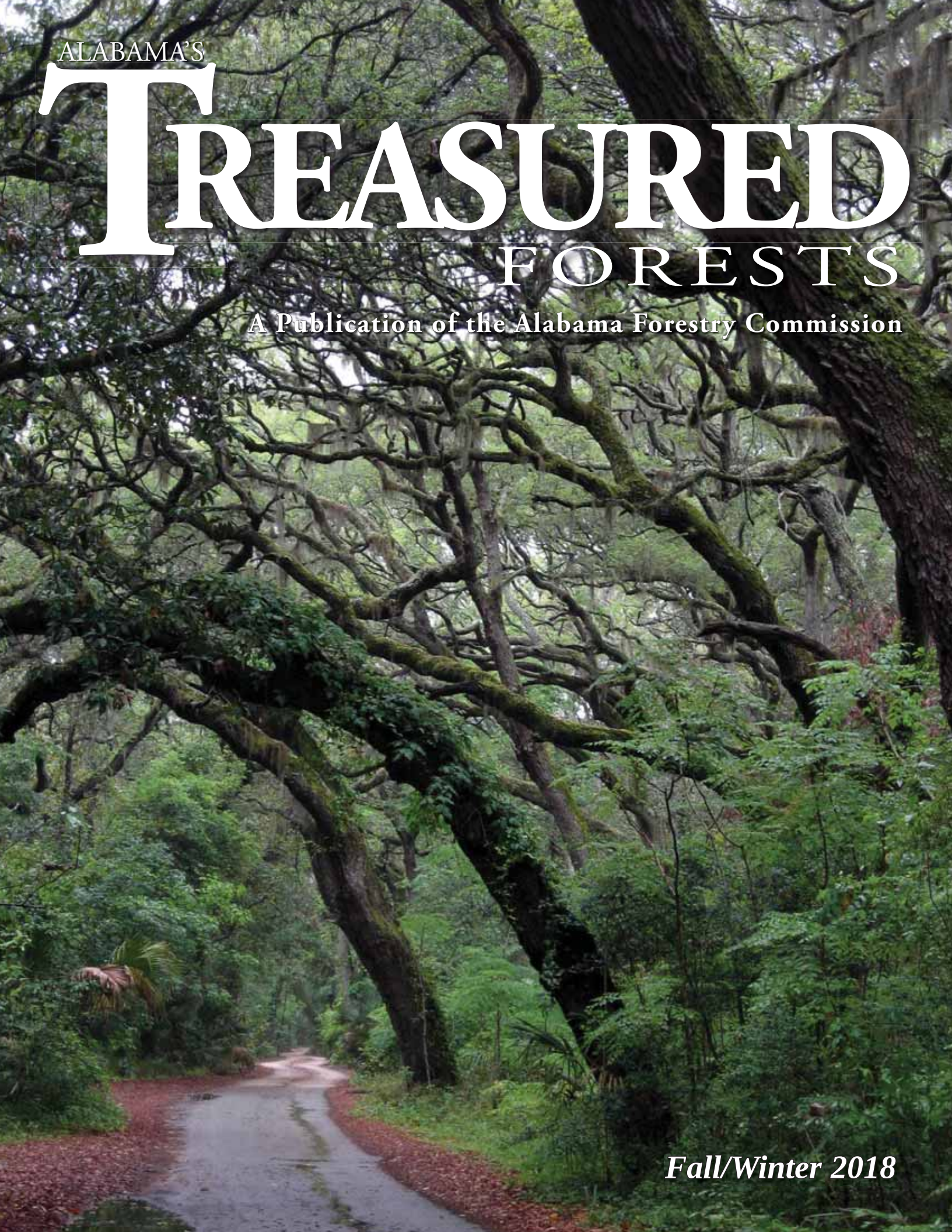

ALABAMA'S

TREASURED FORESTS

A Publication of the Alabama Forestry Commission

Fall/Winter 2018

Message from the *STATE FORESTER*

Rick Oates, State Forester

Alabama dodged a bullet! On October 10, Hurricane Michael came ashore, just east of Panama City, with 150-mile per hour winds. Our first concerns were about the safety and lives of the people who were in the path of the storm. The damage was incredible, and crews are still working to help people impacted by this massive hurricane. It will take months, even years, before the lives of people in hard-hit communities like Mexico Beach get back to normal. As the media coverage of the event fades, I urge you to keep these people in your prayers.

Before the storm, Alabama Forestry Commission Employees were prepared to assist. We had chain saw crews identified and equipment ready to go. Our men and women were part of the Emergency Management Agency activation, both at the state operations center in Clanton and at the division offices in the southern part of the state.

Immediately after the storm, AFC employees were dispatched to help people in Southeast Alabama. Our men and women spent several days with chainsaws opening roads and removing debris so people could get back into the area. We hauled water, tarps, MREs, etc. across the state to aid Alabamians. Our foresters are just now starting the task of helping landowners assess the damage they have sustained. Over the next few months we will be making recommendations to help landowners decide the appropriate management strategy for their property in the wake of Hurricane Michael.

There is a lot of updated material available on our web site (forestry.alabama.gov) to help people make decisions about storm-damaged timber land. If you are in the impacted area, I suggest you look at some of this information and see if it can help you. If you were not impacted by this storm, look at it with an eye as to how it might help you prepare for a disaster on your property. Tornados, wildfires, southern pine beetles . . . all these unexpected events can mimic the devastation caused by a hurricane. Whether it's only on your property, or a large-scale disaster, landowners must still account for the damage on an individual basis to the IRS and others. Take this warning as an opportunity to make sure you have done all you can before the next disaster strikes.

If your forest was impacted by this storm, or is hit by the next one, remember one thing. Most likely, your timber has been growing for ten, 15, 25 or more years. Don't make a rush decision to clear-cut, or take some other action, without getting a professional to evaluate the situation on the ground. Take the time to make a sound decision, based on solid advice from a registered forester. It may be that the stand is not as bad as it looks, and you could lose out by making too quick a decision.

Regardless, I again urge you to keep the people of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia in your prayers. They have all had a rough few months. It's amazing how quickly our lives can change. Also, be sure to thank the employees of the AFC who serve as first responders to wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes, ice storms, and other natural disasters. They risk their lives to help keep other people safe!

Rick Oates

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The Alabama Forestry Commission supports the Alabama Natural Resources Council's TREASURE Forest program. *Alabama's TREASURED Forests* magazine, published by the Alabama Forestry Commission, is intended to further encourage participation in and acceptance of this program by landowners in the state, offering valuable insight on forest management according to TREASURE Forest principles. TREASURE is an acronym that stands for **T**imber, **R**ecreation, **E**nvironment, and **A**esthetics for a **S**ustained **U**sable **RE**source.

ALABAMA FORESTRY COMMISSION Est. 1924

ALABAMA'S
TREASURED FORESTS
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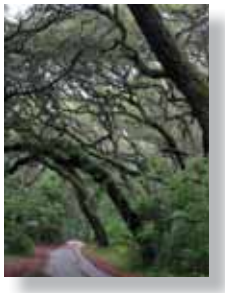

On the Cover:
Southern Live Oak grows abundantly across the southern coastal states.

Photo by Dan Clark, USDI National Park Service, Bugwood.org

This publication is provided at no charge to the forest landowners of Alabama, with a circulation of approximately 14,000. Published three times each year, the magazine is filled with forestry information and technical assistance designed to assist landowners in making informed decisions about the management practices they apply to their land. Articles and photographs are contributed by AFC employees and other forestry or natural resources professionals.

Alabama's TREASURED Forests magazine is also available on-line! **www.forestry.alabama.gov**

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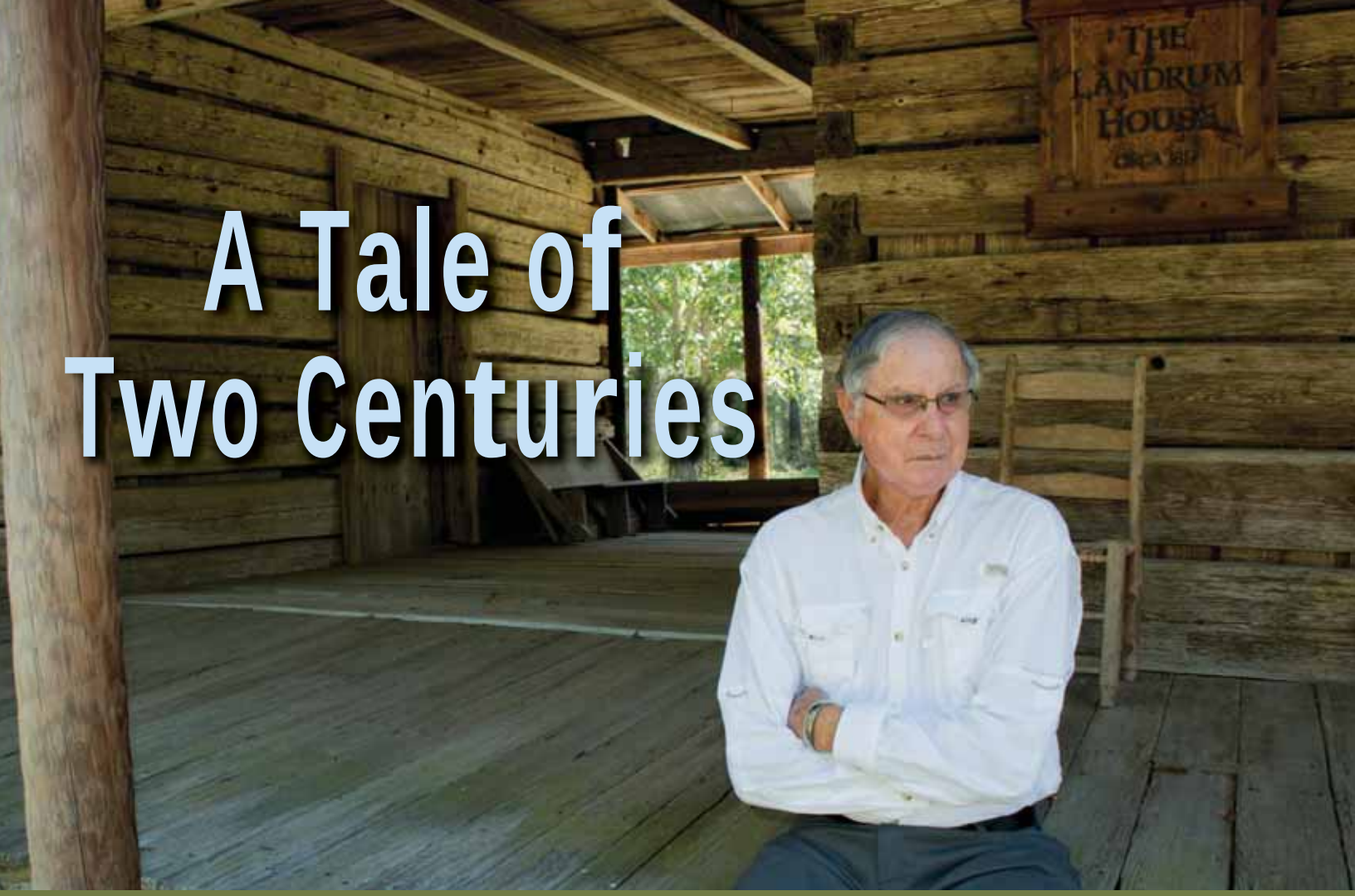

A Tale of Two Centuries

By Cole Sikes, Alabama Forestry Commission

Why do we continue to carry traditions? Is it because someone told us to? Is it because it's what we are supposed to do?. . . I believe that what we hold on to pertains to our character, honor, and love. Traditions can define cultures, religions, and even countries. What is often overlooked are the family traditions. These are what make every one of us special in our own way of life. We can also have customs that express our traditions. Some come in the form of trinkets, vacations, stories, and even a backyard football game in the fall.

What if a piece of land symbolized a tradition? It would show generations of work containing memories that appear to have no end. Roy Jordan of Marengo County owns 720 examples of this traditional heritage. They come in the form of TREASURE Forest acres that are unique to the Jordan family. This tradition, like no other, earned Jordan a Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award in 2017.

Spanning four generations of managing Alabama's beautiful forests, Jordan's inheritance comes from his father, grandfather, great grandfather, and even great-great grandfather. After settling in Marengo County in 1818, his great-great grandfather built a log house and used his entire property for agriculture. The log home still stands today. For over a century, farming was the land's purpose until one of the grandfathers began utilizing the land for cattle and timber production. In the early 1900s, Jordan's father began the family's relationship with the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC). He diligently followed the agency's recommended practices along with insight from Extension Service and Soil Conservation. Success from his involvement with the AFC allowed the family to designate the property for their current forestry practices.

Jordan's main TREASURE Forest management objective is timber production, with wildlife management following as a "close number two." Recreation is also important to Jordan, allowing him to participate in almost all aspects of land management. His 720 acres is divided into two sections referred to as the 'Landrum Place' and 'Home Place.' Cumulatively, these portions represent 306 acres of pine trees, 144 acres of pine and hardwood mixture, and 225 acres of preferred hardwood species.

The Home Place is made of approximately 225 acres currently used for pine tree production and wildlife food plots. This section contains roughly 70 acres of longleaf plantation, 15 acres of loblolly plantation, 18 acres of food plots/pasture, and 42 acres of natural pine hardwood. The last 79 acres of pine/hardwood are located in a streamside management zone (SMZ), a strip of land immediately adjacent to water where soils, organic matter, and vegetation are managed to protect the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of surface water downstream from forestry operations.

Included in the Landrum Place is roughly 235 acres of loblolly pine trees, 8 acres of longleaf pine plantation, 116 acres of natural oaks, a 2.3-acre pond, 22 acres of food plots/pasture, and

110 acres of desired hardwoods. Ninety percent of the Landrum Place's hardwoods are used in another SMZ. This has immeasurably improved water quality throughout the property. Jordan also rebuilt the dam on his pond and stocked it full of bass and bream before fertilizing it, furthering the property's aquatic qualities.

Jordan's pine trees receive a specific management plan based on the species and their associated stand ages. Approximately 78 acres of longleaf and 228 acres of loblolly plantation are treated on an even-age stand method. This process entails that pine stands with equal ages receive prescribed burning on a two- to three-year cycle. Jordan believes this is "one of the best tools we have available in pine timber management." Longleaf pines begin this cycle at the younger ages of 2 or 3, while loblolly stands are burned beginning at 8 and 10. Along with prescribed burning, Jordan prefers to commercially thin all pine species starting at 12 to 14 years old. The combination of these practices allows the soil to remain rich in nutrients and decreases natural competition.

His mixed hardwoods also receive a management plan of their own. Contrary to his pines' even-age management where the entire stand is treated identically based on its age, hardwood treatment decisions are made on a stem-by-stem process rather than stand-by-stand. Most of his hardwoods and hardwood mixes are used for wildlife habitat enhancement and SMZ purposes.

Wildlife management on the two tracts has been successful because of a particular land trait, diversity. As stated earlier, Jordan's natural habitat contains a variety of different timber. The best wildlife habitat needs copious amounts of diversity ranging from young to mature timber, thick brush to almost open savannas, and property edges among timber stands varying in size, height, stocking, and species. The culmination of his forest plantings and practices has created an environment that accommodates numerous wildlife species such as white-tailed deer, wild turkey, and dove.

Natural food resources have been returned to his pine stands that have been treated with commercial thinning and prescribed burn. Legumes, forbs, and wildflowers now flourish after the removal of forest floor litter, allowing sunlight to reach it to promote growth. Above all Jordan's tree species, he relies most on one tree for wildlife forage, the sawtooth oak. During Alabama's drought of 2016, he recalls his 122 sawtooths providing a wealth of acorns near his food plots. This is because of the tree's ability to adapt to a dry environment, making it a durable species. Jordan plants food plots in summer as well as winter, allowing wildlife to have a year-round supply. His preferred crops are wheat, oats, and clover, rotated on a seasonal basis.

Claiming that his south Alabama soil responds well to fertilizer, he shared how it has affected the family's hunting. "We are

(Continued on page 6)

" I'm sometimes known as a 'tree hugger,' but I don't think that's all bad."

(Continued from page 5)

able to grow some really nice deer on the property," said Jordan. The family typically harvests between 15 to 20 deer annually. Among those is somewhat of a one-to-one ratio of doe and buck taken among his 12 food plots, finding a 'sweet spot' for their deer population that proves to be effective and sustainable.

Rounding out Jordan's management objectives is education. With assistance from the AFC, landowner tours have been hosted on both the Home and Landrum Places. Tour participants would occasionally stop and compliment or criticize what Jordan was practicing on his property. "Most of the time they were complimentary," he said with a grin. Since 2006, he has hosted three Classroom in the Forest events. Local fifth-grade students from Sweet Water and Marengo schools were taught about forests in their very own environment. The young scholars have enjoyed every field day they have spent on this TREASURE Forest.

A unique feature can be found on his forest in the form of a large rock pile. Jordan calls it his 'Ebenezer' which refers to a Biblical story in the book of 1 Samuel. After God saved Samuel and the Israelites from an impending doom from the Philistines, Samuel placed a stone in memorial of God's love for them, naming it Ebenezer. Jordan gathered these rocks from his forest and made a monument of his own, with a track loader of course. "I placed these as memorial to my ancestors because I stand on the shoulders of people that were here before I was, and I want to give them credit," said Jordan.

The future of this TREASURE Forest is bright according to Jordan. He is confident that his children will continue to love the land as he has. Looking back on his hard work on the property, he said, "I'm sometimes known as a 'tree hugger,' but I don't think that's all bad."

When asked if he had any encouragement for other landowners, Jordan gave a lasting piece of advice. "Don't be selfish. Share what you know. Share what you believe. Love the land."

Landowner Assistance

WILDFIRE PROTECTION

Protecting Alabama's rural areas from wildfires is the number one priority of the Alabama Forestry Commission. The AFC has highly trained firefighters who are the first on call to suppress wildfires in Alabama's rural and urban / wildland areas, as well as to respond when natural disasters affect our state's citizens. This protective service is provided on 22.8 million acres of forestland, 365 days a year, 24 / 7. The agency also operates an aerial detection system and toll-free wildfire call system to ensure timely reporting and efficient response to wildland fires across the state.

INSECT & DISEASE DETECTION

From naturally-occurring forest diseases to non-native invasive plants and insects, there are numerous pests that can damage or destroy your trees. The Alabama Forestry Commission can help reduce the impact from infectious diseases, destructive insects, and catastrophic weather that threatens healthy sustainable forests. AFC foresters can diagnose the problem and recommend a course of action. For assistance with forest health issues, contact your local AFC office.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

The Alabama Forestry Commission provides forest landowners with tools to manage and sustain their forest resources. Whether through promoting forest stewardship programs, reviewing harvest sites for compliance with forestry Best Management Practices, or providing advice for urban landscapes, we can help you meet your objectives. AFC personnel can assist in developing forest management plans, making stand management recommendations, and connecting you to cost-share programs which provide financial assistance in meeting your goals. To learn more about our landowner services, contact your local AFC office.

Landowner Services

PRESCRIBED BURNING

Prescribed burning not only provides benefits for both your timber and wildlife, but also protects you and your neighbor from devastating wildfire. The Alabama Forestry Commission's professional team of Certified Prescribed Burn Managers can safely and efficiently conduct either a site preparation or understory burn on your property. For more information or specific pricing, contact your local AFC office.

FIRELANE CONSTRUCTION

In an effort to maintain, enhance, and / or protect the timber on your property, the Alabama Forestry Commission offers affordable dozer work by experienced operators to assist you with construction of fire lanes and creation of small wildlife openings (less than five acres). For more information or specific pricing, contact your local AFC office.

AERIAL IMAGING & MAPPING

Whether it's a single photo, live imaging, video, or a complete map of your property, the AFC offers a full line of drone aerial services. Available items include a large aerial map of your property, as well as a digital copy that can be used in your management plan, a copy of all captured images, and video footage upon request. If you have questions or need more information, contact your local AFC office.

www.forestry.alabama.gov

Hurricane Michael

Destroys Timber in Houston County

While the majority of Alabama landowners escaped severe damage when Hurricane Michael made landfall on October 10, timberland owners in Houston County in the extreme southeast corner of the state were not quite as fortunate. Officials with the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) estimate timber losses at nearly $20 million in that one county alone. Strike teams from the agency were immediately mobilized to assist with road clearing and debris removal in the area.

Aerial surveys conducted by the AFC indicated approximately 42,357 forested acres were damaged by the storm, totaling a value of $19,916,759. Forest Inventory and Analysis data was used to compute the damage by forest type in the impact area (pine 13,396 acres; hardwood 2,879 acres; and mixed pine/hardwood 26,082 acres) as well as total dollar value.

Storm-damaged timber must be recovered in a timely manner if it is to be utilized, so forest owners should not delay in surveying their property. In the coming weeks and months, drying timber on the ground will create fuel for wildfires, and compromised timber is also more susceptible to southern pine beetle attack. However, State Forester Rick Oates says forest owners should not rush into having their trees clear cut without getting a professional to evaluate the situation. “Some folks have been growing their timber 10, 15, 25 or even more years,” said Oates. “They need to take the time to make a sound decision, based on solid advice from a registered forester.”

If your timber property was located in the path of Hurricane Michael and sustained damage, please contact the Alabama Forestry Commission at (334) 260-6260 or send an email to the agency at hurricane.michael@forestry.alabama.gov. For additional information to help in the recovery process, please visit www.forestry.alabama.gov. You may also consider utilizing the services of a registered forester to provide recommendations and/or handle selling your damaged timber. A list of registered foresters can also be found on our website.

Tax news you can use

Timber & Taxes

Income Tax Deduction on Timber and Landscape Tree Loss from Casualty

Timber or landscape trees destroyed by hurricane, fire, earthquake, ice, hail, tornado, and other storms are 'casualty losses' that may allow the property owners to take a deduction on their federal income tax returns. The key for most cases is to figure out the 'adjusted basis' of the timber.

'Adjusted Basis' of Timber

Generally, the cost or the measure of your investment in the property you own is the property's basis. The 'original basis' is defined as follows: 1) for purchased timber property, it is the purchase price and related costs; 2) for gifted timber property, it is the donor's adjusted basis in many instances; 3) for inherited timber property, it is the fair market value on the date of death (or alternative value if so elected, on alternative valuation date). The 'adjusted basis' of a property is the 'original basis' reduced or increased by adjustments over the term of the ownership (e.g., an increase of the timber basis by new purchase, or a decrease of the timber basis by timber sales).

If you have not determined your timber basis at the time of acquisition, you may use the current timber volume, timber growth over the years, and the timber price at the time of acquisition to retroactively establish it. You may need to consult a professional forester to help you set up your timber basis.

Tax Deduction Rules for Casualty Loss

For Timber Held as Investment or Business

Loss Determination. Deductible casualty loss for timber held mainly for business or investment purposes is the smaller of the adjusted basis of timber, and the difference of the fair market value immediately before and after the casualty.

Example 1: A fire damaged Mrs. Smith's woodland tract. Before the fire, the fair market value of the timber was $10,000, but after the fire the timber is worth only $1,000. So, the fair market value loss of her timber is $9,000 ($10,000 - $1,000). Assuming her timber basis is $5,000, the amount of casualty loss deduction is limited to $5,000.

Tax Reporting. Casualty losses are reported first on Form 4684. For timber investment property, the loss is then entered into Schedule A of Form 1040. For timber business property, the loss is entered on Form 4797.

In general, you can deduct a casualty loss only in the tax year in which the casualty occurred. However, for federally declared disasters, you may elect to apply the casualty loss in your prior year's tax return.

'Single Identified Property.' Treasury regulations require that casualty loss is determined with respect to the 'single identifiable property.' This can be the 'timber block' (even if only a portion of it is actually damaged) if you keep the timber tax records (account) together for the block.

Example 2: Mrs. Smith owns a timber property that contains 1,000 MBF of pine sawtimber ($9,000 basis). She kept the property in one account. A tornado destroyed 300 MBF. The adjusted basis for the casualty loss purpose is $9,000, not just $2,700 ($9,000 / 1,000 MBF x 300 MBF). But the loss valuation must also be appraised for the entire tract or block, which may cost more.

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Gain from Salvage Sale. A taxable gain may result if the salvage sale exceeds the adjusted basis of the timber and related selling expenses. But you may elect to postpone paying taxes on the gain if the proceeds are re-invested in timber such as planting trees, purchase of timberland and stock (at least 80 percent) of timber corporations. Salvage sale is reported separately.

For Timber Held for Personal Use

Loss determination. A personal-use timber property is defined as one that is held primarily for personal enjoyment (vs. income production from the timber). For tax years 2018 through 2025, the personal casualty loss deduction is limited to losses from federally declared disasters. The term 'Federally declared disaster' means any disaster subsequently determined by the President of the United States to warrant assistance by the Federal Government under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.

The amount of personal casualty loss deduction is limited to the lesser of the fair market value loss of the prop-erty or the adjusted basis of the property. Insurance or other reimbursement you received reduce the casualty loss. Also, the loss is deductible only if the amount of loss exceeds $100 per casualty. Further, the loss is deductible only to the extent that it exceeds 10 percent of your adjusted gross income (AGI).

Example 3: Mr. Thompson owned timber primarily for personal enjoyment, not for profit. In 2018, his timber was completely destroyed by a storm that was a federally declared disaster. The fair market value of the timber immediately before the loss is $9,000. But his timber basis is $5,100. Assuming his adjusted gross income is $40,000, his timber casualty loss deduction is limited to $1,000 ($5,100 – $100 – 10% x $40,000).

For taxpayers impacted by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. Congress passed special tax law on September 29, 2017, to provide tax relief. The dollar limitation is increased to $500 per casualty from the $100 limit. Also the 10 percent AGI reduction for personal casualty loss and the 'itemized deduction' requirements are waived.

Tax reporting. Personal casualty loss deduction is claimed under 'itemized deductions' on Schedule A of Form 1040.

Special Rules for Landscape Trees Casualty. Personal-use property casualty loss rules discussed earlier apply in calculating the deductions from the loss of landscape trees and/or residence. Casualty loss of trees in the private residence is measured based on the entire property (that is, the land, the improvement (house), and trees). In other words, the measure of the casualty loss is based on the tree loss that contrib-utes to the overall decrease in the fair market value of the entire property immediately before and after the casualty.

Example 4: Mr. Walter purchased his house at $110,000 five years ago. He spent $10,000 planting landscape trees and shrubs in the yard. After the 2018 fire destroyed the trees in Federally declared disaster, the property value decreased $20,000. Assuming the insurance paid him $5,000, the tentative deductible landscape tree casualty loss is $14,900 ($20,000 loss - $5,000 insurance - $100 per casualty). If Mr. Walter's adjusted gross income is $60,000, the casualty loss deduction would be $8,900 ($14,900 – $6,000 (10% of $60,000).

Summary

The current tax laws provide a deduction for the loss of timber and landscape trees caused by casualty, provided such losses meet the deduction requirements. Because of the complicated restrictions on the casualty loss calculation, if the timber basis is low or zero, there may be little or no deductions. It is important that you have records to support your casualty loss deduction. Carefully prepare the appraisals by qualified professional foresters and/or appraisers.

This material has been prepared for informational purposes only, and is not intended to provide tax, legal or accounting advice. Please consult your own tax, legal and accounting advisors before engaging in any transaction.

Linda Wang is the U.S. Forest Service national timber tax specialist, author and coauthor of numerous articles. For more information, visit the National Timber Tax website, www.timbertax.org

The 'Dozen Do's' Of Buying Rural Land

By Tom Brickman, Registered Forester

If you are shopping for land, here's a checklist developed by trial and error, from experience gained in helping people buy and sell over 200,000 acres of rural land over 40 years.

1. Be clear on why you want to own land

Hunting, investment, rural residence, and family recreation are all good reasons for owning land, and each one leads to a different kind of land. For example, if you plan to live on the land, legal access and proximity to public services will be important. Be clear on your intentions so you can focus your search. Consider how you will use the land, and in what way your wife, husband, or children wish to be involved. The key to fewer regrets is thinking in detail about how the land will be used and involving your family in the shopping effort.

2. Look at many properties

The more you shop, the better deal you'll find. Our experience is that people change their minds about many details once they do some shopping. Looking at a lot of deals can be challenging because it takes a lot of time, but it's important. Keep in mind that easy-to-find properties (on the internet) are only a small part of all the land available for new ownership. That's because many more properties are promoted by thousands of landowners or small-town agents. In fact, our research shows that many properties available for purchase have not been promoted at all. So keep looking, get help if needed, and you'll find your dream property.

3. Inspect the property

Not every property will have the physical characteristics you desire. To determine suitability you'll want to physically inspect any possible purchase. Depending on intended use, things to consider are neighborhood desirability, ease of access, timber species, age and quantity, soil productivity, how the land lays (topography), presence of creeks, quality of pastures, existence of boundary line and corner markings, potential boundary or access problems with neighboring landowners, etc. Whenever you buy land, remember that one day you may want to sell it. So think about that day now and make a better buying decision. Whatever appears to be a problem for you right now will likely be a problem for future buyers too. To inspect a property you'll need aerial photos and topographic maps with the boundary lines indicated. Get out and walk the lines. A good source for boundary line information is the county tax assessor office. In fact, many counties have tax maps online. And, there are private sources for paper and online tax map data. A consulting forester can help with an inspection.

4. Talk to the property owner

Believe it or not, some people will say they want to sell their land, but really don't have a sincere interest in selling. It might be for a free appraisal, or even for the attention. You should interview the property owner to assess the strength of their motivation to sell. A property listed by an agent should already have this step completed. But not all agents do this, and some don't do it correctly. So, ask good questions of the owner or listing agent, such as, how long it's been on the market, how many price changes there have been, how many offers have been made, how many different agents have listed it, and why the owner is selling.

(Continued on page 12)

The 'Dozen Do's...

(Continued from page 11)

5. Confirm the acreage

Most rural land has never been surveyed. The fact is, without a survey, no one really knows exactly how many acres are in a tract. For example, the deed may say 160 acres because the property is 1/4 of a Section (a perfect Section is 640 acres), but the tax assessor may say 155 acres. Each have their reasons, but without a survey neither should be viewed as exact. Because surveys are expensive ($0.40 to $0.80 per foot), most land buyers make a 'rough check' on acreage and live with the ambiguity. Examples of rough checks include plotting the boundary lines as indicated by the tax map on a topographic map or aerial photograph with known scale. Another example is pacing the boundary lines (assuming they are visible on the ground) which is also a good way to check for encroachments by your neighbor (a loss not covered by title insurance). Your forester can help you do this and may have a GPS which also provides a good rough check. Sometimes a lender, seller, or buyer will require a survey. But unless there is reason to suspect a problem, a rough check will find serious errors and save a lot of money if you can live with a little uncertainty.

6. Confirm the timber value

Timber can be worth as much as $4,000 per acre. Also, a property that looks clear-cut along the road may have excellent timber on the back side across the creek. If a property is timbered, it's a good idea to have a consulting forester walk the property for a 'rough check' on timber value. Testing the validity of the asking price of a property will require you to have some idea of the timber value. Many times a walk-over is enough of a check if the timber has unexceptional value. The cost of a walk-over will be somewhere around $400. However, most foresters will give credit of this cost towards a formal appraisal if the walk-over indicates a timber cruise is in order. (A timber cruise is the process of counting and measuring the trees.) A timber cruise and appraisal will typically run $4 to $8 per acre, depending on circumstances. However, it's a small price to pay for peace of mind (and good info for establishing your timber tax basis).

7. Test the asking price

It's not unusual for land sellers to have an unrealistic opinion of value. So, independently testing the asking price is very important, and having some facts makes your decision more sure. Study actual sale data. Get an appraisal, retain a real estate professional, or go to the courthouse yourself. Otherwise, your estimate of fair value will be shaped by coffee-shop talk or what an owner asks for their land – all poor guides for fair pricing. Sale data is available at the county probate office if you know how to search. Be sure the sale data you consider is of property similar to the property you are looking at (similar size, location, timber value, access, land quality, and use). If the property is listed with an agent, that agent should be able to provide you with comp sale data. However, some agents and most landowners don't look at this data before setting an asking price.

8. Examine the title

A title exam is a written report on the legal history of the property. It identifies the claims of others in the land (for example, a long-lost cousin with a 1/64th interest) and informs you of the limits to your rights as the new owner (for example, the rights of the power company who have a transmission line across the property or, a neighbor with a road use easement). It can identify mineral interests (but may not), or the legal condition of the road to the property (just because there is a road does not mean you have unrestricted use of it). Many people take this step after a contract is signed. In our experience, a title exam is a cheap way to find a 'deal killer' early, saving time and money. A title exam (also called a binder) can be purchased from a local attorney or title company, will take about a week to complete, and typically run about $300.

9. Determine if you will use debt

Land and timber investments rarely earn the loan payment, and your cash may be needed for other matters. Finding the right balance of cash and debt is important, so talk to your financial advisors early in the process.

10. Contract negotiation

Once a price is agreed upon, there will still be things to work out between you and the seller. For example, who pays for title insurance, closing attorney, survey if needed, mineral inclusion, cost to get the deed recorded at the court house, loan costs, etc. It's good to address these issues early in the negotiating process.

11. Setting up tax basis accounts

Once you buy the property, it's a good idea to set up two accounts for tax purposes (known as your 'basis'). 1) Determine the value of your timber at the time of purchase (your timber basis), then; 2) the balance of the purchase price is allocated to land (your land basis). The purpose for this is to allow you to calculate capital gains tax should you sell some or all of your timber or land later on. Capital gains tax is only charged on the amount of gain from a sale above the amount of your basis.

12. 'Current Use' property tax status

'Current Use' is a special property tax status that allows rural land to be taxed at a lower rate than other types of real property. Current Use can reduce your tax bill by 50 percent or more. The tax assessor's office in your county can verify the tax status and help you apply for Current Use if you do not already have it.

The preceding article is an excerpt from Tom Brickman's e-book, "Buying Rural Land: Tips & How-To's."© This collection of well-written, quick reads will help you find a rural property you'll love, and simplify getting it done. Download the e-book and learn from a seasoned pro with 40+ years of experience as a Registered Forester, Certified Appraiser, and Land Broker. You can reach Tom at (205) 936-2160 or tbrick@CyprusPartners.com.

Let's talk about Fire

in Upland (Oak) Hardwood Forests

By Callie Jo Schweitzer, PhD
Research Forester, US Forest Service, Southern Research Station

Managing the upland hardwood forests of Alabama is nothing short of challenging. Beautiful and diverse, the forests are a result of unbelievable consequences. These forests came about after tremendous disturbance and they remain tied to disturbance, whether introduced by us, or by nature. At the turn of the previous century, these forests were subjected to a perfect storm of disturbances that resulted in the stand structure and species composition we have today.

Most are aware of the story of the American chestnut. This majestic species is purported to have occupied one of four dominant tree canopy positions in our upland forests. The death of these giants was unique, as the chestnut blight resulted in a 'death in place' scenario, and this created a peppering of dead trees and small open areas in our stands.

At the same time, human demographic changes were rampant, with the demise of Native American populations and the movement of Euro Americans to the South. Along with these changes came different expectations and uses of the forests, as the forests were exploited as an almost inexhaustible resource. We harvested timber to meet our needs as a growing nation, without regard to future forest composition and structure. We increased the amount of grazing by domestic animals and influenced the natural pressures from wildlife by hunting and habitat manipulation. Also, the people in the early 1900s used fire in ways that the Native Americans may not have; fire was a broad-based tool used to clear out underbrush, drive out varmints, and clear logging areas. Fire also was set accidently and allowed to run its course. Regardless, this perfect storm of disturbances resulted in our oak-dominated upland hardwood forests of today.

While forest managers are not suggesting returning to these more wild times, we do suggest that mimicking some of these disturbances may be beneficial to sustaining species composition (especially oaks) that we desire. This desirability is reflected by landowner preferences, but suffice to state that many landowners would prefer to keep oaks in their stands. The judicious use of fire in hardwood stands may assist with meeting these goals.

We know so little about the true history of fire in our systems that it is difficult to replicate it. For example, for any given stand, little is known about the species distribution by stem size class when a fire may have been introduced. Even less is known about the fire itself, characteristics such as the season of burn, fire intensity, fuel loading, and weather conditions. Many fires were set not for specific management goals, but for some general effect instead or by accident. Thus, the resultant stand composition may, or may not, have been influenced by any given fire.

The science behind fire in upland hardwood stands is advancing. For many years, fire was thought to be a detriment to the quality of timber, which was the primary forest product. The reasons behind this belief are myriad, including observation of increased rot and degrade in forests that were exposed to fire. What must be kept in mind is that these fires were not introduced as part of a silviculture prescription, and their impact to the residual stand was not considered. It is possible that the fires that resulted in degraded hardwood timber were set at the wrong time in stand development. Recent research on the effect of fire on the quantity and quality of red oak timber product value in Missouri showed that if the stand was harvested within five years of a prescribed fire, the amount of value loss was minimal (*Marschall et*

al. 2014). Conversely, in a study of the impacts of wildfire in Kentucky forests, an average value loss per acre was $404 (*Reeves and Stringer 2011*), while in West Virginia, multiple wildfires resulted in a 54 percent decline in stumpage values, with values decreasing as much as $619 per acre (*Wood 2010*). An examination of boards presenting defect attributable to the heat of prescribed fires showed that 2 to 16 percent of all boards sawn from butt logs were affected, with associated defects including mineral stain, decay, shakes, and checks (*Weidenbeck and Schuler 2014*).

Indiscriminate wildfire and prescribed fire applied at the wrong time in the stand's rotation can also result in higher percent cull in live total net volume, increased overstory mortality, and loss of vigor. Tree injury and mortality related to fire depends on species, size, and individual tree characteristics. Low-intensity, dormant season prescribed fires usually have minimal effect on overstory hardwood tree mortality. Smaller stems of all species are susceptible to damage and death with fire. In general, top kill of hardwood trees less than 4 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh) is common, and a proportion of stems up to 8 inches dbh will be impacted. This impact depends on each individual stem's species and general vigor. Hardwood stems will resprout, and the fire-in-oak-systems prescription is predicated on the biology of oaks, which have an advantage over competitors for surviving fire due to: preferential allocation of carbohydrates to root growth, and an abundance of dormant buds located on seedling tissue that is below the soil and thus insulated from the heat of the fire.

We have learned a few additional pieces of information related to the fire-in-oak forests prescription. Oak has an advanced growth-dependent reproduction strategy. In essence, a stand must have sufficient number of oak seedlings in a competitive position in order to regenerate the stand and sustain oak, prior to any introduction of disturbance (fire, harvesting). While the number and size of these oak seedlings are site- and stand-dependent, managers should error on the side of more seedlings and bigger seedlings is better. Fire will not magically create a plethora of large, competitive oak seedlings. Fire may have a larger impact on those species competing with oaks such as red maple, yellow-poplar, and sweetgum, especially if multiple fires are part of the prescription. Using fire as part of a regeneration prescription requires an assessment of the status and number of advanced oak reproduction, as well as any aggressive competitor species; some type of stand disturbance to open up the canopy and to allow more sunlight to the understory; and multiple fires.

The use of fire in hardwood forests can assist in meeting management goals. Timing of fire is of utmost importance. If using fire in a mature stand to meet aesthetic or wildlife goals, and timber production is desired, harvesting trees within five years may minimize degrade. Prescribed fire at this time will also open the understory, enhancing light and growing conditions for all species, including oaks. Additional fires may promote oak dominance in the seedling and sapling layer over other species, provided the oak advanced reproduction present is large and numerous before harvesting. At some point, burning must stop to allow recruitment of the seedling sprouts of oaks into the overstory, which may take 10 to 30 years. A fire-free period is crucial to permit this recruitment. If a vigorous sprouting response from competing species persists, herbicides can be used to release the oak crop trees without the risk of stem damage that fire would introduce.

Mimicking that perfect storm of disturbances that gave us our oak-dominated hardwood stands requires managers to pull out all their tricks.

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Left: Damage to the lower bole of white oak after a prescribed fire in north Alabama. Center: Minimal lower bole damage following several dormant season prescribed fires in north Alabama. Right:Oak seedling sprouts following dormant season prescribed fire.

Set Sail
SOUTHERN OAK

By Stephanie Cross

The historical significance of live oak in shipbuilding is well documented, with Colonial shipbuilders recognizing early on the value of live oak's strong curled limbs for building the ribs of ships. President George Washington signed legislation for the Naval Act of 1794 which commissioned the original six frigates, including the *USS Constitution* and *USS Constellation*. The designer of these ships, Joshua Humphries, extolled the virtues of live oak over white oak. Thousands of acres of live oak were 'nationalized' as a strategic resource.

While the need evaporated with the advent of ironclad steam-powered ships in the 1800s, live oak has not lost its usefulness in shipbuilding in these modern times. Southwest Georgia plays a significant role in supplying Southern live oak to shipbuilders, thanks to Steve Cross, a fifth generation sawyer and owner of Cross Sawmill in Iron City, who manufactures the live oak frame stock that forms the curved framework around which wooden ship hulls are built.

In hopes of educating shipbuilders and the general public on the widespread availability of Southern live oak (*Quercus virginiana*), Cross contacted maritime museums all along the east and west coasts. In 2011, he provided the first commercially harvested live oak since the 1800s for a replica of the *San Salvador* being built by the Maritime Museum of San Diego. It was originally the flagship of Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, the first European explorer of the modern coast of California.

Cross convinced museum heads that live oak was legal to harvest and plentiful, and they eventually purchased six tractor trailer loads of it to complete the ribs of the 111-foot galleon. The replica was launched in September 2015 and will be used as an educational vessel, teaching history and sailing skills. The *San Salvador* will be licensed and insured to carry passengers anywhere in the world.

"At one time in our history, America's great forests and the people who harvested them were a strategic maritime and naval resource," says Ray Ashley, CEO and president of the Maritime Museum of San Diego. "Without Southern live oak that could stop 18-pound shot fired from British guns, for instance, 'Old Ironsides' (*USS Constitution*) would never have earned that name, and the War of 1812 might have turned out differently.

"Anyone who thinks history lies buried in the past has never met sawyer Steve Cross," says Ashley. "Steve is thoroughly knowledgeable in his trade, resourceful on every level, and exudes a boundless and personal enthusiasm for the projects he undertakes that makes him a joy

(Continued on page 18)

Photo by Jerry Soto, San Salvador

Above photos by Robert Mitchell 2016 for BBH Shipyard, Ernestina project

(Continued from page 16)

to work with. Building a full-scale 16th century Spanish galleon is no small undertaking, and without the expertise, material, and commitment that Steve has contributed to the project, *San Salvador* would not be the magnificent ship we intended."

Cross soon found a friend and advocate in Ross Gannon who co-owns a well-respected shipyard on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. "I first met Steve Cross at the 2012 Maine Boatbuilder's Show in Portland, Maine, where my business, Gannon & Benjamin Marine Railway, Inc., was displaying," says Gannon.

"Steve made me aware that he could provide live oak framing stock, a surprise to me since I thought no one was still sawing live oak commercially and that it might be a protected species. Steve reassured me that it's an abundant, unprotected species and that he was the man who could provide it. Additionally, he provided copious research material proving his viewpoint that live oak is definitely a sustainable resource."

The common misconception that these trees are protected or endangered began to come up in conversations with other shipbuilders on the East Coast, too. Cross began to research current and historic statistical information regarding live oak numbers and protection status. He worked closely with the USDA as well as Risher Willard, Bill Pryor, and Dru Preston from the Marketing & Utilization Division of the Georgia Forestry Commission.

Dr. Doug Goldman, chief botanist with the USDA, was surprised to find language in their *USDA Plant Guide* that inaccurately described live oak as "protected for public enjoyment."

Cross knew it didn't reflect the legal or environmental status of live oaks in rural areas of the eight states encompassing their range.

Earlier this year, Goldman wrote, "The statement 'today live oaks are protected for public enjoyment' has led to confusion about the protected status of *Quercus virginiana*. This statement is not to be interpreted that this species is excluded from commercial use wherever it occurs." He clarified that the species is protected only in public parkland, just like any other plant species, or protected in some communities by special ordinances. Outside those areas it is not protected.

"Live oak is an abundant tree species in the tri-state region of Georgia, Florida, and Alabama," says Willard. "Within a 100-mile radius of Bainbridge, Georgia, there are 97.1 million live oak trees and the number has increased from 77.4 million in 2010." In the eight coastal states where live oaks grow – Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas – there are an estimated 1.3 billion live oaks, and less than one percent are protected by local ordinances in urban areas. Unrealized by most is that more live oaks are purposefully killed with herbicide and bulldozed than protected by urban ordinance.

Subsequently, in 2015 when Gannon needed frame stock for the extensive reframing of the yacht, *Mah Jong*, he arranged to travel to southwest Georgia with Pat Ilderton, the vessel's owner, to see for himself what Cross could provide. "It was obvious Steve had the material we were looking for, and plenty of it," says Gannon. "I must say that it's been a pleasure continuing an historic use of live oak – also known as the Maritime Oak – for boat and ship framing, a use for which it is eminently suited."

Currently Cross is cutting live oak for another ship restoration, the *Ernestina-Morrissey*, the state ship of Massachusetts. Work is being done at the Boothbay Harbor Shipyard in Maine. This vessel, for which original construction began in 1893, has sailed 120 years over the course of three centuries. She was first a fishing boat that retrieved enough salted cod on her first trip to cover the cost of her building, then briefly a cargo ship.

From 1927-1945, the ship sailed exploratory trips in the Arctic, then for more than 30 years was a transport vessel in the Cape Verde Islands of the East African coast before finally returning to Massachusetts. When restorations are completed, the *Ernestina-Morrissey*, like the *San Salvador*, will be a sail training and educational vessel that will strive to channel modern minds back into the depths of history.

Photo left and this page by Jerry Soto, San Salvador

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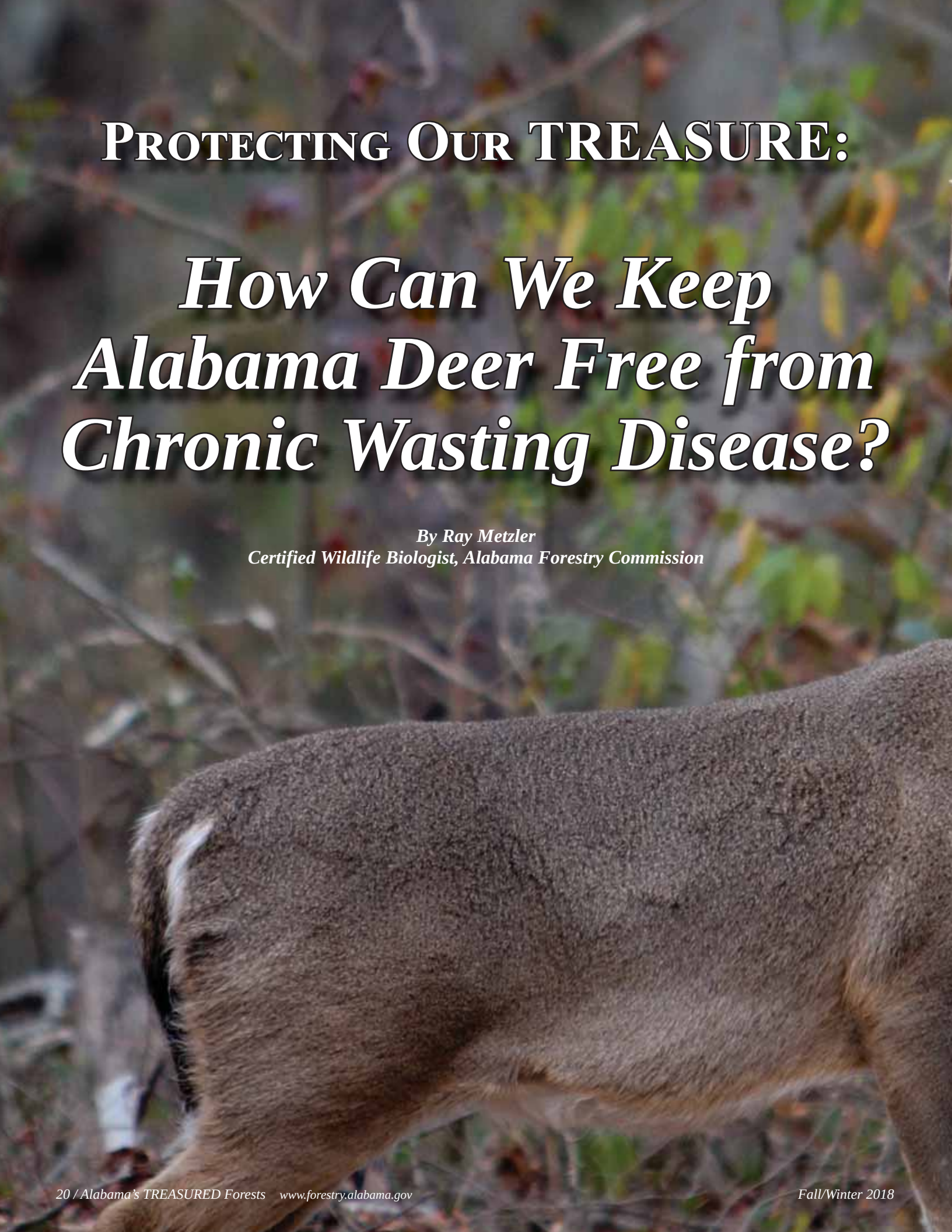


Protecting Our TREASURE:

How Can We Keep Alabama Deer Free from Chronic Wasting Disease?

By Ray Metzler
Certified Wildlife Biologist, Alabama Forestry Commission

Photo: Billy Pope, Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, Guntersville State Park

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has now been confirmed in three deer on two sites in Mississippi. The first confirmation in February 2018 was just east of the Mississippi River – as far from Alabama as it could be and still be in Mississippi. A second incidence was announced on October 19, 2018, of a deer in Pontotoc County in northeast Mississippi, approximately 47 miles from the Alabama state line in Marion County. Now another deer has recently tested positive within the CWD management zone in western Mississippi, bringing the total to three.

Needless to say, this discovery of CWD in Mississippi has increased the level of concern among southeastern state fish and wildlife agencies, land managers, hunting clubs, and hunters. Before these determinations in our neighbor state to the west, CWD had not been detected in the deep south – northern Arkansas was as far south as the disease had been discovered east of the Mississippi River. **Although over 6,600 deer have been tested for CWD in Alabama since 2002, to date, none have tested positive.**

CWD is an infectious, communicable, and always fatal neurological disease of members of the family Cervidae (which includes deer, elk, and moose). This fact is the primary reason why Alabama hunters should be very concerned about this issue and be proactive to ensure CWD does not make its way to our state. Disease experts classify CWD as a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) along with other related diseases such as scrapie in sheep, bovine spongiform encephalopathy in cattle, and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans. TSEs are believed to be caused by misfolded 'prion' proteins. Research has shown these prions to be 'long lived' and very difficult to destroy. Procedures such as heating the prions to temperatures exceeding 1,100° F or disinfecting with bleach haven't proven to be completely effective. A recent study reported that exposing the prions to temperatures greater than 900° F for at least four hours would destroy them. A great deal of research has taken place since being first recognized in 1967 at a wildlife research facility in Fort Collins, Colorado, but there is still a lot to be learned.

Research indicates the incubation period for CWD is typically 17-18 months or longer. These mis-formed prions can apparently be shed from infected animals in saliva, urine, blood, soft-antler material, and feces. Animals can become infected through direct contact with another animal or indirectly from contaminated material in the environment.

Testing for CWD requires post-mortem examination of the brain or lymph nodes from the throat. There are no reliable live-animal testing procedures, and no known vaccine or treatment exists. Alabama began testing hunter-harvested, road-killed, and those deer showing signs of emaciation and/or neurological abnormalities in 2002. These collections have taken place each year, with the exception of two years when federal funding for this activity was lost. No deer from Alabama have tested CWD positive since testing began.

A white-tail deer and an elk in north Arkansas both tested CWD-positive in February 2016. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission quickly implemented their CWD response plan which included outlining a CWD Management Zone. They began collecting additional specimens for testing to determine how prevalent the disease was within the management zone.

(Continued on page 22)

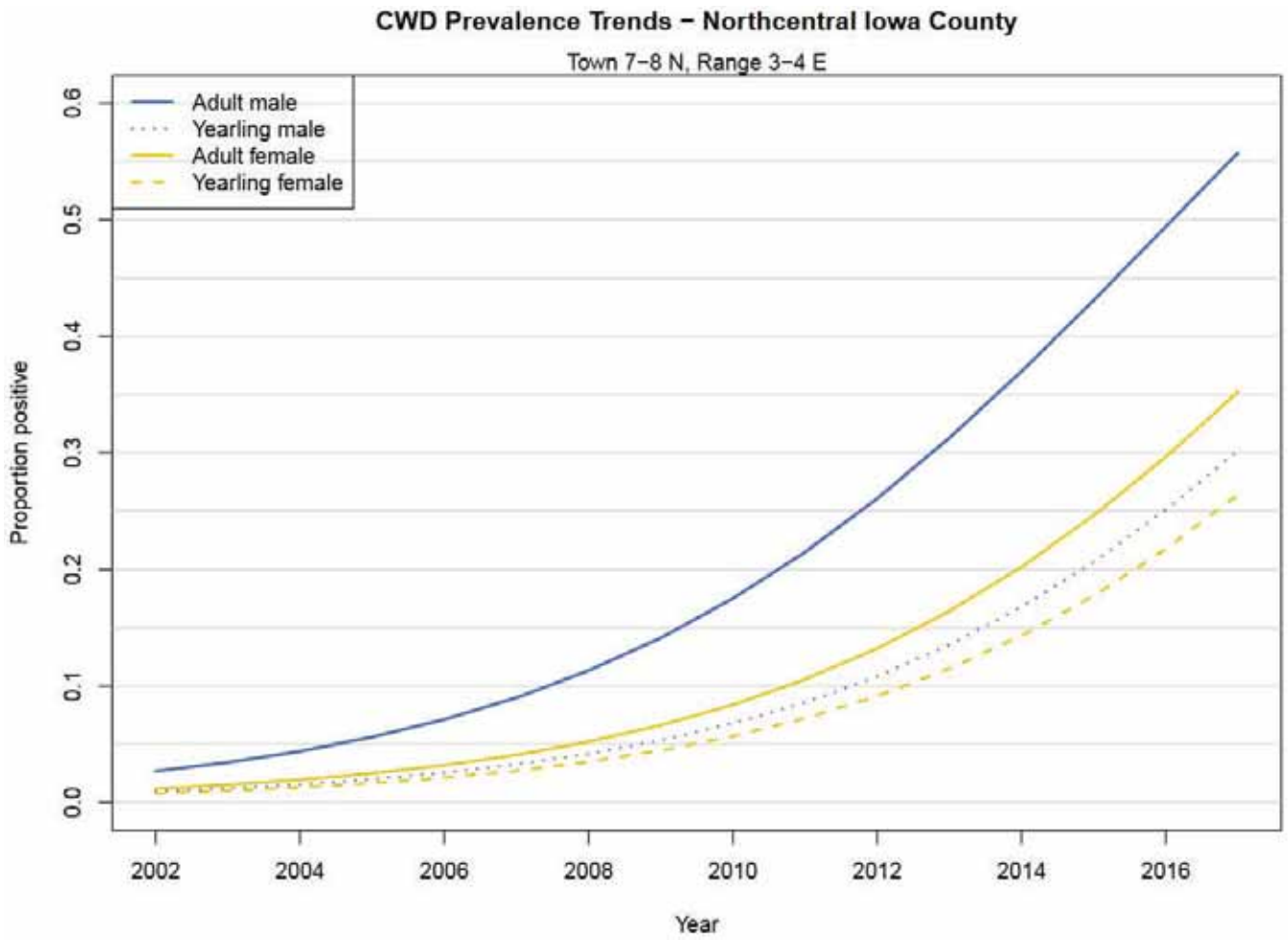


Figure 1. White-tailed deer CWD prevalence rates in northcentral Iowa County, Wisconsin. Graph taken from dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/prevalence.html#prevalence on June 25, 2018.

(Continued from page 21)

Surprisingly, they determined that approximately 23 percent of the samples tested were CWD-positive. Because of the extended incubation period of CWD, it has long been recognized that deer less than a year of age could not test positive for the disease. However, even deer between seven and ten months old included in the Arkansas samples resulted in positive detection for CWD at the same 23 percent infection rate. This fact indicates that CWD may have been present and gone undetected for as long as 10 years. Ten counties in Arkansas have now been confirmed as CWD-positive since 2016.

The longer the disease has been present in an area, prevalence of CWD increases. The endemic areas in Colorado and Wyoming have prevalence rates ranging from 20-40 percent. Figure 1 demonstrates the significant increase in prevalence in northcentral Iowa County, Wisconsin, since the initial detection of CWD in 2002. Greater than 50 percent of adult bucks in this local area were found to have this always fatal neurological disease. This data from Wisconsin is alarming to me as a biologist and suggests the prevalence rate will continue to increase. Only time will tell if there is some maximum rate at which the disease will be found in a given population.

Prevalence rates greater than 50 percent for a disease that is always fatal would certainly have negative impacts to population density, hunter satisfaction, and economics – all of which are important factors in modern wildlife management. Many experts say that the best defense against CWD is to employ an offense that keeps it from arriving in our state.

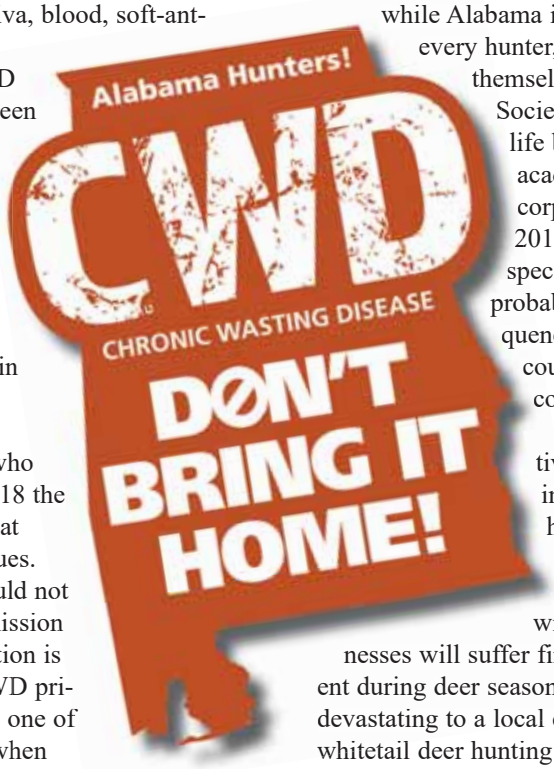
One might ask, how would CWD arrive in Alabama if we don't have it already? Research indicates two potential vectors as causal agents for CWD infection in Alabama. Importation of CWD-infected live deer, or certain body parts of infected deer are the primary concerns.

The need for the live animal importation ban is obvious to most hunters and conservationists. In the early 1970s, the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries was proactive with the implementation of a state law prohibiting the importation of any live deer into the state. While this law has not completely stopped the importation of live animals, it has certainly caused some folks to think twice before attempting to import a live deer into Alabama. A recent federal court case involving a violation of the importation ban by a licensed game breeder resulted in a conviction and fine of $750,000.

Importation of body parts of harvested deer from all states, Canadian provinces, and foreign countries was recently banned. This ban on body parts is sometimes questioned by individuals outside of the wildlife management arena. Remember, the infect-

ed prions are very difficult to destroy and can be distributed into the environment from infected body parts such as brain and spinal cord tissue, large bones, and lymph nodes that have been discarded. For this reason, it is important to bring only deboned meat, antlers (without velvet), clean skull plates, and hides into Alabama from any deer killed within a CWD-positive area in other states. Recent research indicates healthy animals may be able to pick up the prions from soils and even plant materials that have been infected from urine, saliva, blood, soft-antler material, and feces.

Although a direct link between CWD in deer and illness in humans has not been documented, both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urge caution and recommend testing of deer harvested in CWD positive areas. Mad cow, a similar disease as CWD has been able to move from cattle to humans, resulting in at least 30 deaths worldwide. In 2017, Canadian researchers claimed to have observed CWD in macaque monkeys who had eaten infected deer meat, but in 2018 the National Institute of Health reported that there was no transmissibility in macaques.



A recent review of many studies could not rule out the possibility of CWD transmission to humans in the future. More information is needed about incubation periods of CWD prions and possible human illness. This is one of the reasons that caution must be used when hunting in and consuming venison from CWD-positive areas. Information from CWD-positive areas in Wisconsin indicate many deer go untested and one must assume that hunters and their families are ingesting venison that could harbor the mis-formed prions. As a hunter and biologist, following the WHO and CDC guidelines makes sense to me.

Deer hunting in Alabama will be forever changed if CWD finds its way to our state. The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries recently unveiled an updated CWD Strategic Surveillance and Response Plan. Available at www.outdooralabama.com, this plan is something that each hunter should read and understand. Some of the highlights of the plan include establishing a five-mile radius core-zone around a confirmed CWD-positive cervid location, and implementing, but not limited to, the following regulations:

1. Mandatory check stations to sample hunter-harvested deer.
2. Ban the movement of whole deer carcasses harvested inside the core-zone, to areas outside of the core-zone.
3. Permitting of meat processors and taxidermists to minimize the risk of CWD prions leaving the core-zone.
4. Prohibit all supplemental feeding within all counties located within or contacting the core-zone.
5. Finalize deer carcass disposal regulations to require discarded parts to be bagged and deposited into a lined landfill, or buried on-site at least 8 feet deep.

Banning of supplemental feeding within a core-zone is one of the first steps generally taken by a state game and fish agency when CWD is discovered. Baiting and supplemental feeding have been discussed and debated in Alabama for many years by professional biologists, hunters, and our legislative representatives in Montgomery. In fact, legalized baiting came within one vote of passing during the 2018 legislative session. The ban of supplemental feeding in the response plan is a reaction to a stimulus (CWD) that should generate some questions. First and foremost, should we as hunters, hunting clubs, landowners, and managers be proactive by eliminating supplemental feeding while Alabama is still CWD free? This is a question that every hunter, hunting club, and landowner should ask themselves. The Alabama Chapter of the Wildlife Society, a group comprised of professional wildlife biologists from state and federal agencies, academia, conservation groups, and private corporations approved a position statement in 2012 that opposes baiting and feeding of game species by the general public. This debate will probably continue in the future, but the consequences of supplemental feeding and baiting could exponentially increase if CWD is discovered in Alabama.

CWD detection has proven to have negative impacts on local economies, especially in sparsely populated counties that rely heavily on visiting hunters. Will hunters continue to lease property if CWD is detected in an area? If not, the landowner will be negatively impacted and local businesses will suffer financially due to fewer hunters being present during deer season. The cumulative effects of CWD could be devastating to a local economy and the economic impact that whitetail deer hunting generates in Alabama.

Biosecurity issues resulting from the detection of CWD should be a concern for all hunters in Alabama, not just those in a CWD-positive area. Many hunters harvest deer in areas away from their residence, either taking the carcass home to process or to a meat processor near home. The detection of CWD would require all deer killed in the core zone to be deboned within the core zone, and then disposal of the carcass by placing it in a plastic bag in a lined landfill or buried on site at least 8 feet deep. These biosecurity challenges would be daunting, requiring hunters and the Division of Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries to be completely engaged in a process to ensure this fatal disease does not expand out of the core zone.

As a hunter, I would much rather be proactive and do everything possible to ensure CWD does not make its way to Alabama instead of having to endure the biosecurity and testing challenges. I am one of those guys that just wants to kill a deer and eat it, without having to worry about it causing illness to me or my family.

Alabama hunters should be thankful that CWD has not yet been detected and be supportive of all efforts to ensure it is not brought to the state in the future. Report any known violations of Alabama's ban on importation of live cervids or illegal body parts to the Division of Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries by calling the Gamewatch number or your local district office. Each and every hunter in the state should have a vested interest in protecting the future of hunting as we know it today by minimizing the risk of CWD becoming a part of the Alabama landscape.

HUNTING SEASON IS HERE

Outdoor UNDERWRITERS

As your club prepares for the upcoming hunting season now is a good time to review your club's safety procedures and examine areas that cause the most frequent injuries.

Tree Stands

- Check and repair tree stands and make sure they are properly secure and stable.
- Provide a safety harness for each tree stand.
- Attach new ropes to raise and lower tree stand items.

Gun Safety

Shooting accidents continue to be the most costly type of injury. Most incidences can be avoided by practicing basic gun safety commandments:

- Treat every gun as if it is loaded,
- Do not transport a loaded weapon. Always unload weapons before transporting on ATV, golf cart or other vehicle.
- Be absolutely sure of your target.
- Know what is behind your target.
- Watch muzzle direction at all times.

Gates

- Clear the vegetation around gates.
- Mark gates with reflective material that is visible from the outside and inside of the gate.
- Mark gate post with reflective tape.

Hunting Club Check-in box

The use of a hunting club check in board is a common practice for many hunting clubs. This check in system can provides a focal point for hunting club safety. A Check-in box can be used to:

- Identify stand location and occupied stands,
- Display a site map that shows major features, gates, and other potential hazards.
- Identify homes and other structures on adjacent property.
- List emergency numbers for the local fire department, sheriff's office, emergency dispatchers and lease coordinator.
- Map directions to the site that can be used to direct emergency response.
- Outline specific requirements of the hunting lease and hunting club rules.

866.961.4101 www.outdoorund.com

ATV SAFETY

TYPE OF ACCIDENTS

All terrain vehicles are a common sight at most hunting clubs. Transporting hunters, installing food plots, road maintenance and general trail riding make them a popular equipment choice. However, severe accidents are becoming more common and increasingly due to improper use.

Over 76% of ATV accidents were operator related.

During the last five years, over 46% of ATV related accidents reported to Outdoor Underwriters were due to operator error, traveling too fast, turning sharply, underage drivers, and exceeding the passenger capacity.

The next highest incident category was associated with site related issues such as: poor road and trail maintenance, ditches, gates and fallen trees. Of the 30% of accidents reported were site related, the majority of these accidents were a combination of both operator error and site conditions.

Approximately 11% of the reported accidents involved highway use and auto collisions. Forest fires associated with ATV use were infrequent, but this type of incident often caused significant property damage.

SAFETY TIPS

Operator training and education is critical to the safety of hunting clubs. Machines should be operated within the manufacturers specification. *Supervision of youth and ATVs should be one of the most important components for any hunting club or timberland owner.*

Frequently used trails and areas should be well marked and maintained. To help mitigate your liability the location of gates, ditches, bridges, and other site hazards should be known by all operators and identified on a site map.

THE CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION OFFERS THE FOLLOWING TIPS FOR A SAFER ATV RIDE:

- ***Stay off paved roads.***
- ***Never allow children to operate an ATV designed for adults.***
- ***Do not allow more people on the vehicle than it was designed to carry.***
- ***Always wear a helmet.***
- ***Get hands on training.***
- ***Avoid alcohol use while operating an ATV.***

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Alabama Forestry Commission
Directory of County/Regional Employees

Helping Alabama landowners protect and sustain their forests is one of the top priorities of the Alabama Forestry Commission. To make it convenient to reach our staff, we've listed below the direct contact numbers and emails of AFC employees in each county. Current AFC county office telephone numbers will be discontinued in the near future. There is a complete employee directory on the agency website at ***www.forestry.alabama.gov***

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Certified Wood & the Future

By Jim Junkin, Registered Forester, Alabama Forestry Commission

Wood certification has been discussed over the forestry 'coffee table' for many years now. Recently, the trend toward getting wood certified has gained steady momentum. One can make a visit to most any lumber/building supplier and find a logo for certified wood on various products. As visual product awareness and concern for environmental aspects continue to grow, the demand for certified wood will grow as well.

Simply put, the goal of certification is to satisfy an increasing public awareness for responsible, environmentally friendly, forest management. The truth is that green preservation is in public demand, therefore anything that promotes or denotes responsible forest management with the 'green' connotation is a plus for everyone – from the people growing trees, to those utilizing forest products, to people simply partaking of clean air and water. Sound conservation has nearly become a necessity throughout our culture. Even though there is a price that accompanies most green practices, there are also rewards.

Currently, there are three main wood product certifications utilized in North America. It should be noted that all three certifications are non-profit organizations.

The Canadian Standards Association or CSA was established in 1996. It is the leading forest certification in Canada. Of course, most of these products are utilized by Canada, but many products make their way into several states in the northern U.S. A portion of their motto reads: "all forest management involves public participation and conservation with biological diversity being the goal." Since 95 percent of Canada's forests are publicly owned, CSA certification requires strict third-party audits, with assurance of adherence to biological, environmental, and social criteria.

The next most prominent certification is the Forest Stewardship Council or FSC. Established in 1993, the FSC was initiated in response to global concerns about deforestation. It is a world-wide organization seeking to promote responsible management of forests around the world. Wood products with FSC designation have been sourced in an environmentally friendly, socially responsible, and economically viable manner. The FSC claims to "take care of forests along with the wildlife and people who call them their home." In addition to trees, the FSC makes sure that local communities are respected, and that the habitats of endangered plants and animals are protected. All FSC products are certified and labeled as eco-friendly.

With FSC, there are two types of certification. The first, forest management certification is awarded for responsible management of any forested area. The other, chain of custody, is certification that tracks material from the forest to the store. As with other certifications, members must undergo a third-party audit which is completed annually. Individual auditors determine their own fee or assessment. Since FSC is non-profit, these fees go toward core FSC functions, services provided to certificate holders, and further education regarding FSC's mission. FSC operates under ten principles of compliance. For practical purposes of this article, the condensed version of these principles is basically "to plan, educate, preserve, conserve, and mitigate toward the future of a sound plant and animal community."

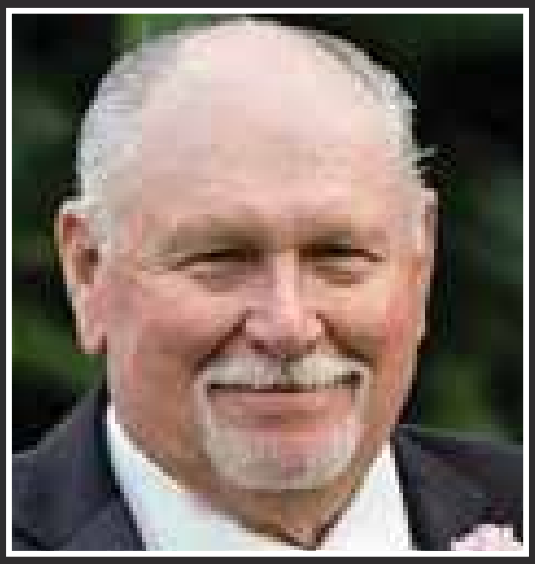
Finally, the Sustained Forestry Initiative (SFI) is by far the most commonly used certification in the United States. Most wood industries across the continental U.S. are SFI certified. SFI only certifies lands in the United States and Canada. SFI believes that responsibly-sourced forest products are the answer to societal needs that are focused on clean air, clean water, abundant wildlife, recreational opportunities, green jobs, and quality forest products.

The Sustained Forestry Initiative is very businesslike in its approach to forest certification. All SFI members are required to have an annual third-party audit. Furthermore, SFI standards are constantly reviewed and then revised every five years to incorporate the latest scientific data to better respond to expanding environmental issues. Independent oversight is provided at each stage of the revision process. Currently, 300 million acres are enrolled, and this number is growing. The SFI Forest Partners Program, composed of National Geographic, Meredith, Macmillan Publishers, Pearson, Hearst Enterprises, and Boy Scouts of America, is making multi-year commitments and investments to increase certification throughout the forest supply chain. Consequently, if a non-industrial private landowner (NIPF) is Tree Farm certified, they are automatically SFI certified!

As our society grows in its environmental awareness, more emphasis will be placed on 'green' forest management to produce sustainable forest products. Having certified wood products not only substantiates scientifically sounds forest management it also will ensure certified wood has an expanding future. Next time you are out shopping, look for the logos of these certification systems to know you've purchased products that are environmentally sustainable.

MEMORIAL

"A True Friend"



Louis M. 'Ted' McGill, Jr.
1936 – 2018

By Paul E. Hudgins, Alabama Registered Forester
Soil Conservation Technician,
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Answering the telephone early one morning recently and hearing that familiar voice on the other end could only mean one thing . . . another friend had lost his battle with cancer called mesothelioma. Louis M. 'Ted' McGill, Jr. was one of the first landowners that I got to know when I first moved to Butler County. Ted and his wife, Sadie, welcomed this 'wet behind the ears, just-graduated forester' with open arms.

Ted loved his little piece of heaven in Forest Home, Alabama, and spent many a day in the woods of Butler County, far away from the hustle and bustle of Mobile. He loved his Lord and Savior, family, woods, hunting, fishing, and friends in a way that is hard to describe, unless you were one of them. Ted spent his whole life in the Mobile area, enjoying the opportunity to get away to Butler County whenever possible.

He also loved the western shore of Mobile Bay where he and Sadie own a second home they fondly refer to as the 'bay home.' A few years back, my wife, Brenda, and I were visiting the bay home along with a friend of ours. This friend told Ted that he had been watching YouTube videos so he knew how to grab a blue crab and remove it from the crab net. He then proceeded to show Ted just how to do it. We all got a great laugh out of the fact that the YouTube videos that my friend had watched didn't really show the correct way. The crab grabbed my friend's thumb and latched on, giving him a big ol' pinch.

Spending his entire career as an electrician, Ted was far more than that. He was a man that loved helping anyone with any type of project, whether big or small. He enjoyed gardening and sharing the bounty of his labor. He was a very giving and caring man that will be missed by all that came to know him.

Just two weeks ago I came across an old picture of me presenting Ted with his TREASURE Forest sign and certificate. His and Sadie's property was the first TREASURE Forest that I ever certified, and it will be the one to always have a special place in my heart. Ted may not be with us in person any longer, but he will always be with us in our hearts as we go for a walk in the woods of Forest Home, or on a hunt for that elusive whitetail buck or long-bearded gobbler . . . even when I think of that crab dangling on my friend's thumb.

Rest in Peace, my friend, until we meet again. I am truly a better man because of my time with you.

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Plants OF ALABAMA

Yellow Jessamine

(Gelsemium sempervirens)

By Fred Nation, Environmental Services, Baldwin County

Yellow jessamine is a high-climbing, woody vine that is native to the eastern United States, from Ohio to New Jersey, south to Florida, and west to Oklahoma and east Texas. It occurs throughout Alabama, where it is frequently seen in pine and hardwood forests, as well as on fences, utility poles, and other disturbed sites. Like many attractive native plants, it has several common names, including Carolina jasmine, woodbine, and poor man's rope. The Latin species name, *sempervirens*, literally means 'always alive;' the actual meaning is 'evergreen.'

Photo by Fred Nation

The leaves are opposite, mostly lance-shaped, to about 4 inches long, one inch wide, and they are evergreen. The flowers, from midwinter into spring, are pleasantly fragrant, bright lemon yellow, about an inch and a half long. In coastal Alabama the flowers can be seen up in the trees as early as mid-January. There is a similar, closely related species that is not as frequent and less widespread: Swamp jessamine *(Gelsemium rankinii)* blooms several weeks later, in much wetter areas than yellow jessamine, and the flowers are not fragrant.

Many published sources have cautioned that *Gelsemium sempervirens* is quite toxic; all parts are said to contain strychnine, which can be fatal if ingested. Children have been poisoned by sucking nectar from the flowers in the mistaken belief that they are honeysuckle. The sap can cause skin irritations in sensitive individuals.

Yellow jessamine is undeniably a handsome plant, and it is used throughout the south in landscapes on trellises and as a 'mailbox vine.' Despite the safety concerns, it has also been used medicinally to treat a variety of medical conditions which include headaches, asthma, rheumatism, and measles!

Yellow jessamine is probably best left safely in the wild, where it is a beautiful, fragrant member of our native communities in Alabama. Not surprisingly, it is admired in other southern states, such as South Carolina where it is their state flower.