



# *“Family First” Grows a TREASURE Forest on Lochicohi Farm*

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**A**s most married hunters know, mixing family and hunting can be a difficult thing when your son is very young and there is another on the way. For Dr. Wendell “Chip” Taylor and his wife, Louise, the choice was pretty simple . . . find a place where the family can be together that provides a place to hunt as well. Living in Birmingham at the time, both Chip and Louise wanted a place for family and friends to come and enjoy the outdoors during weekends and holidays. After looking for several years, the Taylors finally found their answer and acquired what is today known as Lochicohi Farm, so named after the first letters of each family member’s name (Louise, Chip, Conrad, and Hill Taylor).

During the Great Depression, this Hale County farm housed a small sawmill operation where another family harvested, milled, and sold local pine and hardwood timber grown on the property. A sizeable tract of bottomland hardwood (approximately 400 acres) located on the back side of the property had been high-graded, while the remainder was in large acreage fields in row-crop production with smaller hardwood woodlots. Much of the property was inaccessible because of backwater from a hundred-acre marsh. There was plenty of work to be done and the Taylors literally jumped in with both feet.

As hunters, wildlife management would naturally become the Taylor family’s primary TREASURE Forest objective. Because soybean had historically been grown as the main row crop on the

farm, white-tailed deer populations were strong. Hedgerows and scattered woodlots provided travel routes and escape cover. The first year they owned the property, the Taylors harvested 20 deer. That was great, but it wasn’t their true goal of “trophy” deer. To achieve this, improvements would be required.

When it comes to wildlife on the farm, Dr. Taylor’s philosophy is simple: never have an “empty table.” His goal is to provide some sort of food for wildlife year-round. Warm-season plantings include soybeans and a variety of peas. Cool-season plantings include winter wheat, buck forage oats, Austrian winter pea, and crimson clover. Approximately 20 acres of food plots (ranging from one to three acres in size) have been established and maintained in warm and cool season vegetation that are planted annually for target wildlife species. A total of five food plots have been strategically established using timber type and stand composition as a component for viewing and harvesting white-tailed deer and Eastern wild turkey. Soft edges (fallow areas) are left on most of the food plots to allow for a gentle transition from timberland to field.

Three four-acre sawtooth oak orchards have been established and maintained for hard-mast fruit production. Approximately 100 soft-mast fruit trees such as pear, Chickasaw plum, apple, common persimmon, and autumn olive have been planted around the property. Dr. Taylor’s father planted a soft-mast fruit tree called Chi on the farm. Native to Asia, the Chi fruit is 2 inches in

diameter, similar in shape to a raspberry, but tastes like a fig. On several occasions, they have witnessed deer eating fruit from this tree.

In addition to planting, another vegetation management scheme practiced by Dr. Taylor is selective bush hogging. Years ago while performing what he refers to as “tractor therapy,” he noticed a female persimmon tree and mowed around it. Each year he continued to avoid cutting down the persimmon, and today it is one of the most productive soft mast trees on the farm. It has become quite a gathering place for the local deer herd, who dine there at their own risk!

As quality deer management was the main focus on Lochicohi Farm, Dr. Taylor installed a 10-ton grain bin to support supplemental feeding of wildlife. Annually, 40 tons of fortified protein pellets from South Fresh Feeds Company are consumed by wildlife at 14 different feeding stations. These pellets contain 16 percent protein and are used to increase antler development. Game cameras are set up around the feeding stations to track the progress of antler development during the growing season.

An early improvement at Lochicohi Farm was the construction of a Clemson Beaver Pond Leveler/flash-board riser system to the 15-acre beaver pond located on the property. This structure was installed for water control during the fall and winter months, as well as to provide access across the marsh. During spring and summer, the water is drawn down to mineral soil and planted in vegetation such as Japanese millet, grain sorghum, and corn for migrating waterfowl. Areas with native plant species which are beneficial to waterfowl – such as buttonbush, bull rush, and smartweed – are left for natural forage. Numerous friends of the Taylors have harvested American black ducks as trophies from these natural wetlands on the farm.

Six wood duck boxes were erected around the property for nesting and brood-rearing waterfowl in the spring and summer months. The boxes are annually checked for nesting utilization purposes. Dr. Taylor has also preserved all cavity trees in and around the wetlands for natural nesting. Approximately 100 acres of Lochicohi Farms is seasonally inundated with water which provides excellent feeding and loafing waterfowl habitat during the winter.



Several hummingbird and song bird feeders were also established for non-game management, in addition to five bluebird boxes to provide proper nesting for bluebirds.

The 17-acre bass pond was built in 1993 and stocked with Florida-strain largemouth bass, copper nose blue gill, and thread fin shad to provide recreational fishing for family and friends. The goal is to grow trophy bass using proper pond management. The lake is fertilized when needed, and 700 pounds of fish are harvested each year to ensure stocking levels are appropriate. Fish caught under three pounds are taken, but those over three pounds are released. Structure for the main lake includes creation of peninsulas and islands, as well as stump beds and channels to increase fish habitat. Wood duck boxes are also used to mark sunken structures. To ensure water for the lake throughout the hot Alabama summers, a well was drilled.

To support the wildlife management objective, a 50-acre idle field was converted to loblolly pine in 1993 which provided cover for bedding white-tailed deer and nesting habitat for Eastern wild turkey. This pine stand, which also supports the Taylors' secondary objective of timber production, has been commercially thinned once. Another 150-acre agricultural area was established in loblolly in 1996. To prevent southern pine beetle infestations and promote a healthier more vigorously growing stand, these pines were thinned in late 2011. Thinning opened the canopy, allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor and stimulate native vegetation for wildlife.

An intensive prescribed burn management regime has been conducted in these pine stands to control unwanted hardwood competition such as sweetgum and Chinese privet. At a minimum, 40 acres are burned annually, with burned stands staggered throughout the property in a checkerboard fashion to provide different levels of stand composition for diversity. In addition to understory control, this practice also promotes growth of native browse and forbs for target wildlife species. Permanent firebreaks have been established around the perimeter of the pine stands to facilitate prescribed burning and to provide access for recreational ATV riding and hiking. All firebreaks have been seeded to prevent erosion and are maintained during summer months by bush hogging or herbicide treatments.

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# Lochicohi Farm

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At the same time the pine stands were commercially thinned, 200 acres of mixed bottomland hardwood was marked by a registered forester for a select-cut operation. The goal was to reduce stocking levels and improve stand species composition. It also provided browsing and traveling corridors for turkey and deer. Although a constant battle, beavers have been controlled in an effort to reduce mortality of quality bottomland hardwood timberland. More than 100 have been trapped using Kona bear or snare traps, and Dr. Taylor has also used live electric fence wire around culverts to deter beaver activity with some success.

In 2004, Dr. Taylor and adjoining landowner Thomas Wagner collaborated to erect a high game fence around the perimeter of their properties to control deer herd populations within the farm, and prevent trespassing as well. Approximately 1,300 acres are in this enclosure.

When the Taylors acquired the property, the existing main dwelling was run down and in bad shape. In 2009-2010, they remodeled the two-story white farmhouse, replacing all the windows, using cypress siding and a metal roof for a rustic appearance. Dr. Taylor designed the addition of a sitting area in the back of the home for enjoyable afternoons. The back porch columns were fashioned from whole bald cypress trees harvested from the swamps of Florida, adding a unique feature to the home.

Many pecan trees have been maintained around the farm house and barn, providing shade for family and friends during the summer, and increasing hard mast fruit production for wildlife, including the human variety. Forsythias and mulch were added around the base of these trees to prevent encroaching vegetation and add a manicured look.

Numerous ornamental shrubs and flowers, including knockout roses and Japanese yew, were planted around the farmhouse to



enhance the appearance and attract several species of butterfly. Crape myrtles and other flowering shrubs have also been established around the home and barn to increase pollinating insect populations. An irrigation system was also installed around the home to water the grass and shrubs during dry summer months.

In 2011, a raised-bed, walk-thru garden with drip irrigation was established on the west side of the main house for growing fruit and vegetables. To maintain the rustic theme and add to overall aesthetics, the raised beds were constructed with flagstone rock in a geometrical design. Numerous edible herbs and flowers are also grown in the garden. Louise is an active member of "Weekly Weeders," a local garden club, and she has hosted several garden events.

The Taylors are sharing people, often opening their property for educational events. A large number of landowners, foresters, and loggers attended the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association annual tour at Lochicohi Farm in 2006. Forest management lectures included fish pond management, waterfowl management, as well as the pros and cons of high game fences. In 2013, they also hosted the Alabama Natural Resources Council Regional Forestry Field Day Event. Each year, "Classroom in the Forest" field days take place for school children, unless weather events force cancellation.

Annually, Dr. Taylor invites father/son groups to come out to the farm for weekend fishing trips. These weekends help the Taylors reduce the stocking levels of fish in the lake. Being an avid swimmer, Dr. Taylor has auctioned off a day of fishing on their lake to raise money for the Birmingham Swim League. The family has also invited the swimmers out for team building exercises to increase trust and morale within the group. Numerous youth waterfowl, turkey, and deer hunts have taken place since the time of purchase of the property. The Taylors have also participated in the Governor's "One Shot" Turkey Hunt in the past.

While Lochicohi Farm is indeed a busy place, it provides a great example of making family and hunting work together. Both Chip and Louise will tell you that forestland management is a constant learning experience. Their land ethic is the reason their TREASURE Forest is a productive farm and why in 2012, they received the Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award. 🏆

