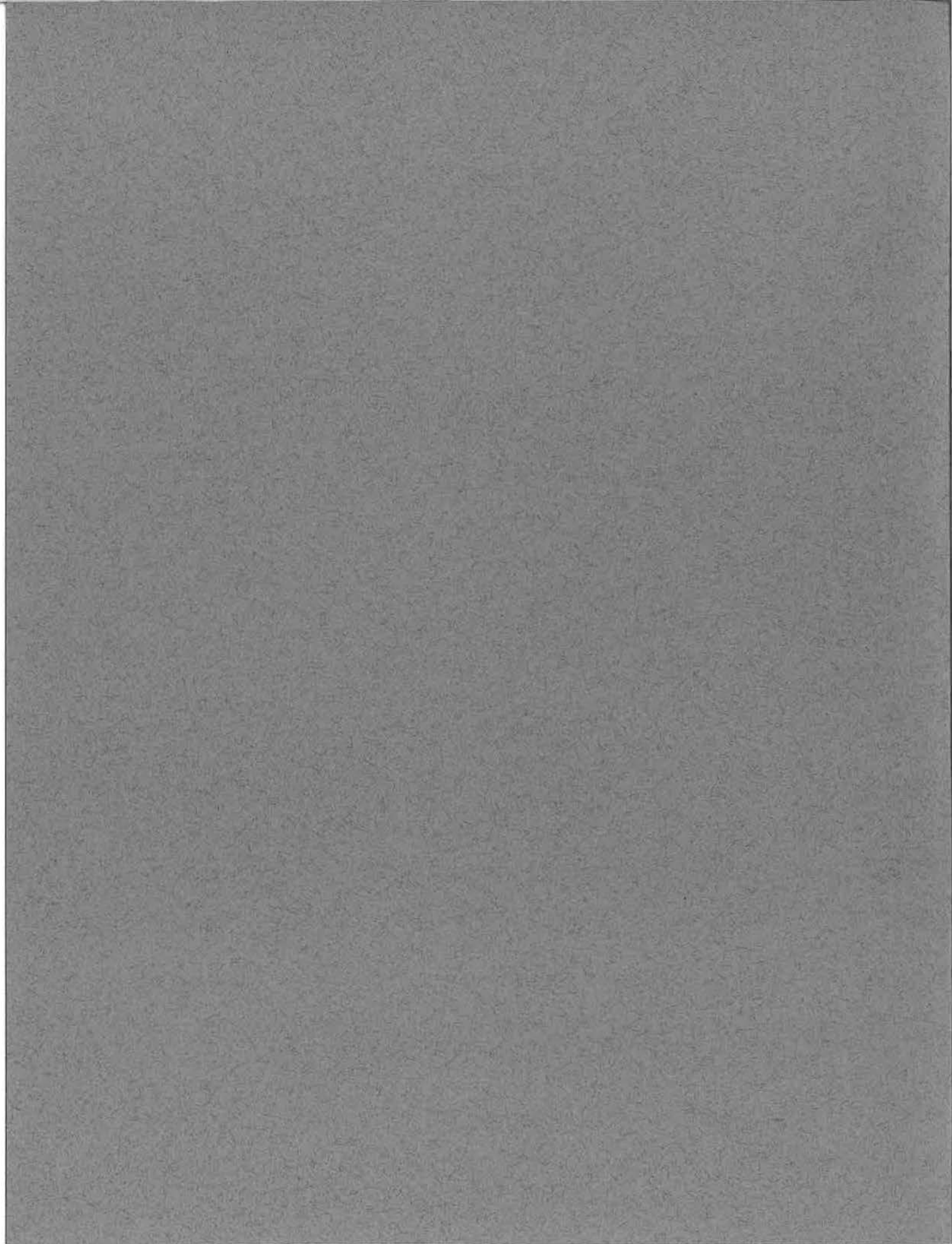


Alabama's Nonindustrial Private Forest Owners



Snapshots
From A
Family
Album



Alabama's Nonindustrial Private Forest Owners



Snapshots From A Family Album

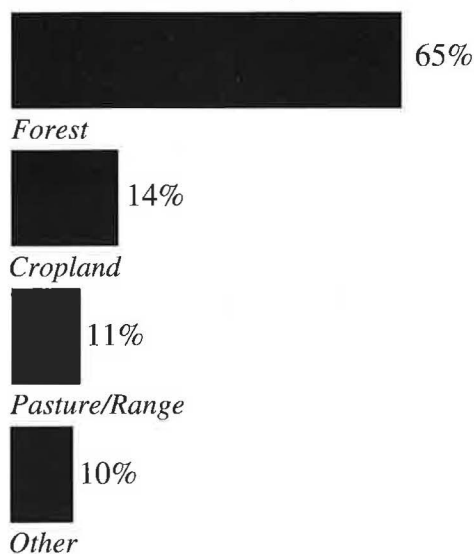
A snapshot takes one moment in time and freezes it, preserving it for others to see, understand, or enjoy. Look closely at a picture of a friend and you learn a lot about the person he or she was at the moment the camera shutter clicked. This is a snapshot album of sorts. It contains snapshots of the kind usually found in photo collections; these are mostly pictures of people and their trees. But it also contains “snapshots” of another kind: brief glimpses of what forest owners thought and how they felt on an evening in 1991 when their telephones rang and a stranger started asking them questions about their forests and themselves. Taking a survey is a way of taking statistical snapshots of people's lives.

The snapshots in this album, both photographic and statistical, are of the people who own Alabama's forests: why they own forests, what they do with their forests, and how they feel about the issues of today that affect their forests. More specifically, this is about **nonindustrial private forest owners**. These are forest



owners who don't own or operate wood processing facilities such as sawmills or pulp and paper mills. Nonindustrial private forest owners include individuals, family and non-family partnerships, and even corporations such as banks and insurance companies that own forestland but not wood processing facilities.

ALABAMA LAND USE 1982



(Alabama Forestry Commission 1991)

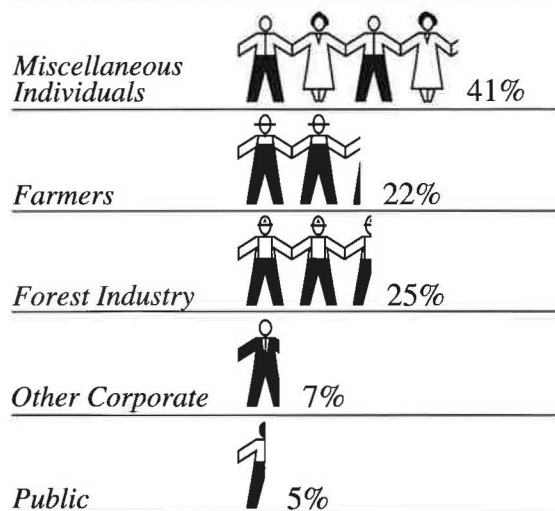
Information about these owners and their forests is of great interest to anyone involved in forestry in the state. Why? Together, nonindustrial private forest owners, or NIPF owners, as they are known, own more than 15 million acres of forestland—almost 70 percent of the forestland in the state. Decisions made by NIPF owners influence the quality of our environment, the appeal of roadside landscapes, and the vitality of the forest products industry—the state’s largest manufacturing industry and second largest manufacturing employer (after textiles). Most of the wood used by the pulp and paper, lumber, and related forest product companies is harvested from NIPF lands.

The information reported in this publication resulted from a telephone survey of private forest owners conducted in 1991 and funded by the Alabama Forestry Planning Committee. Forested tracts throughout the state were selected

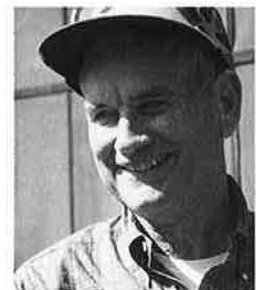


at random, and the tract owners were then identified and contacted for participation in the survey. Although by using this sampling system owners of many acres were more likely to be contacted than owners of few acres, enough interviews were conducted to adequately represent all but the very smallest ownerships. We completed interviews with 731 forest owners. We asked a series of questions about the owner, his or her forest, past forestry practices, and opinions about forestry issues. We even included a ten-question forestry quiz to learn how much these forest owners know about forests and the practice of forestry. Following are some resulting snapshots.

TIMBERLAND OWNERSHIP IN ALABAMA 1990



(Vissage and Miller 1991)





One of the most valuable benefits Dorothy Reynolds gets from her forestland near Fort Davis is the exhilaration of just plain walking over it: "My daughter calls me after I've been walking and asks 'What have you been drinking?' And I say, 'Pure oxygen.'"

DOROTHY REYNOLDS, MACON COUNTY

WHO ARE ALABAMA'S NIPF OWNERS?

It is tempting to put together, from the vast amount of data collected during a survey such as this, a composite picture of a “typical” nonindustrial private forest owner. It is possible to construct such an imaginary person from the data, someone who represents the average age, income, education, and every other characteristic measured. While in practice this is often done, there is in fact no “typical” forest owner. Rather than constructing such a myth, this publication will describe the trends and patterns in the answers forest owners gave to the survey.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

As might be expected, most forest owners in our study are middle-aged or older. Only 2 percent are less than 35 years of age, while about 40 percent are 65 years of age or older. Not surprisingly, almost half (47 percent) are retired. More of Alabama's NIPF owners are older and retired, and fewer are younger than 35 than was the case in 1971, when S. I. Somberg studied Alabama's NIPF owners. This might suggest an increase in forest ownership changes over the coming years, as owners pass on their holdings to their heirs or otherwise dispose of them.

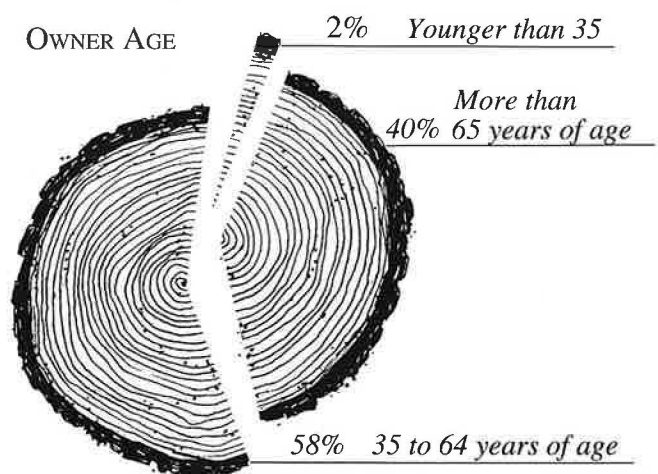
About two-thirds of the people who answered the questions in this survey were male. Less than 4 percent identified themselves as other than “white.” Almost three-quarters of our



respondents reported being Protestant, and 69 percent called themselves “conservative.” The 1990 household income of survey participants ranged from less than \$10,000 (4 percent) to more than \$100,000 (5 percent).

OWNER BACKGROUND

Twenty years ago, more than three-quarters of Alabama's private forest owners lived on their land, whereas only a little more than 40 percent live on their land today. About 90 percent of the owners surveyed in the 1971 Somberg study grew up on a farm, while only half of the owners in 1991 grew up on a farm. Still, most of the owners in our study grew up in and still live in rural Alabama.





The Huskeys' forestland near Society Hill has been in Mrs. Huskey's family since before the Civil War—she's the fourth generation of her family to live on this piece of land. Although they fear that "forestry is endangered by environmentalists who don't want to cut a tree," Mrs. Huskey doesn't agree with all current forest practices, either:

"It bothers me to drive by where they clear-cut—it hurts."

THE REVEREND GEORGE HUSKEY AND MRS. HUSKEY
MACON COUNTY

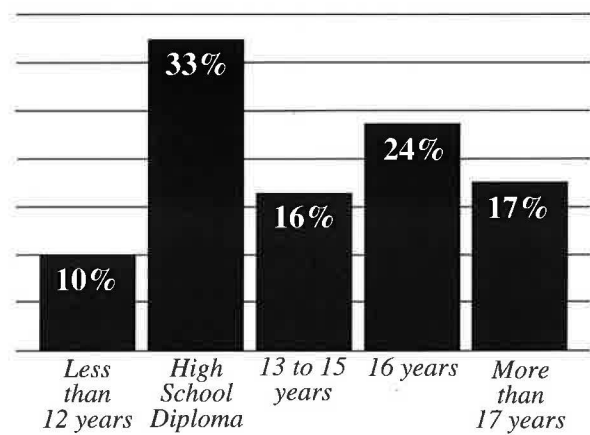
EDUCATION

Another significant change over the past two decades has been in the educational attainment of Alabama's forest owners. Only 16 percent of the owners surveyed in 1971 had a college degree; 42 percent of the owners in the current study are college graduates. In fact, the number of current owners who attended graduate school was greater than the number of owners who didn't finish high school!

FOREST TRACT SIZE

Our sample of forest owners included owners of just a few acres up to owners of thousands of acres. About 63 percent of the study owners hold fewer than 500 acres of forestland in the state. This probably underestimates the actual proportion of small tract owners in the state. An earlier study (Rosson and Doolittle 1987) estimated that 99 percent of the private forest owners in the state held roughly half of the state's total private forestland. The other half was owned by about 1 percent of the private owners (including forest products industries). Research has shown that owners of smaller forest tracts frequently have ownership objectives and management styles that differ from those of the owners of large tracts.

OWNER EDUCATION



LENGTH OF OWNERSHIP

In comparison to forest owners around the nation, Alabama's NIPF owners have been successful in retaining family ownership of their forests over long periods of time. About one quarter of our survey respondents first acquired controlling interest in their forest properties before 1950, and almost half have owned their forests since before 1967. About 18 percent have had their land only since 1980.





C. S., Skip, and Gary Steed run
a timber broker business in three states
and manage thousands of acres. They treat the
timber on their own family forest in Talladega County
“like a safety deposit box,” cutting selectively
and managing for a range of uses.

C. S. STEED, SKIP STEED, GARY STEED
TALLADEGA COUNTY

BENEFITS OF OWNERSHIP

Forests provide a long list of benefits to their owners. Our survey asked two questions to learn which benefits were important and which one was the primary benefit received from forest ownership. The most frequently expressed primary benefit was “keeping land in the family.” One-third of our sample cited this as the primary benefit, and more than 93 percent said it was an important benefit of forest ownership. Income from timber sales was the next most frequently cited primary benefit (25 percent), and 71 percent said it was an important benefit. More than 14 percent said their primary benefit was derived from beauty or land appreciation, and this was important to 88 percent of the owners.

Another way to interpret these results is that non-commodity values such as maintaining family ownership, appreciating and protecting nature, providing wildlife habitat, and providing opportunities for personal recreation were cited as primary benefits by 59 percent of the owners. Commodity values such as timber sale income, timber, hunting, grazing, mineral leases, and land speculation are the primary benefits of 36 percent of the owners.



PRIMARY BENEFITS OF FOREST OWNERSHIP

<i>Keeping Land in Family</i>	33%
<i>Income From Timber</i>	25%
<i>Beauty</i>	14%
<i>Recreation</i>	5%
<i>Investment</i>	5%
<i>Hunting</i>	5%
<i>Other</i>	13%

Percentage of Respondents

TIMBER HARVESTING AND REGENERATION

Most of the wood fiber used by Alabama’s forest products industry is harvested from nonindustrial private forests. The condition of the forest following harvest and plans for regenerating the forest are of concern not only to the forest products industry, but to all who care about the state’s environment. In our study 317 (43 percent) of the landowners reported having sold timber in the past 10 years. We asked them a series of questions about their most recent timber harvest. The most frequently reported reasons for selling were to improve growth on the remaining trees (22 percent), to salvage damaged timber (18 percent), to take advantage of good timber prices (18 percent), and because the owners needed cash (13 percent).

Owners relied upon a variety of people to choose which trees were to be cut, but professional foresters independent of those buying the timber were involved in less than one-third of the harvests. Forty-two percent of the owners



Some 80 acres of forest in Monroe County have been in the family of James C. Tucker for more than 100 years. For Mr. Tucker, it's "almost like a novelty to go back home and hunt on it, fish on it."

JAMES C. TUCKER, MONROE COUNTY

selected the trees to be cut themselves, 28 percent let a timber buyer or logger choose which trees to cut, and industry foresters selected the trees for an additional 15 percent of the owners. About 29 percent of the owners had a consultant forester select the trees, while only 2 percent reported using the services of a government forester.

We asked owners to describe the condition of their forests following their most recent harvest. Thirty-eight percent reported that the harvested area still supports a "well-stocked stand of timber." An additional 26 percent of those reporting said that trees were planted in the harvest area following their most recent harvest, 11 percent said the area had re-seeded naturally, and 10 percent reported that seed trees had been left, but the area had not yet re-seeded. Fewer than 3 percent said their harvested sites were covered with hardwood brush, and only 5 percent reported that the area was no longer being used to grow timber. These reported conditions are instructive, in that they tell us owners' perceptions of forest conditions, but they do not necessarily reflect actual conditions in the forest. The limited available evidence suggests that many fewer harvested acres are well stocked with commercially valuable trees.

Almost 80 percent of the owners who had harvested timber in the past 10 years plan to continue to grow trees for future harvests. In fact, 82 percent of the owners who sold timber in

the past 10 years reported that they planted trees sometime during that period. We asked those owners who had not planted trees following their most recent harvest, and who did not plan to, their reasons for not planting. Most of these owners (65 percent of the non-planters) felt that there was no need to plant trees, because enough trees were left following the harvest to ensure the successful regeneration of the stand. This could be the case in pine stands that were only partially cut, or it could reflect hardwood stands that re-sprouted vigorously to hardwood. It could also reflect the generally faulty assumption that mixed pine-hardwood stands, once harvested, will develop into pine stands without any management.

Finally, about half of all of the owners in the survey reported that they plan to sell timber at some time in the future. Of these future timber sellers, two-thirds plan to use a partial cutting or thinning method, while about 11 percent plan to clear-cut. Owners who don't plan to sell timber in the future most frequently cited two reasons: a desire to leave their forest "as it is" for their heirs and a concern over possible damage to wildlife habitat, recreation, and other non-timber values. We shouldn't interpret these plans too strictly, however. Over time, plans change and ownerships change hands, thereby possibly making more timber available for harvest than would be expected based solely upon forest owners' reported plans (Carpenter 1985).



Drew Kyle's family has owned forestland in Greene County for three generations. It used to be mostly cotton ground, but now it is a mixture of planted pine and mixed hardwoods. The pine plantations provide supplementary income, while the hardwoods add beauty and wildlife habitat for Drew's new hunting club.

DREW KYLE, GREENE COUNTY

MANAGEMENT INFLUENCES

Many factors influence the forest management decisions of NIPF owners. Almost three-quarters of our respondents said that strong markets for forest products were somewhat or very important to their decisions. More than two-thirds rated favorable tax treatment, high stumpage prices, and advice from professional foresters as important influences.

In contrast, only one-third of our sample reported that government subsidies (such as cost-sharing programs for tree planting and timber improvement) influence their forest management decisions. Nonetheless, more owners (23 percent) reported participating in forestry cost-sharing programs such as the Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP), the Forestry Incentives Program (FIP), and a state cost-sharing program than any of the other landowner assistance programs we asked about. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) attracted the next most participation, followed by the Tree Farm Program. Although they may not participate in these programs, many owners are aware of the opportunities open to them. More owners (53 percent) are aware of the Tree Farm Program than any other landowner programs we mentioned, followed by the CRP, ACP, and FIP federal forestry cost-sharing programs, the TREASURE Forest program, forest industry's landowner assistance programs, and the federal reforestation tax credit and amortization program.



OPINIONS ON FORESTRY ISSUES

Although Alabama's NIPF owners share several characteristics, they don't all agree on how forests should be managed or what constitutes good forest policy. In fact, forest owners hold a considerable range of opinions on the relevant forestry issues of the day.

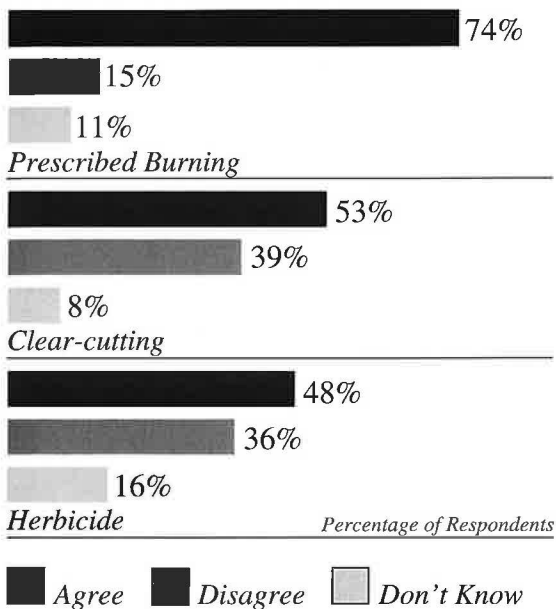
About half of our respondents feel that not enough harvested acres are being replanted, but they disagree on what regeneration methods should be used. Prescribed burning enjoys the widest support, with almost three-quarters of the owners saying it is an acceptable practice. This might reflect the region's long-standing acceptance of intentional woods burning. Owners are evenly divided in their acceptance of clear-cutting and herbicides. About half (53 percent) feel that clear-cutting is acceptable, while 39 percent find it unacceptable, and 8 percent don't know enough to state an opinion. Similarly, about half of the owners (48 percent) feel that using herbicides is acceptable, 36 percent find herbicides unacceptable, and 16 percent said they didn't know. About 60 percent feel that there should be a limit to conversion of hardwood forests to pine plantations.



Cedar Hill Forest in Hale County
was purchased by Dr. William D. Sudduth
with a specific piece of advice from his father in mind:
“Show me a man that owns an acre of land who is
bored, and I will show you a boring man.”

WILLIAM D. SUDDUTH, M.D., HALE COUNTY

ACCEPTABILITY OF FOREST PRACTICES



In addition to continuing debate over individual forest practices, discussion has heated up in recent years over the appropriate balance between the rights of private property owners and their environmental responsibilities. Are voluntary guidelines sufficient to ensure prudent management of natural resources on private lands? Or, are environmental protection regulations required? To determine forest owners' opinions on this important topic, we posed a series of statements and asked owners to state whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with each statement.

One statement was fairly general:

Forestry practices on private land should be regulated in order to protect the environment.



- 42 percent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

- 49 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Asked their opinion of a slightly more specific statement:

Timber harvesting should be strictly controlled in wetlands.

- 57 percent agreed or strongly agreed.

- only 24 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

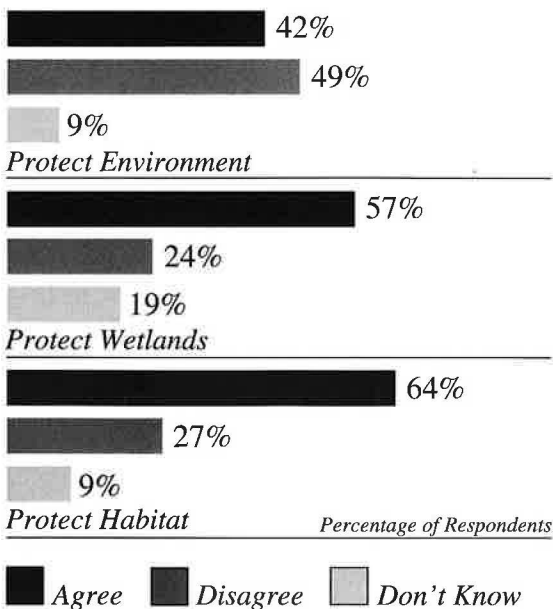
Even more of the forest owners thought that:

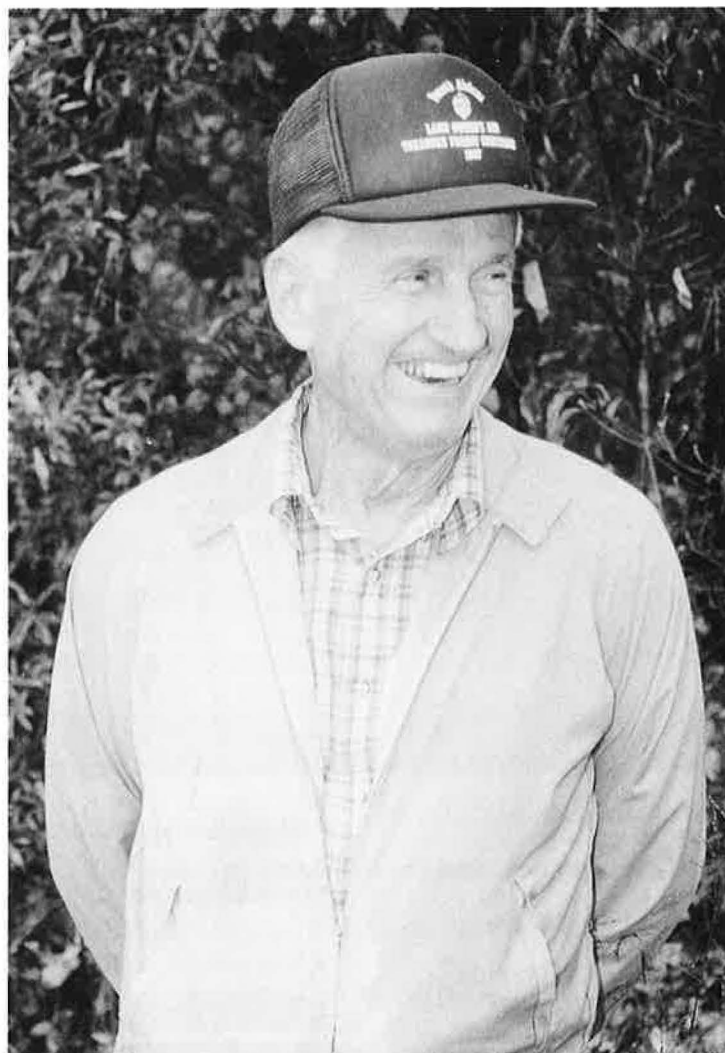
Timber harvesting practices should be regulated where necessary to protect habitat for endangered species.

- 64 percent agreed or strongly agreed.

- only 27 percent disagreed.

ACCEPTABILITY OF REGULATION





J. B. Dollar was born in a farmhouse
near his Tuscaloosa County woodlot.

Now, he lives in the home he built
for himself from beetle- and
storm-damaged pine trees.

J. B. DOLLAR, TUSCALOOSA COUNTY

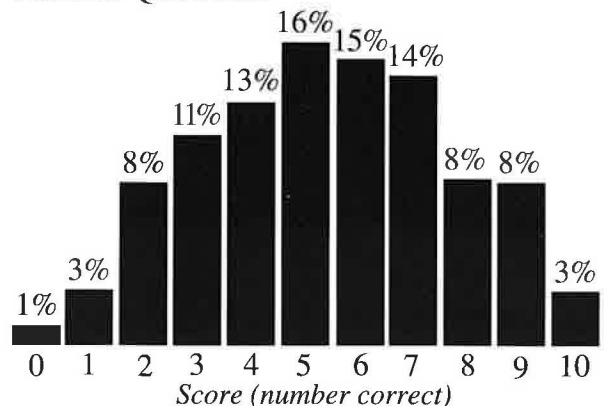
These results may surprise some, given that almost three-quarters of the owners in the study classify themselves as conservative on most issues. Certainly, each statement could be interpreted in different ways, leading to different results. For example, some owners might agree in principle with regulating forest practices but resist regulation of their own management activities on their own land. Or, owners might have different understandings of “wetlands,” or “controlled,” or any of the other terms used. These uncertainties are bound to occur in a telephone survey. However, given the chance to comment on several different statements, and the large differences in agreement, these results are unlikely to seriously misrepresent the opinions of those surveyed. They suggest that regulation of forest practices may not be as unpopular among Alabama’s NIPF owners as has been assumed by many in the forestry community.

KNOWLEDGE OF FORESTRY

We wanted to learn not only what Alabama’s forest owners have done with their forests and how they feel about forestry issues, but also we wanted to find out what they know about forests and forest management. To measure their forestry knowledge, we included in the interview a ten-question, true or false quiz. The quiz was comprised of questions about basic forest ecology and conventional management practices, and it included a few questions about forest ownership and production in Alabama.

Results of the quiz are sobering. Fewer than half of the owners correctly answered six or more of the ten questions. Two-thirds believe their mixed pine and hardwood forests will regenerate to pine after harvesting without any management. In fact, hardwoods aggressively dominate such stands after harvesting. More than half of the owners believe that forest industries spray their pine plantations annually with herbicides, while most industries spray only once or twice during the 30-year life of a plantation. Two-thirds of our landowners think that industry owns most of Alabama’s timberland, while industry actually owns only about a quarter of it. Although many of Alabama’s NIPF owners engage in forest management, and most have strong opinions about forestry, most owners appear to have limited understanding of fundamental forestry concepts and practices.

FORESTRY QUIZ SCORE



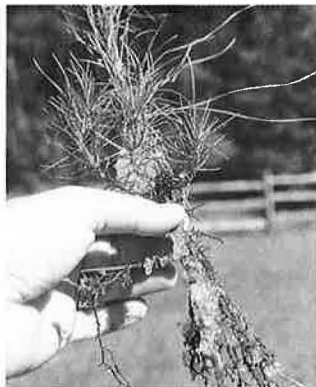


C. B. Munroe's property in Talladega County was granted to his family by President Benjamin Harrison, so he's speaking for himself when he says, "People take a lot of pride in keeping their family heritage and property." A retired rural mail carrier, Munroe manages 120 acres of forest for quail, turkey, and deer "just to enjoy watching them."

C. B. MUNROE, TALLADEGA COUNTY

SUMMARY

Who owns Alabama's forests? People do. People with varying backgrounds, opinions, and levels of knowledge about forestry. Many cherish the continuity that comes from passing the family forest from generation to generation. Many look to their forests for income when they need it, and most value highly the environmental and aesthetic values their forests provide. A majority indicate a willingness to restrict practices that put those values at risk. Although they are increasingly well educated, they remain, on the whole, uninformed about forests and forestry practices. The care they give their forests will continue throughout the coming decade to be a major influence on the environmental and economic health of Alabama.

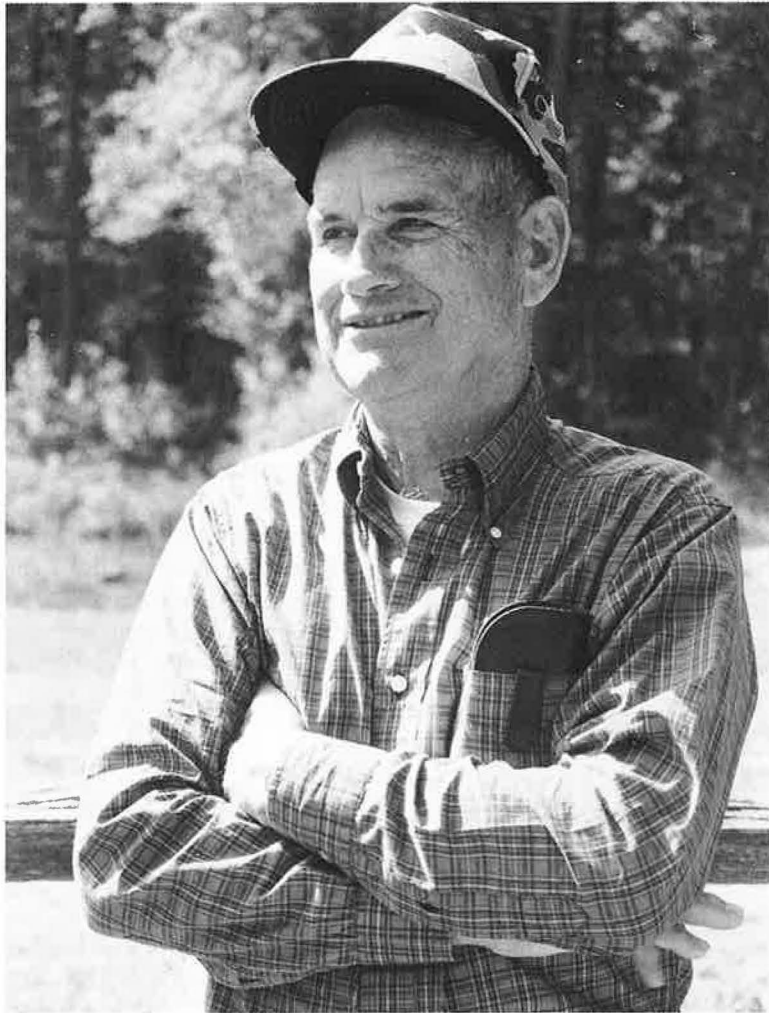


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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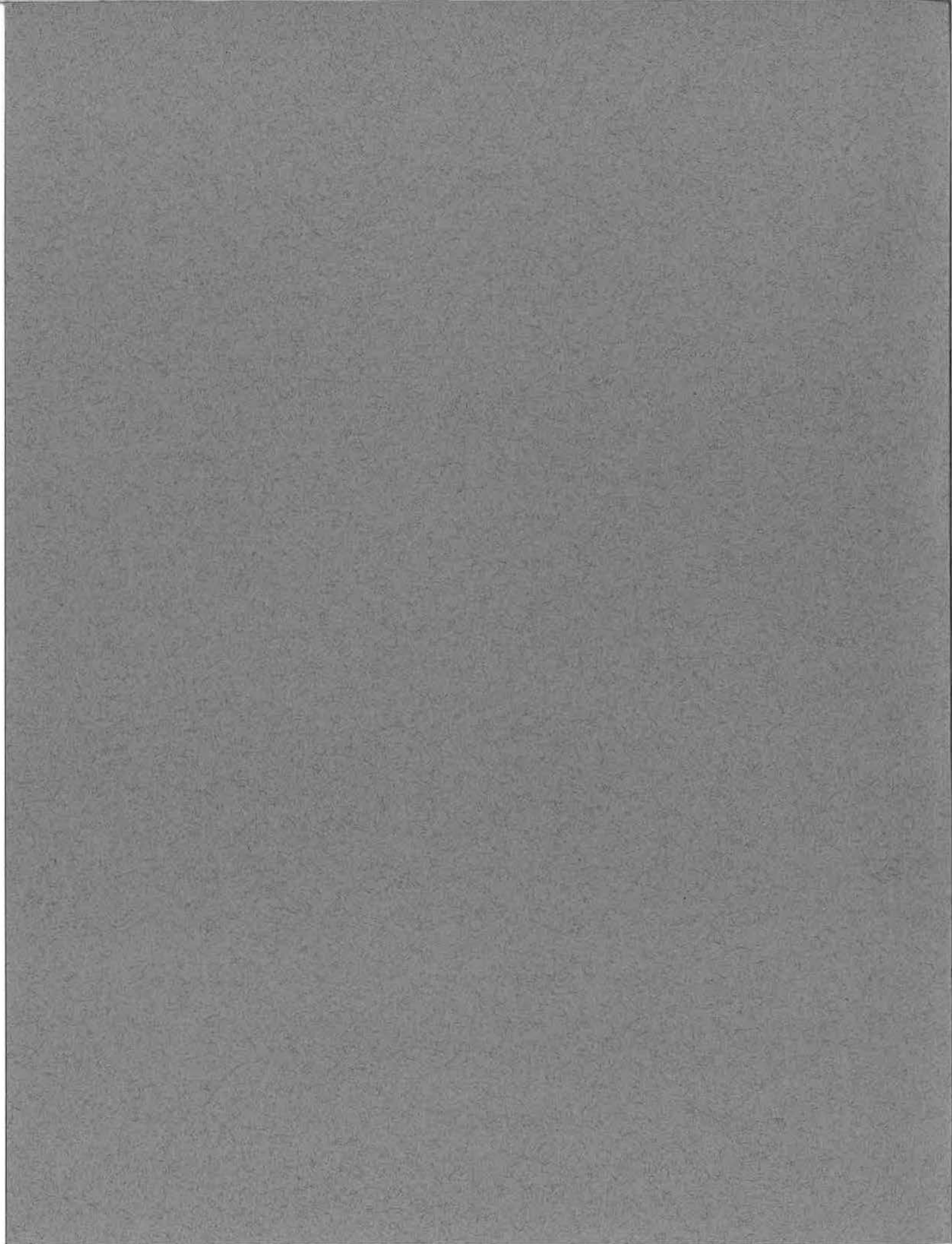
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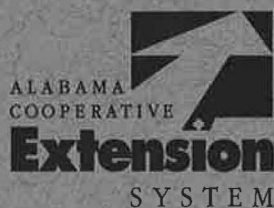
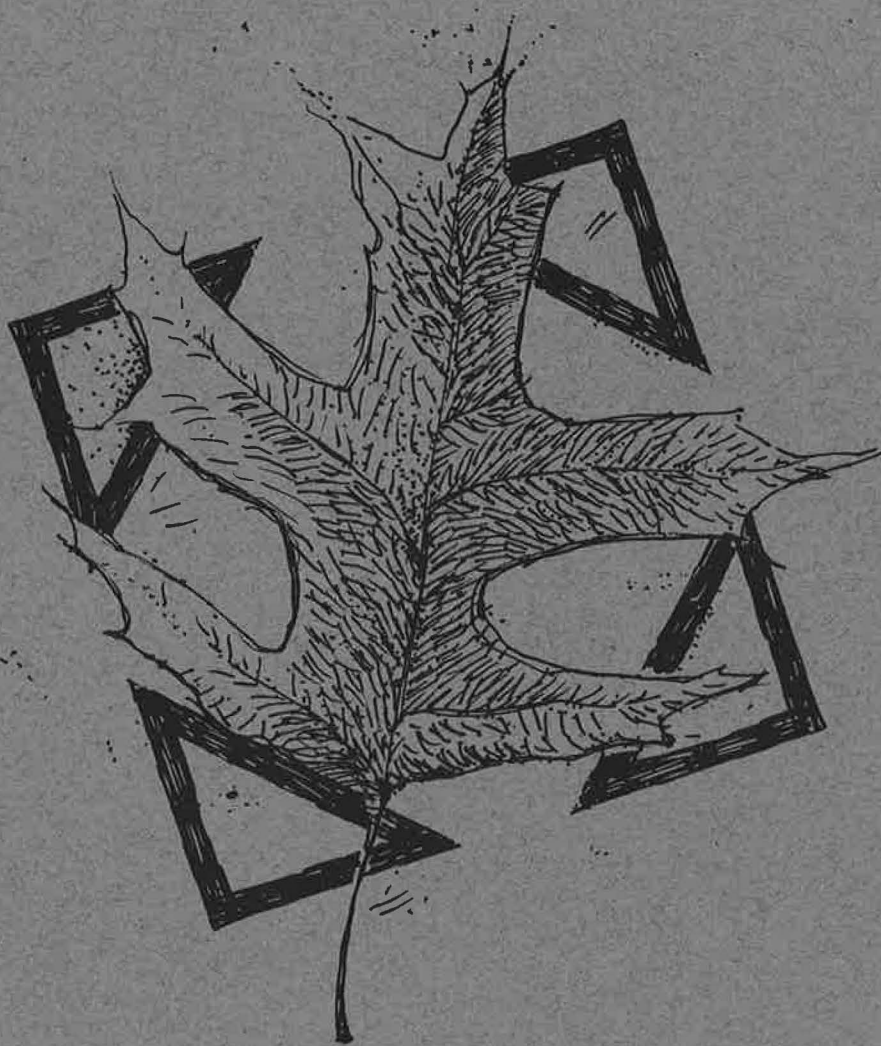
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A thin stretch of trees along the banks of the
Choccolocco Creek near Easteboga in Talladega
County is all the forest that James White holds claim to.
But it cools both the creek and his dairy cows who
come to rest in the shade.

JAMES WHITE, TALLADEGA COUNTY





CIRCULAR ANR-788

This publication was written by **John C. Bliss**, *Extension Forester*, Associate Professor, Forestry, Auburn University.

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