



# Practice What You Preach

## *Life on the Ponderosa II*

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**A**s a Registered Forester with a Bachelor of Science degree in Forest Management from Auburn University, for years I have been giving management advice to landowners, writing management plans, conducting understory and site preparation prescribed burns, planting trees, controlling invasives, and much more. Although my wife and I had not owned property, we were in the market, looking at many tracts priced too high to be affordable. Then we were told of a tract for sale and went to look. I called the landowner, got the price, and told him we were interested. The rest is history, and I finally had the opportunity to “practice what I had been teaching” others my entire career.

In May 2013, my wife, Annette Stewart Cartwright, and I bought our first property in southwest Butler County, Alabama. Consisting of 60.5 acres of young timberland, the property was part of an old estate. The previous owner told us that he and

many other neighbors had been born and grew up on the old home place once located there . . . Dr. Watson drove a horse and buggy all the way from Georgiana (about 12 miles) to deliver babies, and he was often paid with produce or canned goods. The old house had burned a few years back, leaving only two chimney monuments to mark its spot. An old cotton shed was also burned by a wildfire just one month before we closed on the property, but the old cannery survived which is located north of the old home place about 30 feet. Cleaning and weather-proofing this structure to a degree, we can use it as a check-in stand for hunters and guests on the property. We’ve decorated the front with antlers from deer harvested in past hunting seasons, and plan to add a double-insulated window for ventilation.

Our forest management objectives for the property are timber production, hunting, recreation, and aesthetics. We plan to later build some sort of house or cabin and may eventually live there.

In the meantime, the property is transected by a gravel road and power line that provides rural power to an old camper located next to the old home place. Rural water is also connected to the camper, so it is livable in its present condition. There is also an old open well with curbing and good water, which can be used if the rural water is not available. A metal carport located on the old home site allows us to park our vehicles out of the sun and weather.

Needing equipment to work on the property as well as maintain fire lines and roads, we purchased a 58 hp John Deere tractor with a Rhino front-end loader, bush hog, and disk harrow. We have since replaced the old equipment, buying a brand new 6 foot bush hog and 6 foot Tufline disk harrow. Added to that was a used Kawasaki Mule and trailer for quick and easy access to all parts of the farm.

Our first timber harvest was in October 2013 when we solicited bids and thinned 30 acres of a 13-year old loblolly pine plantation, recovering about half of the timber value. As rows could not be defined, we asked the logger to cut corridors parallel to the road. This worked out great not only opening up the stand, but also providing hunting corridors across it. After the thinning, we hired the Alabama Forestry Commission to clear two food plots next to two existing hunting houses. We later planted the food plots with a variety of seed from Whitetail Institute and also planted the few existing roads.

We signed up for cost-share on fire breaks, which were installed in March 2014 and planted with leftover seed from Whitetail Institute. Obtaining a burn permit later in March, we conducted a prescribed burn in the plantation by lighting a backfire on the north line with a 5 mph southeast wind. After about two hours, we slowly ignited flanking fires that burned well and consumed most of the fuel except for small piles of debris. The stand looks great and we experienced a successful hunting season, harvesting seven deer and one coyote.

In addition to hunting, we've already found other means of recreation on the property. In May of 2014, we held a family gathering to celebrate the return of our nephew from Afghanistan. In addition to grilling hamburgers, hotdogs, and sausage, we ate other dishes brought by the family. We set up a



shooting range with targets and shot clay targets thrown with a spring-loaded thrower, with all the family bringing guns and participating. Everyone also enjoyed riding around the farm with two UTVs, an off-road golf cart, and a 4-wheeler. Arriving at 8:00 am and leaving at 5:30 pm, 20 family members just had a wonderful time.

The Alabama Forestry Commission completed our forest Stewardship management plan in April of this year, and we have recently received certifications for Stewardship Forest, Tree Farm, and TREASURE Forest. Annette and I go out to the farm almost every weekend so we can continue to improve the place and add value, working as a team on every project such as cutting, splitting, and hauling firewood. We are methodically removing and treating privet, cogongrass, and eastern baccharis. Again, we hired the Alabama Forestry Commission to push fire lanes around all exterior boundary lines, push two additional interior roads, and create three additional food plots. These improvements have now given us full access to all parts of our property . . . Mrs. Cartwright and I have found a native chinquapin tree, as well as a few honey locust trees and at least one big leaf magnolia tree. Every discovery is another adventure on the farm we fondly call the Ponderosa III! 🌲



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