

Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Forestry

Why is Implementation So Important and Stressed So Much?

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The last issue of Alabama's TREASURED Forests magazine contained a great article by Roberta Swann and Tom Herder entitled "The Mobile Bay Estuary and Coastal Population Growth: The Challenge of Keeping What We've Got." To quote the opening lines, "The Mobile Bay Watershed drains three quarters of the State of Alabama, much of Georgia and Mississippi, and even portions of Tennessee, making it the sixth largest basin by area with the fourth highest fresh-water inflow in all of North America."

Alabama is blessed as a state to have as much, if not more, water and diversity than any state. We are also blessed to have 22.8 million acres of forestland within the state, the majority of which is owned by private landowners. These landowners are presently free to choose the direction of management for their property as long as they do not violate any state or federal laws.

To quote another article from that same magazine, "Forest Management and Stream Water Quality," by Dyson, Muenz, and Reutebuch, "The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that 10 percent of the freshwater resources of the United States either originate or flow through the state of Alabama. Alabama contains over 77,000 miles of waterways, of which approximately 47,000 miles are perennial streams, meaning they flow year-round."

If you have not read these articles, you need to. If you have read them, please read them again, and pay attention to the statements about aquatic biodiversity and endemism. Also discussed is threatened and endangered species, many of which live in small headwater streams.

There are many forces at work to protect these species, even if it means forcing a landowner to follow a specific management regime. Remember, we are free to choose at the present time, barring no violations of current law.

The majority of the smaller headwaters I just spoke of originate and flow through forestland – land owned by private landowners. Most foresters, water quality folks, and water treatment folks will tell you "Healthy Forests Equal Clean Water." You might wonder how to keep forests healthy? The answer is management which involves, yes, cutting of timber.

The latest numbers in print from the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and the Alabama Agribusiness Council related to timber production in Alabama are as follows:

Timber Production and Processing = 122,020 jobs

Money Produced by

Timber Production and Processing = \$21.4 Billion

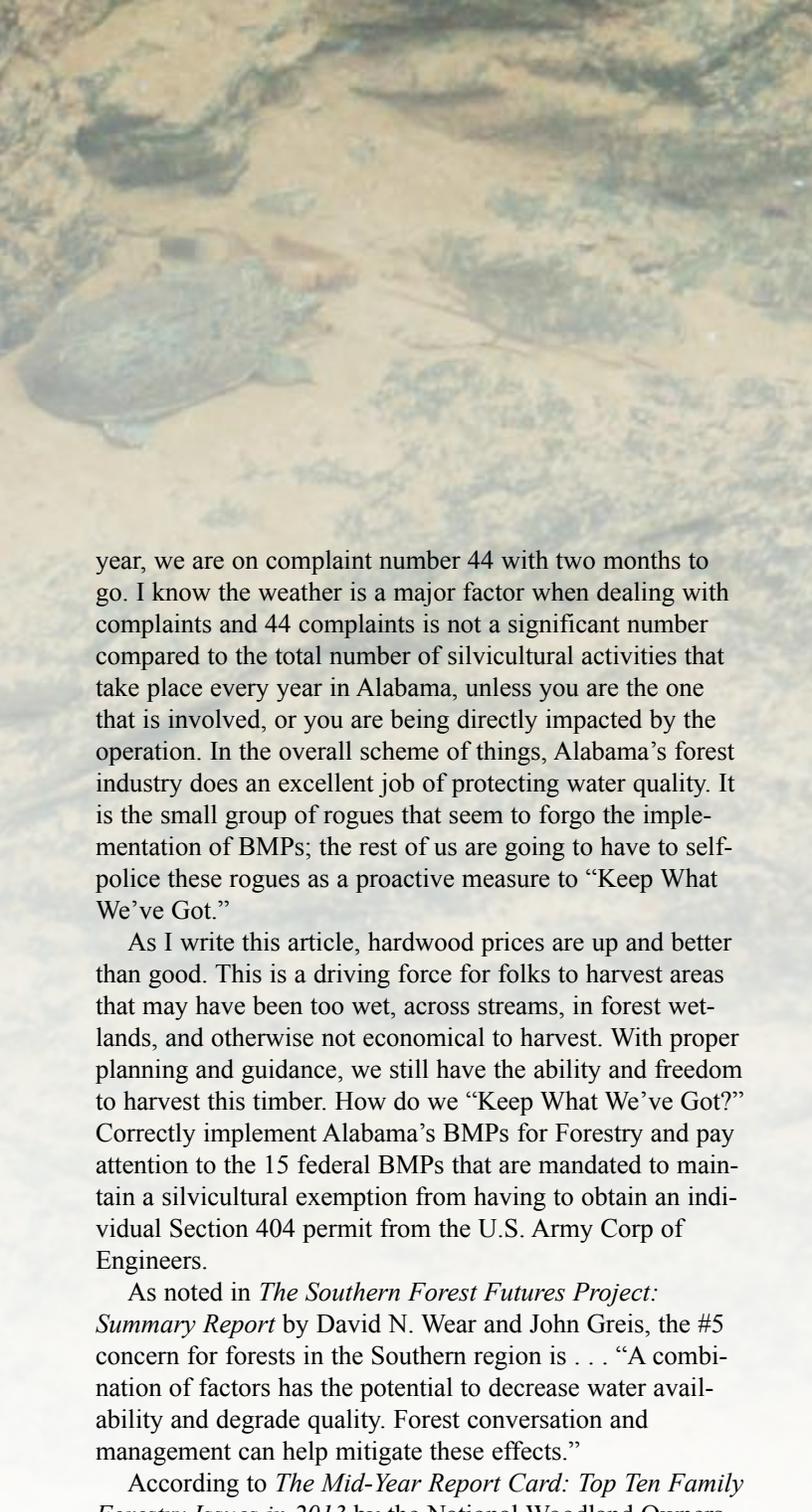
The Challenge of Keeping What We've Got

How do we keep the freedom that we currently have to manage the forestland of Alabama? The main answer is to be proactive and not reactive. Utilizing and correctly implementing Alabama's BMPs for Forestry is one way. Right now we have the choice of which BMPs to use and the flexibility to be site specific. Another way to be proactive is to work with natural resource professionals — such as registered foresters — to do some pre-planning of any silvicultural activity, especially if a stream or water body is in the operation area or close by. And, of course, there are third-party certification programs available to help you. In Alabama they are mainly Tree Farm, Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

“Healthy Forests = Clean Water”

On the public (agency) side of the field, the Alabama Rivers and Streams Network is a group of state agency, federal agency, and non-government (NGO) folks working in a proactive and cooperative manner to designate the "best of the best" aquatic habitat left in the state. These areas are called Strategic Habitat Units (SHUs). Investigation of these areas has already prevented the listing of some species, as well as formulated the re-introduction of some listed species. If you live or work in any of these areas, you need to support the group. Implementation of forestry BMPs is all that is requested from the landowner; the right thing to do to protect water quality.

While I know I am preaching to the choir, we still continue to field complaints dealing with silvicultural practices and water quality. Some are not valid; however, some are. So far this fiscal



year, we are on complaint number 44 with two months to go. I know the weather is a major factor when dealing with complaints and 44 complaints is not a significant number compared to the total number of silvicultural activities that take place every year in Alabama, unless you are the one that is involved, or you are being directly impacted by the operation. In the overall scheme of things, Alabama's forest industry does an excellent job of protecting water quality. It is the small group of rogues that seem to forgo the implementation of BMPs; the rest of us are going to have to self-police these rogues as a proactive measure to "Keep What We've Got."

As I write this article, hardwood prices are up and better than good. This is a driving force for folks to harvest areas that may have been too wet, across streams, in forest wetlands, and otherwise not economical to harvest. With proper planning and guidance, we still have the ability and freedom to harvest this timber. How do we "Keep What We've Got?" Correctly implement Alabama's BMPs for Forestry and pay attention to the 15 federal BMPs that are mandated to maintain a silvicultural exemption from having to obtain an individual Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers.

As noted in *The Southern Forest Futures Project: Summary Report* by David N. Wear and John Greis, the #5 concern for forests in the Southern region is . . . "A combination of factors has the potential to decrease water availability and degrade quality. Forest conservation and management can help mitigate these effects."

According to *The Mid-Year Report Card: Top Ten Family Forestry Issues in 2013* by the National Woodland Owners Association, water quality and quantity are listed as the #7 issue.

"How do we keep what we've got?" By being part of the proactive solution and not part of the problem.☸



HARDWOOD CORNER