

HIDDEN



TREASURES

A Commitment to Conservation

By *Tilda Mims*

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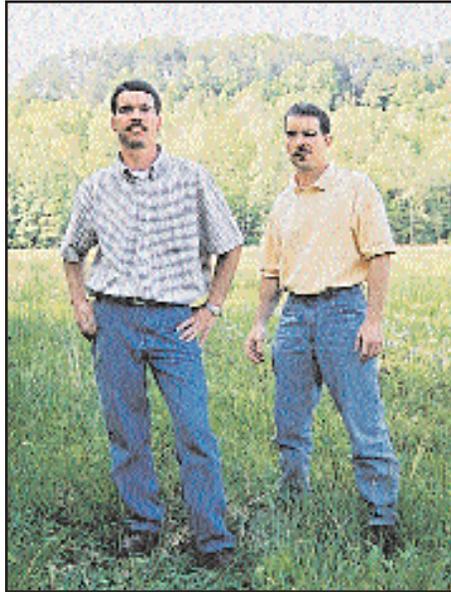
The Alabama Wildlife Federation named Franklin County TREASURE Forest landowners, Jeff and Joel Pounders, as the 2003 “Forest Conservationists of the Year” at the annual Governor’s Conservation Achievement Awards program in Montgomery. In a competition among many distinguished Alabama landowners, the brothers were selected, in part, for their lifelong commitment to conservation of natural resources – a steadfastness they exhibit in their personal and professional lives.

The Pounders brothers of Russellville became interested in natural resource conservation as young men, learning to enjoy the forests and waters of Franklin County through hunting, fishing, hiking, and other outdoor activities. While students at the University of North Alabama, they continued to learn about the broad scope of forest conservation and completed their studies in Environmental Biology.

As young couples, both Jeff and his wife, Paula, and Joel and his wife, Rhonda, made a commitment to acquire property of their own to manage according to the principles they embrace. In 1994, they began purchasing land and today own a 360-acre TREASURE Forest in the Mt. Hebron community managed for wildlife habitat enhancement and timber production. They also lease an adjoining 750-acres from both private and industrial landowners. It houses a cattle operation and is used for timber management as well.

Less than ten years after their first purchase, they have made significant accomplishments in multiple-use forest management and continue to practice cutting-edge management techniques. These techniques include selective harvest, formation of wildlife food plots, constructing sediment control structures, and implementing riparian buffers to protect water resources on the farm. Some of their accomplishments in the promotion of wildlife habitat enhancement noted in the award presentation were as follows:

- Created Franklin County’s first waterfowl pond under the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program, a federal cost-share program. The shallow water wetland provides habitat for wood ducks, mallards, and other species of wetland wildlife.
- Received the WILD (Wildlife Improvement through Land Development) Award from the Natural Resource Conservation System.



Brothers (L to R) Jeff and Joel Pounders.

- Host the Franklin County Envirothon where students learn about five environmental subjects.
- Allowed a Belgreen High School team to train on the property, who later won the 2002 Envirothon state competition.
- Sponsor “Kids in the Creek,” a TVA project modeled after Envirothon with emphasis on water quality. Students conduct water analysis of Little Bear Creek, a forest creek crossing the property.
- Work with Muscle Shoals High School ecology and oceanography classes to conduct field tests of water, testing for pH level, and nitrate contamination.

Fortunately, both Jeff’s and Joel’s careers with GoldKist, Inc. allow them to promote and practice wise conservation of natural resources, as well. Joel is Director of Environmental Compliance Management for North Alabama, and Jeff is Breeder Supervisor. The company twice won the Alabama Water Environment Association Award and the inaugural Clean Water Award from the U.S. Poultry and Egg Association.

Joel is chairman of the Soil and Water Conservation District and also chairman of Bear Creek Watershed Advisory Committee. He founded the Bear Creek Millennium Project, a citizen volunteer group that performs conservationist work on the watershed. This project received the 2001 Regional Watershed Management Award from TVA.

Both brothers assisted Dr. Doug Phillips with The Bear Creek Watershed segment of the award-winning “Discovering Alabama” program on Alabama Public Television and have developed wildlife slide presentations they present to local civic groups, hunters, conservationists, and other interested parties.

Tim Gothard, Executive Director of the Alabama Wildlife Federation, says the purpose of the Governor’s Conservation Achievement Award program is to promote leadership by example and, in turn, increase conservation of the natural resources of the State of Alabama – its wildlife, forests, soils, water, and air. Among landowners devoted to protecting and enhancing forest resources, Jeff, Paula, and their daughters, Gracie and Tess; and Joel, Rhonda, and their daughter, Chloe, are certainly at the top of the list. Their concern for forest conservation, multiple use, clean water, and wildlife management is genuine and they have worked to instill these ethics in others. ♣