

Welcome to The Hahn-da-rosa

By *Tilda Mims*, Information Specialist, Alabama Forestry Commission

The Hahn-da-rosa is a fitting name for Fred Hahn's 960-acre spread in the Hale County community of Sawyerville. "My boys came up with 'Hahn-da-rosa' back when I bought this place. The name was just tossed out and it seemed to stick."

While a clever word play on "The Ponderosa," the family ranch in the popular television western, *Bonanza*, it also represents the sense of family and tradition evident on this TREASURE Forest. Since purchasing it in November 1994, the Hahn family has committed time and resources to make it a true family farm, earning it the honor of being named the 2003 Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award winner for southwest Alabama.

Fred became interested in owning land while a member of a hunting club with some other gentlemen. He had ideas for management that he wanted to implement for himself and his sons, and started looking for a suitable place around West Alabama. "Once I saw this place, I knew we could do something with it," he said. He particularly enjoys the excellent diversity - hilly terrain, swamp areas, hardwood bottoms, planted and natural pines.

Originally a large cotton plantation, the only farming done on the property for years was the planting of green fields for deer hunts. Hunting rights were leased to Dale Earnhardt and Neil Bonnett until it sold to the Hahns about ten years ago. While the management plan is extensive and highly diverse, all activities primarily promote wildlife habitat with timber production as a secondary objective.

WILDLIFE FOODS – There is still a good bit of farming going on at The Hahn-da-rosa but it is strictly for wildlife. Food plots of corn, soybeans, wheat, fruit trees, autumn olive, clover, pears, persimmons and more are cultivated each year for game and non-game species making their homes there. Three five-acre sawtooth oak groves have been established and are routinely fertilized and maintained.

Permanent and seasonal wildlife plantings have significantly improved wildlife forage and edge effect. Food plots are irregularly shaped, creating maximum edge, and follow natural contours to minimize soil erosion. After hunting season, they put out supplemental feeders – about 20 – in primarily soybeans and corn.

Existing mast trees such as cherry, dogwood, persimmon, and oak – as well as shrubs such as blackberry and honeysuckle – are cultivated. Eight honeysuckle beds formed with wire mats are placed around the farm and more are planned. Openings are planted in annual or perennial grasses and legumes, or allowed to revert to native weeds and grasses for turkey, quail, other birds, and rabbits. To enhance vegetation quality for deer, selected openings are maintained by mowing, disking, or burning.

"One of my Christmas presents was 150 persimmon trees and 500 autumn olives from one of my sons," Fred said. The mast-producing trees were soon thriving in protective shelters to prevent grazing damage and add an extra boost in initial growth.

While intensive management at the Hahn-da-rosa has resulted in a dramatic increase in the wildlife population, Fred says the most significant improvement is in the size of the deer and turkey, and the deer antlers. Before, the average buck size was about 175 pounds. Today, it is more than 220 pounds.

Non-game species benefit from supplemental plantings, too. Bluebird and wood duck boxes as well as butterfly boxes are erected throughout the farm.

Fred says they encourage all types of wildlife. "We make them feel at home."

QUAIL HABITAT – The Hahns work diligently to increase the number of quail living on the farm. Quail have the same basic habitat requirements for survival as other wildlife: water, food, cover, and space. With a few strategic adjustments, they found their overall wildlife management program enhances quail habitat, as well.

"When we first came here we burned on a three-year rotation but stepped it up to every two years to maintain suitable nesting habitat for quail populations," Fred said. Quail often locate nests near summer food sources such as blackberries, beggarweeds, and ragweed that benefit from burning.

Chicks need a high-protein diet during the first ten weeks of life which includes invertebrates such as beetles, grasshoppers, ants, and spiders. Disking or mowing every one or two years helps maintain adequate brood rearing habitat. Interspersed cover among feeding areas provides the best protection and creates escape cover for avoiding predators.

Of course, turkeys love the results of burning, too, Fred says, and many other species are enjoying these areas. They think they are controlling sweetgum a little better, too.

POND MANAGEMENT – An attractive 30-acre lake built in 1995 adds a nice focal point near the camphouse. Existing trees and shrubs remain along the shoreline, casting reflections on the water, providing shade, and blending the



Photo by Tilda Mims

Three five-acre sawtooth oak groves are fertilized and maintained.

pool into the surrounding landscape. Other trees and shrubs have been added at different locations around the perimeter of the lake. Nesting boxes for wood ducks are placed over the ponds. A shoreline gazebo adds interest and invites visitors to linger.

Blending water structures into the landscape has encouraged use by fish, amphibians, waterfowl, reptiles, and insects. Allowing plants and trees to shade areas of the lake encourages fish habitat and promotes frequent use by a variety of wildlife year-round.

Shoreline vegetation attracts water birds, shore birds, rabbits, turtles, frogs, and snakes.

Establishing good vegetation is not only beautiful and beneficial for wildlife; it has prevented erosion and siltation that affect the life of a pond.

The objective of this lake is to grow trophy bass, so there is a catch-and-release program in effect for bass. Since it is stocked with Florida bass, North American bass, bluegill, and shellcracker, there are still plenty of fish for eating and for recreation. Fred works with Alabama Sports Fishermen to manage the lake. "The last time we measured the bass was a few years ago. They were about 7 pounds and growing about 18

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Photo courtesy of Fred Hahn



Wildlife cameras capture the activity of deer and turkey on the farm.

Spring 2004



Photo by Tilda Mims

An attractive 30-acre lake built in 1995 adds a nice focal point near the camphouse.



Photo by Tilda Mims

Fred's Christmas present of 150 persimmon trees and 500 autumn olives from one of his sons are thriving in protective shelters to prevent grazing damage and add an extra boost in initial growth.



Photo courtesy of Fred Hahn

Three Generations: (L to R) Greg Hahn, Philip Hahn holding Thomas Hahn, and Fred Hahn holding Paul Wesley Hahn.

ounces a year. We expect them to weigh between 8-10 pounds now.”

The second water structure built on the farm is a lake stocked with crappie, bream, and sunfish. “People tell me I can’t have a crappie lake but we are going to try it.” He submerged evergreens, treetops, and other natural elements to promote successful crappie bedding.

TIMBER – When the Hahns bought the property, fields along the county road were highly visible and attractive to night hunters. Planting 8-10 rows of pines between the fields and the road provided a needed screen within a few

years. A few years later, they planted 8-10 rows behind these and did the same thing again after another few years. Today they have abundant coverage from night hunters for years to come.

Most of the pine plantations were thinned a few years ago to get rid of smaller trees and crowded trees. They prescribe burn every other year, burning half one year and half the next. “We don’t harvest hardwoods,” Fred notes. “If it makes an acorn, we keep it.”

TREASURE FOREST – Fred had heard of the TREASURE Forest program but says he did not know much about it until Hale County manager Jim Junkin

talked to him about it. “Jim was instrumental in getting us qualified for the award.”

Fred says his family has been blessed with advice during the last ten years, crediting the Alabama Forestry Commission; local forester Steve May; and wildlife biologists Jay Haffner and Jeff Makemson with Alabama Game and Fish as tremendous assets. “We seek help, so a lot of it comes our way.”

The Hahn family agrees that Earnest Cochran deserves a lot of credit for the success of their day-to-day forest management program. He has been working on the farm since the second year they owned it. “We knew we couldn’t do everything we wanted to do and operate our businesses, so we got Earnest to take care of it. It is our hobby and we use it as that.”

Fred says he can see nothing but a bright future for The Hahn-da-rosa. “We will continue, mainly because my sons have the same interests I do. What little improvements I make, they do that much and more. That is why I keep doing something to it every year to make it better and better. I get my thrill from watching my sons and grandsons enjoy it.”

“I have a saying, ‘If I don’t run out of time or money, I am going to make something out of this place.’ This is going to stay in the family a long time. My sons and their sons, and then their sons, I hope, will enjoy it for years to come.” 🌲



Photo courtesy of Fred Hahn