



Rewarding Beyond All Expectations

By Elishia Ballentine, Editor

His love for the land began with his first deer hunt in the early 1960s. Jimmy Jimmerson says he went deer hunting on a tract of land owned by his future father-in-law in Cleburne County, because there were no deer in Cherokee County where he lived at that time.

Later on, having hunted in the area for several years, he and wife Sue began to look for land to buy in northern Cleburne County. They wanted a little place of their own, mostly to hunt or just ramble in the woods. In 1991, they found and purchased 120 acres, not knowing the journey that lay ahead of them, certainly never expecting they would end up living there one day. Now Jimmy says, "This has been the most wonderful and rewarding experience we could have ever dreamed, truly a blessing from God."

As often happens with new forestland owners after buying property, the shock set in of not knowing what to do with it. Covered in undergrowth so thick that one could hardly walk through it in most areas, the land was not in good condition. Cutting most of the timber in the late 1970s, the previous owner had done nothing following the harvest.

However, the optimistic Jimmersons did have a vision as to how the land should look; it was a question of where to start. Their initial call for assistance was to the Cleburne County office of the Alabama Forestry Commission where a young forester named Jeff Thurmond worked. With his professional guidance, they were about to begin their new journey.

When Thurmond came out and met with Jimmy and Sue on the property, he explained that they basically had two choices to clean it up. One option was to hire someone with a dozer, but this was expensive. The other way was to learn to burn and begin a prescribed fire program. Providing brochures about controlled burning, he talked with them about firebreaks and food plots for wildlife. This information afforded the Jimmersons with the welcomed opportunity they needed.

Additionally, Thurmond advised that if they completed all of the suggested forest management practices, the property might be certified as a TREASURE Forest. Although Jimmy had never heard of a 'TREASURE Forest' at the time, he thought it sounded like a great idea!

Fortunately, carrying out Thurmond's recom-



mentations actually ended up achieving Jimmy and Sue's ideals of how their property should look. After a lot of hard work and accomplishment of several projects in the forest management plan, the Jimmerson family achieved TREASURE Forest certification (#1028) in June of 1994.

Then in 1995, they started building a log house so that they could live on the property. The logs for the outside walls were constructed of yellow pine, purchased from a nearby mill. Much of the framing came from recycled stadium lumber. Eventually moving into their new home in 2000, improvements to the property continued.

Timber – the Primary Management Objective

Eventually Jimmy and Sue purchased 5 acres from a neighbor, then another 17 acres from another source. The last particular stand had been clear-cut a few years earlier and was replanted with loblolly pines. A cost-share opportunity arose in 2011 to establish longleaf, so they planted 8 acres in longleaf pines. The Jimmersons also received Tree Farm certification that same year. Today, makeup of the total 142 acres is approximately 70-80 percent pine and 20-30 percent hardwood.

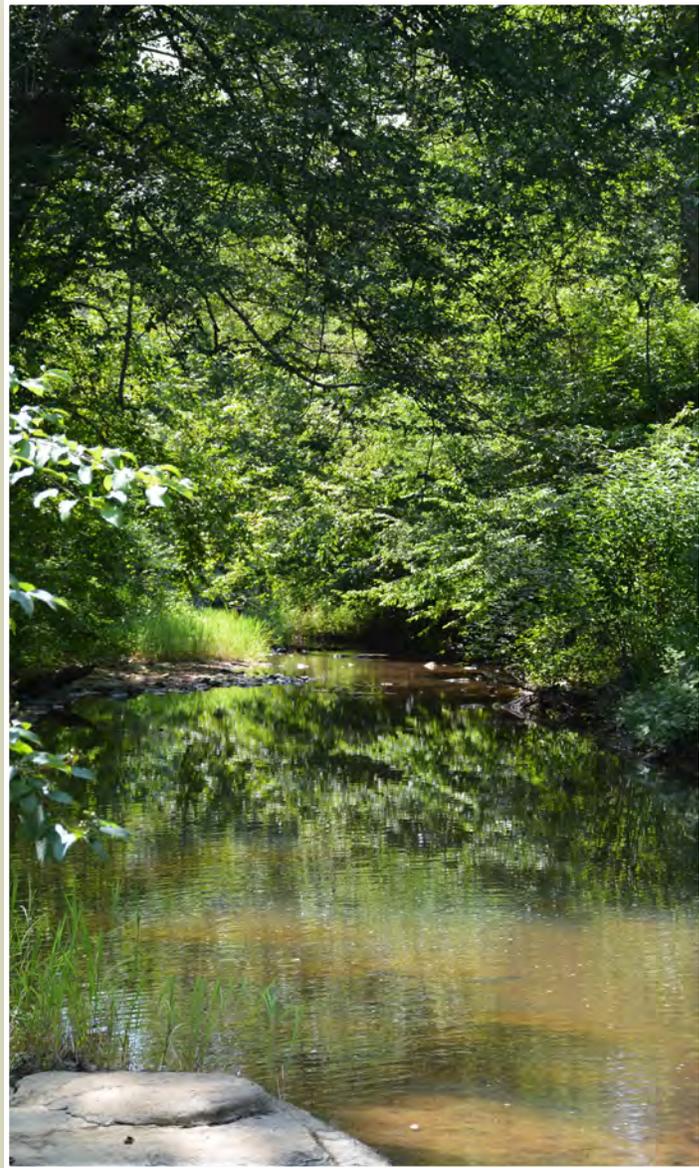
When Jimmy and Sue began making plans to harvest some timber, they utilized the services of a registered forester to cruise the timber and make recommendations on the type of harvest. Some of the options included clear cutting, thinning and harvesting pine timber, as well as thinning hardwood areas. The timber had been growing since the purchase of the property on uneven-aged stands of mostly loblolly and mixed uneven-aged hardwoods. A few pine stands contained trees that are approximately 35-40 years old, with many of the hardwoods being much older. Because of all the different ages and sizes, they decided to do 'select harvest' on both pine and hardwoods. As part of the preparation, a stream crossing was installed to enable harvesting trees across Wallace Creek.

The prescribed burn rotation program they began in 1991 has continued up to the present, successfully burning approximately 40 to 50, even 60 acres each year. Jimmy became a Certified Burn Manager in 2006. This practice not only lowers the risk of

damage from wildfires, but also improves wildlife habitat.

Wildlife – A Secondary Management Objective

To facilitate the family's interest in hunting, four large wildlife openings were installed and 4'x 6' shooting houses were built back in 1993. These openings are maintained and planted with both cool (wheat, oats, winter peas) and warm (soybeans and corn) season mixes. Numerous bird houses



es and wood duck boxes have also been erected around the property.

With a growing family and the joy of the great outdoors obviously being passed along to the next generations, their oldest son helped build approximately 12 tree stands across the property. "My youngest grandson killed his first deer here, and another young boy killed his first turkey," commented Jimmy. "It's very rewarding to watch the kids take such delight in harvesting wild game."

In 2007, enough timber was harvested from widening fire-breaks and storm-damaged timber to build a 32' x 64' shop/hunting house. Appropriately named the 'Man Cave' by their oldest grandson, the walls of the lodge are of course adorned with lots of whitetail deer, turkey, and fish trophies . . . even a couple bobcats and foxes.

In 2002, they built a 1-½ acre fish pond, stocked with bream and catfish, supposedly for the grandchildren to enjoy. However, it's quite a treat to watch Sue feed the fish, talking to them and calling them her babies! As she rides up in the Mule, her 'pets' eagerly swim to the bank awaiting the delicious treats she tosses out into the water.

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Educational Activities Abound

Jimmy and Sue believe that it is very important to educate the public about the benefits of the forest. To that end, they generously give of their time hosting events to teach both children and adults. Since 2003, they have hosted an annual 'Classroom in the Forest' for fifth graders from across Cleburne County, with approximately 50 students attending each year. This event is a collaboration between the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Soil & Water Conservation District, Cleburne County Extension Agent, and the Alabama Forestry Commission. They have also hosted the Cleburne County Forestry judging FFA Teams a number of times.

Over the years, they have hosted numerous landowner tours which included county, district, state and federal agency personnel. Jimmy always advises new forest landowners to actively seek assistance from all available these natural resource agencies. The Jimmersons hosted a Soil & Water Conservation Forestry and Wildlife subcommittee meeting as well for planning of the 2013 Forestry and Wildlife School for Landowners.



Jimmy is very active in a number of forestry-related organizations. He served as a director on the state board of Alabama TREASURE Forest Association (ATFA) and as president for 2010-2011, playing a vital part in the merger of ATFA and ALFA in 2013. He represented ATFA on the Alabama Natural Resources Council for 2012-13, and serves on the TREASURE Forest certification sub-committee for the Council. He also serves on the Cleburne County Farmers Federation Board as commodity chairman for Forestry and Wildlife. In addition to serving as a supervisor for the Cleburne County Soil & Water Conservation District, Jimmy also serves as Area II Vice President of the Alabama Association of Conservation Districts and vice chairman of the AACD Forestry and Wildlife Sub-Committee. In his spare time, Jimmy manages an 800-acre hunting club!

Reaping Rewards

For all their perseverance, hard work, and commitment to promoting the multiple-use philosophy that serves as the foundation of the TREASURE Forest program, Jimmy and Sue Jimmerson received the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association's Bill Moody award in 2013, a life-time achievement. Then in 2015, they were recipients of the prestigious Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest award. Jimmy sums up their success by saying that they believe in and adhere to the TREASURE Forest motto, "Taking the land God loaned us and making Him proud He did."

As Sue says very simply, their dreams have come to pass. ☸

History Rocks Here!

Standing along the creek and admiring the sheer beauty now found on the heavily-wooded steep hills, it's difficult to envision what Jimmy describes as the 'scrubby-looking' 120 acres it once was. Another very unique feature is the Native American history of the location. Jimmy noted that the historical boundary between the Cherokee Indian Nation and the Creek Indian Nation lay only a couple miles north. Aside from their vast collection of discovered artifacts that are always a big hit with students attending 'Classroom in the Forest' events, there is a notable rock overhanging the side of a bluff which has generated quite a bit of interest.

The Jimmersons hosted archeology students and instructors from the Alabama Archaeological Society in 2012. Additionally, the State Archaeologist from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service completed a cultural review which was required for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification process. In this study, the rock shelter was estimated to have been occupied as far back as 7,000 BC.

