

Alabama TREASURE Forest Association

Forming A Network

By **BOBBY DEAN**

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PEOPLE from all walks of life are getting involved with the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association. The call to form county chapters has begun a great awakening in the hearts and minds of a broad cross-section of Alabamians. The membership of ATFA reflects an astonishing increase of nearly 70 percent in the past 12 months. The Association's growth has tripled the number of chapters to 18 approved and 19 that are in the process of formation.

I went looking for a window into the time that this association was formed and found reflections of where the ATFA began in earlier issues of this magazine. I found many inspiring words from former State Forester C.W. "Bill" Moody and a host of others. Their words helped give me a sense of where the Association has been and what the intentions were of those who were involved from the beginning.

One statement was from an article by Bibb County TREASURE Forest landowner Dan James. It described the sense of community we are building and the relationships we are enjoying. "Among the Association membership there is a special kind of fellowship and sharing of ideas and experiences that enhance an already solid relationship in stewardship." (*Alabama's TREASURED Forests*, Fall 1992, p.24)

I would like to thank each one of our members who volunteered and helped form or participated in county chapter meetings during the past year. Your leadership is instrumental in helping us build and maintain this organization. Many people now recognize the ATFA as the vehicle to build a network of landowners and concerned individuals who are all stakeholders in the future and well-being of Alabama's forests.

As I travel Alabama and attend ATFA meetings, I ask many of our members to plan their chapter goals and activities. I

listen to their responses, and the feedback I have been getting from them reflects the aspirations of this Association. I also feel their suggestions are closely aligned with the intentions of our earliest leaders.

Many members are concerned about education and ensuring that the next generation of Alabamians grows up with an understanding and appreciation of forests. Many want to reach the ear of every landowner with the TREASURE Forest stewardship message. Some want to inspire people to respect the land and have respect for the property of others.

Some want to encourage government leaders to make informed decisions regarding property rights, taxation, and other public policy. Another suggests getting to know county service providers and programs better. Still others want to share and receive information and instruction with technical experts and other members.

The underlying thread of all their goals is the fiber of our network that encourages responsible forest stewardship. That fiber is the TREASURE Forest concept of multiple-use management. The ATFA is now a vibrant growing network of empowered landowners and stakeholders reaching out to share their TREASURE Forest ideals and experiences.

Beginning this year the ATFA will introduce some tools and tutorials to assist our leaders in building and maintaining county chapters. It is vital that we keep the momentum of this organization going and growing. We will expand our leadership training to eight sessions that include the addition of four Advanced Leadership 2000 sessions. Some of the additional topics will include Parliamentary Procedures, Involving Elected Officials, The Importance of Gatekeepers, and Tools for County Chapter Meetings. These sessions will help enable us to encourage and empower more leaders to continue the great work

of this Association.

The ATFA is also launching its online network to foster communication and promote the Association. The Web site address <http://www.atfa.net> will connect you to the ATFA network. You will find information on ATFA membership types and a form that can be used to join the Association or renew your membership. There are contact lists of leaders by county as well as information on county chapter meetings and leadership sessions. You can download a template for county chapter letterhead or look at Virtual TREASURE Forest Tours and photographs of ATFA activities. All of the tools and materials on the web site are available by U.S. mail through our membership services office in Opelika.

ATFA Executive Director James Malone hired me in July 1999 and commissioned me to serve the members of the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to work for such a worthwhile organization. Since that time I have strived to meet the needs of our membership as we continue to grow together. I have observed that in an ATFA county chapter meeting you find a sense of community and willingness to share that you will find nowhere else.

The more ATFA members I meet the more I am firmly convinced that our people are our greatest natural resource. ♣

If you would like more information on the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association, please contact:

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