

In Their Own Words ... Letters to the AFC

21 April 2015

To Bruce Springer
Alabama Forestry Commission
Clanton, Alabama:

On behalf of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Alabama Forestry Commission, specifically the Chambers County unit rangers, for their assistance with prescribed burning this year at West Point Lake.

Rangers James Williams and Jimbo Robinson helped Corps of Engineers rangers complete the burning of over 2,400 acres of public land in addition to the plowing of fire breaks before prescribed burning took place. Please pass along my sincere appreciation to the members of the Chambers County unit office.

We look forward to working with your agency in the future. If I may be of assistance to you in any matter regarding West Point Lake, please contact me.

Stephen F. Logan
Operations Manager, Department of the Army
Mobile District, Corps of Engineers
West Point, Georgia



15 May 2015

To Greg Pate and Dan Jackson
Alabama Forestry Commission
Montgomery, Alabama:

I wanted to take just a moment of your time today to recognize two fantastic employees of the Alabama Forestry Commission! During the past month I have had the great opportunity and pleasure of working beside both the Bullock County Forester; Mr. Matthew McCollough and Ranger; Mr. Mark Richardson. Both of these men are not only very knowledgeable about their profession but they are extremely dedicated to providing the best possible forest services to the landowners of Bullock County. We are most fortunate to have these two men working in our county!

Matthew recently updated my forestry plan and helped me to obtain the information needed to be certified into the Alabama Stewardship Program and the National Tree Farm Program. I had previously been certified in the TREASURE Forest Program. With their assistance, I

have recently completed a control burn on my property near Union Springs which I would not been able to do without their knowledge and assistance! It was a great joy to watch them go about their job each day knowing that I could trust both their professional training and their experience. I can't begin tell you how appreciative I am of their work ethic and the attitude they go about their job and I wanted to let you know how much I appreciate them and what they have done for me and my family! They are indeed a great blessing!

Charles A. Hall
Montgomery, Alabama



3 July 2015

Letter to the Editor:

My father was a big cotton farmer in Morgan County near the Tennessee River. When he died unexpectedly in 1952, my mother was left with three young children (I was the oldest at 8 years old), a big mortgage on the farm that had been losing money every year for a long time, and a dwindling labor force. She didn't know what to do with 1,054 acres of worn-out red clay and a family to feed, so she put the place on the auction block. I can remember vividly . . . first they sold every cow, mule, hog, fence post, and roll of wire – everything that would move – and the buyers were hauling it off. This hurt me.

Then finally the land came up. Those were hard times, especially for “dirt farmers.” When the high bid got to \$48 per acre by a neighbor, my mother stopped the auction and huddled with the auctioneer. They announced a “no sale.”

The old place was washing away. Back then I think the main job of the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) was fighting wildfires, but the county forester was a Mr. Nichols who would visit from time to time. He told us about a government program designed to prevent erosion. It paid landowners \$10 per acre, per year, for 10 years to plant trees on land like ours. It fit us like a glove so we did it, with Mr. Nichols shepherding us all the way.

When the trees were about 15 feet tall, a big wildfire came through and killed everything. It almost killed me and the others fighting it – all we had was limbs

and tree tops to beat it out. Mr. Nichols and his crew, as well as all the neighbors, were right there with us, but they didn't have any equipment like they do now – just manpower. The wind came up and it got in the tree tops, with us right in the middle of it. The only thing that saved us was a big ditch with some water in it that we lay down in – it roared right over us! You talk about scared!

So, we replanted and started over, again. We knew nothing about managing like we do now.

Now comes the second major encounter with the AFC. When I was away in college, my mother called saying that, out of the blue, a fellow had contacted her and offered big money for the timber to do a clear-cut. (I call them “timber pimps” or “road riders” – I get a call or letter about every month asking if we'll sell.) I told her to just hold on and let me see what we had.

I called around and found a young fellow with the AFC who agreed to take a look and advise us. His name was Steve May, county forester for Morgan County – I think he's still with the AFC. By then, their mission had shifted to the technical side to get landowners to do the things they should to get maximum benefit from growing trees.

May said we just needed to thin and manage the stand rather than clear-cut. He taught us how to bore for growth rates, control burn, monitor for diseases, put in fire brakes, etc. Plus, he showed us how to do a timber sale. He explained how to conduct a timber cruise, optimum basal area – in short, how to manage timber.

We did all those things, and you could just see the timber growth rates take off. And by the way, the money from the thinning alone was about what that road rider had offered! This showed me the value of a continuing relationship with the AFC.

Today I own rural timberland in four Alabama counties, so I have to deal with four different foresters, and they keep changing. From time to time, it's been suggested that I hire a consultant, but I have had terrible luck there.

Years ago I met another fellow named Jim Jeter who was with Gulf States Paper at the time, although he's been with the AFC for over 20 years now. He is abso-

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lutely my “go to” man and knows all facets of timber. Unfortunately, he will retire soon and I don’t know what I’ll do. However, with the good foundation he and others at the AFC have given us, we’ll be fine. Thanks, AFC.

Ed Cain
Birmingham, Alabama



9 October 2015

To Terry Ezell
Alabama Forestry Commission
Decatur, Alabama:

We lived in Decatur in 1979 when we bought our land at Piney Grove in Lawrence County. It was much easier to work the place from Decatur than Birmingham, where we’ve lived about 30 years. Results: much more competition from kudzu, Chinese privet, etc. I’ve been battling them – alone.

Recently, Chris Horne toured our place (TREASURE Forest about 25 years) and gave me a lot of helpful information. Probably equally important, Chis made me know he was really interested in our efforts to improve our pine tree farm. In every way, he was professional, very pleasant, informative, and supporting. I feel confident landowners in Alabama will be well served through Chris’s advice and support. He is a bright star in our state forestry program.

Whit King
Birmingham, Alabama



23 October 2015

To Ricky Fields
Alabama Forestry Commission
Bay Minette, Alabama:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the Commission for assistance with firebreak preparation and with a prescription burn on 240 acres within Gulf State Park. Richard Johnson and William Robertson participated in the aforementioned projects within the Park as far as a forest management plan and the assistance they provided was very helpful.

The Alabama State Parks Division has developed a forest management plan at

Gulf State Park that includes Invasive Species Management, prescribed fire, longleaf restoration and the enhancement of certain plant and animal species of special concern within the coastal environment of Alabama. The Alabama Forestry Commission has been an integral part in assisting the Division in prescribed fire planning and implementation on site. They have also helped foster a greater cooperative relationship between the Park and the cities of Orange Beach and Gulf Shores. This is critical for community planning, wildland urban interface and assists the local/rural fire departments in learning more about prescribed fire and fire behavior. Noting past cooperation with both wildfire and prescribed fire within the Park, the State Parks Division would again like to express their sincere appreciation to the Commission for their assistance and cooperative mindset as we strive to be better stewards of the lands in our charge.

In my personal 31 years with the Alabama State Parks Division and as a planner for prescribed fire within the Division, a rule of thumb has been to always have the Forestry Commission on site if possible during the burn period. This is a direct reflection to the professionalism and dedication of individuals working for the Alabama Forestry Commission.

Forrest Bailey, Chief
Natural Resources Section
Alabama State Parks Division
Montgomery, Alabama



23 November 2015

To Benji Elmore
Alabama Forestry Commission
Brewton, Alabama:

I would like to express my appreciation for Alabama Forestry Commission employees Ricky Fields and Jason Barrett for the recent burning of Knoll Park in Fairhope. Knoll Park has been left in its natural state and is a popular spot for bird watchers. In the spring, the park’s hundreds of azalea bushes bloom beautiful pinks and reds. This longleaf pine 4.6-acre park, bordered by Fairhope and Magnolia avenues and Bayview Street,

certainly is a special place within our community. In addition, Knoll Park was recently recognized as an urban forestry project by America in Bloom. I appreciate Ricky and Jason’s efforts as this would not have been such a success without their assistance and knowledge.

Jack Burrell
City Council President, City of Fairhope
Fairhope, Alabama



To: Butler County Forestry Planning Committee
Thanks for choosing me to go to the 2015 Natural Resources Youth Camp. It was fun, especially when we went to the creek and learned about the different fish and how they survive. And I enjoyed meeting all the other kids and making new friends.
Thanks Again,
Whitman Sims Greenville Middle School

Dear Forestry Planning Committee, Thank you for inviting me to your amazing camp. It was so fun! I met lots of new people and made new friends. Thank you for devoting your time for us to have a wonderful experience! This was an amazing camp and a great way to start off the summer! I loved being out in nature away from technology for a while. Thank you so much! I can't wait for future campers to have as much fun as I did! P.S. The food was very good!
Love, Jamie P.

