

# AFC Forester Receives National Tree Farm Award

The Alabama Forestry Commission's Michael Older, Covington County Forester, was named this year's recipient of the Outstanding Inspector of the Year award at the 14th Annual National Tree Farm Convention, held in October in Madison, Wisconsin.

Sponsored by the American Tree Farm System, this national award honors Tree Farm inspectors who give of their time to inspect Tree Farms and work to educate landowners and the public of the benefits of sustainable forestry. Tree Farm is a land certification program in which forest owners must meet standards and guidelines, develop a written management plan, and pass an inspection.

Older's love of the outdoors and forestry, combined with his commitment to landowners, make him a natural for this honor. Since his involvement with the Tree Farm program from the early 1990s, he has certified 102 new Tree Farms, earning him the American Tree Farm System's Gold Hardhat Award. This is a prestigious award earned by very few tree farm inspectors. The Alabama Forestry Association, sponsor of the Tree Farm program in Alabama, also recognized Mike at their annual meeting in September 2007 in Orange Beach, Alabama. He had previously received both the Bronze and Silver Hard Hat Awards for his efforts.

Mike is one of five "train-the-trainers" in Alabama qualified to teach and recertify inspectors in the Tree Farm program, and he has conducted numerous Tree Farm training workshops across the state.

While volunteering with the Alabama National Tree Farm Committee, Older



*Michael Older, AFC Covington County Forester, discusses Tree Farm certification with a landowner.*

has served as the past Longleaf District chairman and is currently the South Alabama chair of the state committee. He recently chaired the 2007 Southern Regional Tree Farm Field Day, held on the property of the Solon Dixon Center in Andalusia. In 2006, he also served as co-chair of the Field Day for the 13th Annual National Tree Farm Convention, which Alabama hosted in Mobile. It was recognized as being one of the most successful field days in the history of National Tree Farm conventions.

Mike works hand in hand with landowners in Covington County and was the nominator for the 2001 and 2002 Alabama Tree Farmer of the Year Award, one of which was selected as the 2001 *National Tree Farmer of the Year!* Employed with the Alabama Forestry Commission since 1990, most recently as Covington County Manager, Mike has also certified over 80 TREASURE Forests. Additionally, he currently serves on the editorial board of *Alabama's TREASURED Forests* magazine.

Actively involved in every facet of the forest community, Older is a member of the Society of American Foresters, Longleaf District Chapter; the Covington County Forestry Committee; the Covington County TREASURE Forest Association; the Alabama Forestry Association; the Alabama Wildlife Federation; the Alabama Hunter Education Association; and the National Rifle Association along with other memberships.

Mike received his Bachelors degree in Forest Management from Auburn University in 1982. He served four years in the U.S. Marine Corps, and retired in 2005 from the

Alabama Army National Guard after 24 years of service. He and his wife Betty Ann live on their Covington County farm (which just happens to be both a TREASURE Forest and Tree Farm), sharing it with four horses, four dogs, and several cats. He has one daughter, Amanda, who is an RN.

Congratulations, Michael . . . we're proud of you! Thanks for your dedication to your job and the landowners with which you work. 🌲