

FINDING TREASURE *With* OLD FRIENDS

A TREASURE Forest/Tree Farm Success Story



By Tim Browning, AFC Work Unit Manager

Sometimes it almost seems that behind each landowner visit is yet another success story. Over the last couple years, I have had the opportunity to visit and work with a past acquaintance, teacher, landowner, and Tree Farmer.

We all have those experiences throughout life, school, work, etc. that we just file away as good memories. When I was in seventh grade, I had an awesome science teacher . . . one of those teachers that leaves a lasting impression. Mrs. Steedley taught me a lot, not only about science, but also things about ‘life in general’ that I still apply today.

Answering the office phone one day, on the other end of the line I found myself talking with a young woman with whom I had attended school many years prior. She needed forestry advice, so after a brief catch up of the last 20 years, we were both excited to find that we would be working together soon. Her parents – one of which was the teacher just mentioned that I so dearly loved – wanted her to take on the role of land manager, so she needed an updated management plan. I was thrilled that I was about to have an opportunity to show my past teacher what I had learned.

Arriving early that morning, I found an elderly couple starting their day and just enjoying life. We sipped coffee and discussed their farm while the gentleman walked me through his property from the comfort of his living room, which of course overlooked most of his Tree Farm. At this point in their lives, he and his wife were passing along the responsibility of managing the place to their children. Their daughter and I left the house to tour the property, as she proceeded to show me every timber stand, property boundary, gate, unique feature, and historically significant spot that she knew existed for the duration of the morning. It was obvious that she had paid attention through the years as she

watched her father mold this place into what he desired it to be. We arrived back at the family home place around noon to enjoy lunch and ‘fill in the gaps’ about anything we missed, with her father of course.

Now, I know you are reading along in *Alabama's TREASURED Forests* magazine asking, what has all this got to do with TREASURE Forest? I hope that I can clear the air, so to speak, and begin to show you how everything works together for a common good. You see, I was still in college at Mississippi State, attaining my forestry degree, when I first noticed an article in the *West Alabama Gazette* depicting the Steedleys’ farm when it was first certified as a TREASURE Forest in 1995. Alabama Forestry Commission Forestry Specialist Karl Byrd had nominated this property in Lamar County as a TREASURE Forest. At the time, I didn’t have a clue what ‘TREASURE Forest’ stood for, but as my career would unfold, the meaning of the acronym would be revealed.

Today, TREASURE Forest is a recognition program exclusive to Alabama, whereby landowners are identified and acknowledged as managing their property for multiple-use, sustainable stewardship objectives that are important to them. Tree Farm is similar but differs in that it is a national certification program allowing a landowner’s property to be ‘third-party certified’ as sustainable. Internationally recognized, the certified wood can then be sold to mills trying to satisfy consumer desires for a product grown/produced in an environmentally sound manner.

The relevance of what we do comes to us in surprising ways sometimes. Here we were having lunch in an ‘outdoor classroom’ for two retired school teachers, while bridging the gap from one generation to the next about how to manage the ‘family forest.’ 🌲