

HARDWOOD CORNER

FORTY YEARS OF “SNL”

Saturday Night Live vs. Southern Nostalgic Logging

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Usually in this column, I try to relate what is in the present with what may happen in the future. However, in this article I want to talk about the past and what is happening now dealing with forestry in general, not just hardwoods or BMPs.

My wife and I were watching the 40-year celebration of *Saturday Night Live* the other night, and it brought back some fond memories of my early career. As a fresh forestry graduate of Auburn University in the mid-1970s, rooming in downtown Tuscaloosa with a friend who was in law school, we began to watch a new comedy show – “*Saturday Night Live*.” There were folks on there we had never heard of: Dan Aykroyd, John Belushi, Chevy Chase, Steve Martin, as well as many others. Like a few of my fellow forester friends, some have passed on, some have retired. Most of the rest of us have become a little heavier around the waist, with graying or no hair. I fit three out of those five.

Logging in the 1970s consisted of a less complicated world, except for inventory and quotas; that never changes. Markets consisted of pine sawtimber, hardwood sawtimber, and the king: pine pulpwood. This pine pulpwood was hauled as “shortwood,” not tree length. We really had some producers that could test the mill scales – if they weighed. Some folks were still stick-scaling the wood. Many foresters today cannot imagine dealing with that.

Most pulpwood crews consisted of a two-man operation, a bobtail truck with a big-stick loader, a power saw or two, and even a pint of gin on Friday. They would hand-cut and stack the wood, drive the truck close enough for the cable to reach, and repeat until they filled the truck. Some were even hand loading at that time.

Today’s operations are all mechanized and the average startup cost is between \$1 to 1.5 million. Most operations today do not have a single person on the ground. My! How things have changed!

I also remember, before I graduated, picking green pine cones off of felled wolf trees to be sold, dried, and seed collected for newly established seed orchards.

Where are we today? “USDA moving toward less oversight, regulation regarding new genetically-engineered trees.” (*The e-Forester*, an online publication of the Society of American Foresters, February 20, 2015) The U.S. Department of Agriculture has given the go-ahead to ArborGen to start intro-

ducing a genetically-engineered (GE) pine tree it has developed. I am assuming this is the new denser-wood pine because they already have advanced seed orchard stock; elite seed orchard stock; mass control pollinated stock; as well as mass control pollinated advanced, elite, and clonal stock.

What happened to simplicity? Open grown or 1st cycle (generation)? Things get complicated, but markets make you wonder. Pine pulpwood was king, then came chip and saw; hardwood pulpwood utilization was non-existent. I have a good friend (yes, I do have at least one) who owns several acres of land and asked me just the other day, “Would you have ever believed that a naturally-grown sweetgum would bring more stumpage than a 23-year-old intensively-managed pine?” How do you answer that? How are we to project the future? All we can do is look at the past.

Not only has the size of land ownership also changed with more much smaller acreages, but attitudes have changed today as well. Auburn used to teach pine economics – specifically loblolly pine. Now we have longleaf pine and shortleaf pine incentives to re-establish lost ecosystems.

Landowners now want big deer, lots of turkeys, and a big bass lake. Good timber management will get you the deer and turkey, but you better consult the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers about that bass lake. Squeezing every penny out of the timber is no longer the

main driving force behind owning land. I guess that is why pure forestry schools are falling to the wayside, being replaced by “natural resource management” schools. For over 40 years, I’ve actually thought that was my trade.

In fact, we all do have a common goal . . . to be good stewards of God’s creation. I know very few that intentionally destroy what we try to manage; however, we are continually besieged by lawsuits and extremists.

In the 1970s, forestry and forest products helped carry Alabama’s economy. Today, forestry and forest products are still contributing \$11.2 billion in sales to the state’s economy. Alabama has 22.9 million acres of timberland, the third most in the U.S. We have 650 forest products manufacturing companies and 46,800 Alabamians directly employed in the forest industry. Can we afford to lose this economic engine? I hope someone can say 40 years from now, “No, we did not lose the fight.”



Jim Jeter with Jake, mid 1970s.