the Alabama summertime heat! Sarah, who lives far away in Sacramento, also loves the woods and has assisted her dad with several projects on the property. She has always wanted to help with prescribed burning, but opportunities have been limited because there’s never enough time when she’s home or the weather has not cooperated.

He can only hope that his and his father’s Covington County legacy will continue into future generations. “There are always problems to deal with in life,” says Langford, “but the land never fails to restore my soul.” ☪

