Alabama is blessed with 132,419 miles of streams, rivers, and reservoirs. The mission of the Alabama Forestry Commission is to protect and sustain Alabama’s forest resources using professionally applied stewardship principles and education. We will ensure our state’s forests contribute to abundant timber and wildlife, clean air and water, and a healthy economy.

In today’s economic environment, one agency cannot expect to accomplish such a mission without the help of others. As with many states, the Alabama Forestry Commission relies on its various partners, while establishing new partners to maintain this commitment. Partners consist of other state agencies, federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, local chapters of stakeholders (friendly and adversarial), corporations, associations, and especially landowners.

To accomplish our mission of protecting and sustaining the state’s waters, the agency’s Best Management Practices (BMP) section (basically a one-person shop) must engage these partners. We need the support of the Alabama Forestry Association, which represents the second largest manufacturing group in the state — forest industry. We need the support of landowner organizations such as the Alabama Forest Owners Association. Why, one may ask? Alabama has 23.1 million acres of forestland, 95 percent of which is privately owned. We also need the support of the Alabama Farmers Federation, another group that not only represents farmers but also ‘TREASURE Forest’ landowners.

We are engaged with our regulatory partners as technical advisors. This includes the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management. In addition to protecting and sustaining state and federal waters, we are engaged with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service when it comes to Threatened and Endangered Species, especially riparian and aquatic dwelling species.

Partnerships are needed with local and state stakeholders such as the Alabama River Alliance, river basin groups, the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group, as well as the Alabama Rivers and Streams Network.

Our agency works closely with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency, as well as Alabama Soil & Water Conservation Districts, as technical advisors when dealing with cost-share practices that benefit water quality.

As the need arises, we also work with Auburn University and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, the ‘go-to’ folks for offering educational courses such as BMPs for landowners/stakeholders or training for professional logging managers. For research and information, we rely on groups such as the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement as well as the Water Resources Committee of the Southern Group of State Foresters.

We also must continue to engage new partners such as the Southeastern Partnership for Forest and Water, reaching out to stakeholders that may not realize the importance of forested watersheds.

As one can see, the task is huge. The Alabama Forestry Commission is not a stand-alone island, but an active member in a network of different partners that have the same mission — protecting and sustaining the waters of the state.