

Leaving the Stress Behind



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Lined with neatly-pruned sawtooth oaks and natural grasses, covered in white gravel, the long winding driveway stretches for a quarter of a mile. It's obvious that you're entering a special place. In fact, anywhere you look on the Osborn property . . . the wildlife openings, green with cool season plantings . . . the miles of fire breaks and well-maintained access roads . . . the areas that have been prescribed burned . . . the wildlife viewing houses . . . all speak volumes without words as to how much this landowner cares. The old adage "actions speak louder than words" is certainly appropriate here.

John Osborn grew up working on his family farm in Hackneyville, Alabama. Looking for opportunities, he joined the Navy and was trained as an electrician. Using those skills, he came back to Alabama after completing his enlistment and began a long career with US Steel in Birmingham. As often happens with people who grow up on a farm, the land always called to him. Over the years, he spent much of his spare time caring for the family farm. After his parents passed away, the land was divided between the brothers and sisters. Purchasing his sisters'

acreage in 1990, he continued caring for this 91 acres in Tallapoosa County. Then during the 90s, a purchase of 200 acres, an adjacent 30-acre tract, and another 40-acre parcel (all in Clay County) brought the total acreage to 361.

One rather unique feature about the Osborn property is that it is bordered by three other certified TREASURE Forests. A friendship with TREASURE Forest landowners Jerry and Genelle Brown translated into a transfer of knowledge for the Osborns. Throughout the 90s, they implemented forest management practices and the property was certified as a TREASURE Forest in 2001 and a Tree Farm in 2005. However, their work did not stop there. Educating others about TREASURE Forest became a goal for John and Regina. Their TREASURE Forest has served as an integral part of several landowner tours. They have hosted "Step Outside" events for the Becoming an Outdoor Woman program, and high school students have also held "survival camp" onsite. These environmental education efforts, along with the continued implementation of sound stewardship practices, culminated in the couple receiving the 2007 Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award.

Leaving the stress behind them for the country life that John knew growing up, the Osborns eventually retired in 2008 and built a house on the Clay County tract. “We work harder now,” he said, “but it is more enjoyable and my blood pressure is a lot better.”

The only drawback to rural living is the long distance they must travel to buy groceries. Regina commented, “We just have to plan better now!”

Accomplishments

The Osborns determined that their primary forest management objective was wildlife, with timber being secondary. As with other TREASURE Forest landowners, their list of accomplishments is long toward the achievement of those objectives.

Approximately 36 acres in wildlife openings are maintained in a variety of cool and warm season herbaceous cover. Another 14 acres in food plots are seasonally planted in clover, wheat, chufa, and peas. More than 13 acres were planted in mast-producing sawtooth oaks. Chinese chestnuts, pear trees, and apple trees have also been planted for wildlife. A 30-acre tract of mature hardwoods also contribute to the habitat diversity.

To produce quality bucks on the property, deer harvest is regulated through the Deer Management Assistance Program. Observation and shooting houses are maintained for viewing and hunting.

A 3-½ acre fishing pond, rebuilt and stocked with bream, bass, and catfish, has provided many hours of fun and relaxation for family and friends.



Photo by Nick Jordan

Over 5.6 miles of fire breaks and 2.5 miles of access roads (with water bars and drainage ditches) are maintained. To assist in the conservation of soil and water, 14 culverts were also installed on the access roads, and streamside management zones (SMZs) are maintained throughout the property.

Back in 1986, the first trees planted by the Osborns were loblolly pines. The timber on this 36-acre stand has now been thinned twice, and given a mid-rotation release and fertilization as well. The latest planting was nine acres of longleaf pine in 2007. Prescribed burning is conducted in the pine stands to maintain aesthetics and enhance wildlife habitat as well.

Throughout our discussion, there were two things that brought a gleam to Mr. Osborn’s eye. One was when he talked about the

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new barn. Salvaging some beetle-infested trees, he had them sawn into lumber that was used to build this barn. It houses not only the farm equipment, but also his collection of antler mounts from deer he's harvested over the years. However, it is not really what is *inside* the building that holds the most meaning for Osborn. "It's knowing that I grew the trees, harvested those trees, and utilized them on my own property that makes me proud," said John.

The other instance, and perhaps the most telling about both John and Regina Osborn, is when they talked about their children and grandchildren, nieces, and nephews coming to visit the farm. "We thoroughly enjoy having them here. They ride the ATV, watch the deer and turkey, and get a feel for working the land."

Sitting at the dinner table, enjoying coffee and cookies as we concluded our interview, a most appropriate thing took place. It seemed as if an exclamation point was naturally placed after the couple's list of achievements when, through the picture windows, we watched as two deer and four turkeys entered a food plot some 300 yards below. Once again, no words were needed. 🙏

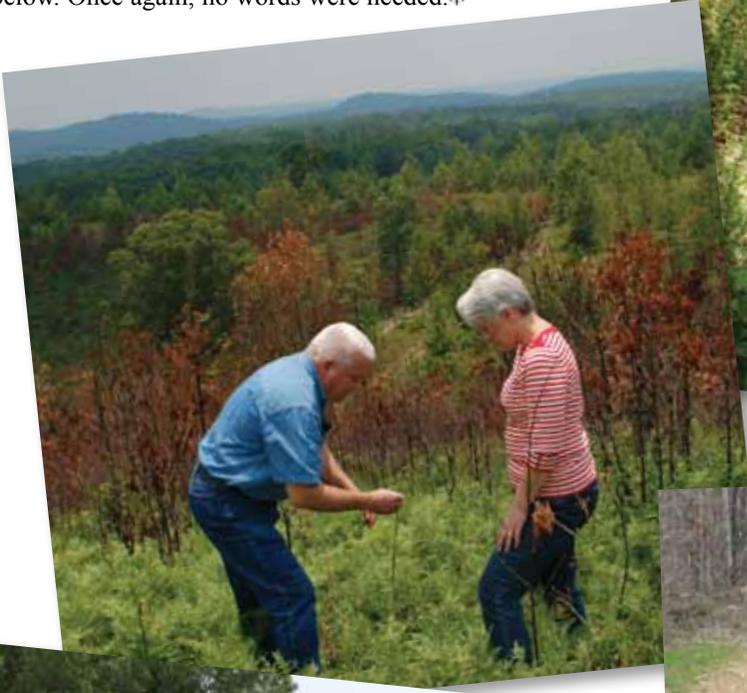


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