

# *A Passion for Wildlife*

*By Elishia Ballentine, Editor*



Photo by Kelvin Daniels

Forest. This property was named the Helene Mosley Memorial winner for the Southwest Region in 2005.

His primary TREASURE Forest objective is wildlife management, with timber being the secondary objective.

Diversity is key to Dr. Youngblood's conservation philosophy, providing wildlife and timber management with the least negative impact. This principle actually has a positive impact on wildlife. Someone who balances a love for all animals with being a sportsman and hunter, he remembers when deer and turkey were scarce. Lee firmly believes, "Diversity allows wildlife to thrive."

Most of the land was leased to International Paper Company that harvested timber and then reforested. In 1992, they began the harvesting process – gradually (approximately 200 acres per year) and selectively – performing a steady cycle of cut, site prep, and replant. According to Dr. Youngblood, it could not have been a better situation. "The relationship was perfect – mutually beneficial to all parties. We were very pleased with the process and the results. IP wanted the land to look as nice as we did. The company practiced an environmental-friendly policy and there was no clear cutting. They utilized SMZs and BMPs; they even planted wildflowers."

The entire harvest took about six years; resulting in multiple-year plantings. These different-aged pines make it easier to complete Lee's forest management plans in cycles, performing prescribed burns and thinnings over 200 or so acres at a time. For the most part, the plantation is in loblolly pine, although there is some natural longleaf scattered around.

Unfortunately, Hurricane Ivan damaged a good bit of 30-year-old timber.

After the harvest, somewhere between 150 to 250 acres of hardwoods were left

*Diversity in planting leads to diversity in wildlife . . . pines and sawtooth oaks line this field of crimson clover.*

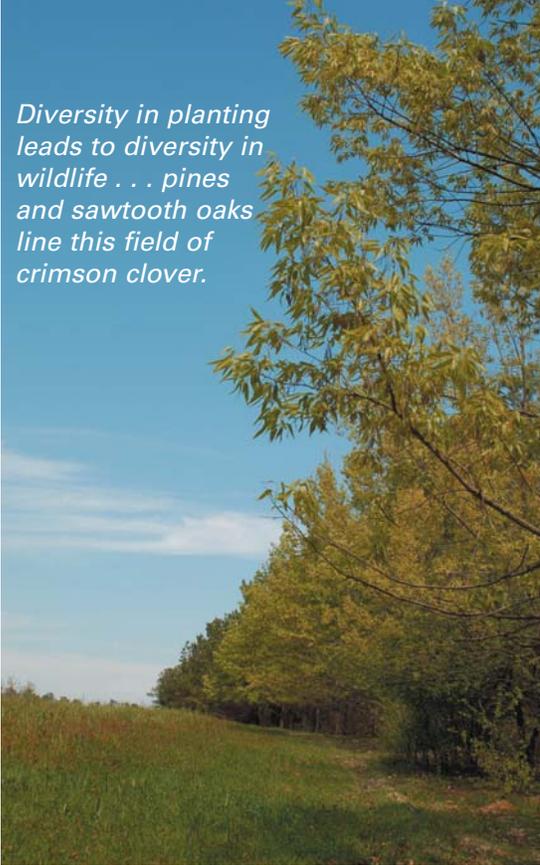


Photo by Kelvin Daniels

**T**ucked away in Dallas County, far off the beaten path, Piney Woods is a quiet and peaceful TREASURE Forest with rolling hills and ridges offering scenic views in several directions. A veterinarian in Selma for the past 38 years, Dr. Lee Youngblood lives in town, only getting out to this country property on his days off and weekends. Not that he actually goes there to rest, however. He has plenty to keep him busy.

On a large-acre farm such as this, the chores and projects are never ending. But that suits Dr. Youngblood just fine. In fact, he says he doesn't want the jobs to end. He's very "project oriented" – always working on food plots, the pond, the quail trail, building/repairing the cabin or equipment, bush hogging, etc. He even practices what he calls Tractor Therapy . . . "When I'm plowing, I'm happy," he says.

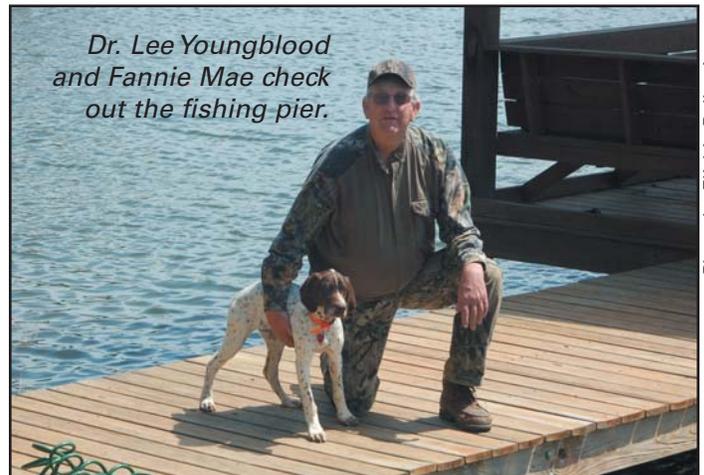
His wife and the rest of the family enjoy going to the farm for relaxation and recreation. His two sons often go out to hunt, but they also help around the farm. His oldest son actually built the cabin that overlooks the lake. Four grandchildren also think the farm is the absolute place to be! With activities such as rambling in the woods, fishing, riding in the golf cart, birthday parties, and bunk beds, there is always something fun to do.

Located near the small communities of Tilden, Minter, and Carlowville in southern Dallas County, Dr. Youngblood says the property has belonged in his family for a long time. For years, his father ran cattle here. Lee inherited his original portion from his grandmother; then acquired more land from his brother and sisters, accumulating 760 acres over time. While all of the extended family's 1,520 acres is managed under TREASURE Forest principles, only his portion has been certified as a TREASURE

standing which make excellent turkey habitat. That's important to someone who claims turkey hunting as a passion! He has since planted several more acres in sawtooth oaks, plus five acres of other hardwoods including cherry bark, shumard, and white oaks. Dr. Youngblood has perfected a system of natural regeneration for chufas, another good food source for turkeys. In addition to disking lanes, he sprays the food plots to kill unwanted or competing grasses, allowing only the chufas and crimson clover to flourish. This provides nutritious treats not only for the turkeys, but for raccoons and squirrels as well.

Although there are dove fields, the doctor's current major project is the

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*Dr. Lee Youngblood and Fannie Mae check out the fishing pier.*

Photo by Elishia Ballentine

Photo by Kelvin Daniels



Photos by Elishia Ballentine

*Young pine plantation and scenic ridges.*



Photo by Paul Williams

*Chufa "nutlets" provide a nutritious treat that turkeys love.*

improvement of quail habitat. His goal is to eventually have 80 acres dedicated to quail.

Also an avid deer hunter himself, Lee leases out part of the property for commercial deer hunting. There are green fields, 30 to 40 acres in food plots, plus 30 to 40 acres in wildlife corridors and openings. Getting around on the place is no problem because there are six to eight miles of roads (with ditches and turnouts) as well as firelanes.

Rather than enlarging a small pond that already existed on the property, Lee and his sons constructed an adjacent 8-acre lake in 2002 and connected the two, stocking them with bass and bream.

They also built a nice covered fishing pier. Now there are numerous hotels and "condos" for purple martins scattered all around the well-manicured pond, which is also home to several ducks.

As stated earlier in the article, Dr. Youngblood enjoys keeping busy. A past president of the Alabama Wildlife Federation, he currently remains on the Board of Directors. He helped start the Dallas County chapters of both the National Wildlife Federation and Ducks Unlimited. In addition to being active in the local Kiwanis Club, he is a member of the Longleaf Alliance and a sponsor member of the National Wild Turkey Federation. In 2003, Piney Woods hosted

the latter group's national tour and seminar, where Dr. Youngblood shared his wildlife management style and techniques with approximately 60 landowners and biologists in attendance.

It always brings Lee joy to share the property. The Boy Scouts sometimes visit Piney Woods for camping and fishing outings, as well as the Outdoor Women program and other groups. Even while this interview was being conducted, he and Tom Lang, the AFC's Dallas County Manager, are planning and preparing for a tour of the Dallas County Natural Resources Coordinating Council in May.

Ever mindful of the future, Dr. Youngblood is already envisioning his next wildlife project: another large field of chufa and clover . . . 🌱

**More projects** – Dr. Lee Youngblood uses a portable sawmill to cut lumber from the property (right) and a special home-made "kiln" to dry it (below). Different venders then make turkey calls from the wood – mainly cedar, but also poplar, walnut, Osage orange, and sycamore.



Photos by Elishia Ballentine