



# Discovering Alabama

Teacher's Guide

## Alabama Private Forests

### Suggested Curriculum Areas

Science  
Environmental Studies  
Social Studies

### Suggested Grade Levels

4–12

### Key Concepts

Forest Management  
Forest Stewardship  
Ecological Services

### Key Skills

Career Awareness  
Critical Thinking  
Comprehension

### Synopsis

The majority of Alabama's forestlands are not public lands but, instead, are *privately owned lands*, and owned not by large commercial entities but by individuals and families who typically own relatively small tracts of forestland. "Alabama Private Forests" visits with private landowners across the state to highlight the values of these lands from the perspective of private owners. Also featured are various natural resource professionals with expertise in forest management and forest ecology. A major aspect of the video is the role of professional *consulting foresters* assisting forest owners with the stewardship of their forestlands.



*Discovering Alabama* is a production of the **Alabama Museum of Natural History** in cooperation with **Alabama Public Television** and **The University of Alabama College of Continuing Studies**. For a complete list of titles in the *Discovering Alabama* series, as well as information about ordering videos and accompanying Teacher's Guides, contact us at either: *Discovering Alabama*, Box 870340, Tuscaloosa AL 35487-0340; phone: 205-348-2036; fax: 205-348-4219; or email: [orders@discoveringalabama.org](mailto:orders@discoveringalabama.org). Also visit our website: [www.discoveringalabama.org](http://www.discoveringalabama.org).

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Alabama Department Of  
Conservation and Natural Resources  
State Lands Division



*The Solon and Martha  
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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA\*



## Before Viewing

1 Ask students to each work alone and draw their image (even if a guess) of the outline/shape of the county in which your school is located. Have them indicate on their drawing the parts of the county they think have sizable tracts of forestland. Next, place students in small groups and have each group compare and discuss amongst its group members their various ideas of where sizeable forestland exists in the county.

2 Discuss with the class their different group ideas, then conduct a brainstorm session to list as many values and benefits the students can think of that are provided by forestlands. Introduce the video by explaining that most of the forestland in Alabama is not owned by industry or commercial timber companies, rather the majority of Alabama's varied forestlands are owned by different individuals and families in every part of the state. Share with the class that the video visits with such forest owners and with professional *consulting foresters* who often assist these private forest owners in sustaining the many values and benefits of their forestlands.

## While Viewing

Have students note 1) the forest values and benefits mentioned in the video and 2) the various forest management aims and concerns that are considered by forestland owners and their consulting foresters.

**Video Mystery Question:** The title *consulting forester* refers to a trained and certified professional forester who works to assist a particular category of client. What kind of client? (Answer: A *consulting forester* works solely to assist the forest management aims and needs of private forestland

owners who enlist the *consulting forester's* professional expertise.)

## After Viewing

1 Show the class an accurate image of the shape/size of your county (using, for example, the Alabama highway map, individual county map, or your own outline drawing) and describe the approximate locations and acreages of parts of the county with sizeable tracts of forestland (this information can be obtained from such sources as your local office of the Alabama Forestry Commission or your County Extension Office). Discuss whether any of your students might be familiar with any of these forestlands, might know someone who owns forestland, or have family who themselves own forestland.

2 Review and discuss the range of forest values/benefits cited in the video and the various management aims and concerns that are considered by forest owners and their *consulting foresters*.

## Extensions

1 View other *Discovering Alabama* programs featuring Alabama forestlands. Examples include "Alabama Forests," "Forest History," "Longleaf," "Longleaf Ecosystem," "Forest Issues," and "A Walk in the Woods."

2 Arrange to have a *consulting forester* speak to your class about the kinds of forests that are found in Alabama and the role of *consulting foresters* in helping landowners manage their forestlands.

## Philosophical Reflections

The South today is one of the fastest growing regions in the nation, with many parts of the region becoming urbanized at accelerating rates and southern society becoming increasingly disconnected from the land. Just since 1980 expanding growth in Alabama has more than tripled the amount of landscape converted from undeveloped natural lands to urban area. However, Alabama still has an abundance of rural lands with a diversity of natural values vital to the quality of life in the state and foremost in distinguishing Alabama favorably compared to other states. A key to sustaining this unique natural heritage is to embrace the perspective of those who yet feel a personal connection to the land. The concerns of forestland owners, farmers, and others who cherish the land can help remind us that the land, the rivers, and the forests remain the real and fundamental basis of life in Alabama.

Unfortunately, the voices of caring stewards of farmland and forestland are too often left out of committees, councils, and commissions involved with community and regional planning. Too often local officials develop a "vision" for future progress that fails to include a vision for sustaining the plentitude and ecological health of rural landscapes and natural surroundings. Imagine for yourself a vision of what your local region might look like in 50 or 100 years if rural lands and forests are significantly diminished. What perspective do your local leaders have regarding the importance of these rural values to Alabama's future? What might you do to influence their perspective toward a full appreciation for sustaining Alabama's rural abundance and special natural heritage?

## Nature in Art

Invite a skilled “wood-worker” artisan to show your class a variety of carved wood items or other kinds of crafted wooden objects and discuss the interesting aspects of working with wood.

## Community Connections

1 Assign group research projects to investigate:

- Forest acreage and forest types of in your county.
- Number of forest owners in your county and number of those who enlist services of consulting foresters?

2 Locate a willing forest owner in your area and arrange a class field trip to investigate tree species, natural habitats, wildlife species, economic values, and related forest management practices.

## Additional References & Resources

- *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold. Oxford University Press, 1949.
- *Discovering Alabama Forests* by Doug Phillips. University of Alabama Press, 2006; [www.discoveringalabama.org](http://www.discoveringalabama.org).
- *Longleaf* by Roger Reid. Young Adult Fiction, Junebug Books, 2006; [www.longleafbook.com](http://www.longleafbook.com).
- *Eastern Forests – A Field Guide to Birds, Mammals, Trees, Flowers, and More* by John Kricher. A Peterson Field Guide, 1988.
- **Alabama Forest Owners’ Association:** [www.foa.org/](http://www.foa.org/).
- **Association of Consulting Foresters:** <https://www.acf-foresters.org/>.
- **State of Alabama – Forestry Commission:** [www.forestry.alabama.gov/](http://www.forestry.alabama.gov/).
- **Alabama TREASURE Forest Association:** <https://treasureforest.org/>.

## Parting Thoughts

Several years ago I was invited to serve as keynote speaker for the annual conference of an organization of Alabama forestland owners. Chief among conference concerns were landowners’ worries about rising activism for higher property and forestland taxes in Alabama. My keynote presentation touched on this issue by first musing that, since Alabama’s private forestlands contribute a wealth of vital benefits at no cost to the landless majority of the populace, maybe all Alabamians who don’t own forestland should be paying a service tax to private forestland owners. Not surprisingly, this idea was met with hearty audience applause.

Emboldened by the warm response, I next ventured bravely to offer what I knew would be a less pleasing idea, but an idea I thought could actually pose a realistic option for Alabama forestland owners. I noted that, in many states, expanding urban populations eventually gain enough voting clout to force substantially higher property taxes on rural farm and forestlands. I proffered that similar political demographics will inevitably become a fact of life in Alabama as well. I suggested, therefore, that Alabama forest owners should pre-empt the efforts of tax-increase activists by taking the lead themselves in advocating a higher tax rate – **but, in doing so, should call for only a small increase.** Well, again no surprise, at this suggestion the room fell quiet with polite audience silence.

In the years since that forest owners conference, the chorus for higher forestland taxes has grown predictably louder, prompting me to feel ever more firmly that my suggestion to the conference attendees is worth serious consideration. If Alabama forest owners would take a lead initiative for a tax increase I think they could help themselves in several ways. Not only could they then claim some moral high ground for requesting a small rate increase, they also would likely garner a positive boost in public respect, thus strategically strengthening their position against a higher tax increase.

So, to all my friends who are ardent proponents for an increase in Alabama forestland taxes, let it be know I have given at least a word of support for your cause.

More important, in reference to this video, “Alabama Private Forests,” let all viewers understand that the content of the video does not assert a particular political position regarding forestland taxes in Alabama. Yes, the video alludes to a number of positive aspects of Alabama’s relatively low rate of forestland taxation. And yes, the video mentions several detrimental impacts to forestlands when tax rates in other states are raised significantly. However, this information is included in the video not as political advocacy, but rather for the simple purpose of informing viewers of some realities and contingencies that are rarely recognized by much of the general public. Certainly, there are other realities and other perspectives that apply in the matter of Alabama property tax rates, and certainly the voting public should evaluate all relevant issues when deciding suitable tax rates for the state. But again, the tax-related information included in “Alabama Private Forests” merely presents various facts that are not always appreciated when Alabamians are evaluating tax rates and potential effects of these rates on the state’s forestlands.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot. I want to extend my sincere gratitude to all of the people who gave time and commitment to be interviewed and to assist in the production of this video. They are fellow forest enthusiasts and many are cherished acquaintances of mine with whom I’ve had no opportunity to visit for years. Seeing them again while producing this video was for me a welcome reunion with loved ones long missed. Moreover, their participation is the element that gives our video special authenticity and credibility addressing a topic about which there is often little public awareness.

Happy outings,

*Dr. Doug*





## Discovering Alabama

### Activity/Information Sheet

## Alabama Private Forests

### Alabama Forest Facts \*

- Alabama has the 2nd largest producing forestland base in the U.S. with 23.0 million acres. The state ranks at the top with more than 70 different forest natural communities and almost 200 species of trees.
- Alabama's forestlands are 93.9% privately owned with various governmental entities owning the remaining 6.1%. There are an estimated 250,000 forestland owners in Alabama, meaning that over 5% of Alabama's population own forestland.
- Alabama's forestlands are a diverse mix of forest types. Approximately 43% of the timberland area is in hardwood forest types, 43% is in pine forest types, and 14% is in mixed pine & hardwood types.
- Alabama landowners have planted over 4.5 billion seedlings since 1990. During this period about 15 trees have been planted in

Alabama for every man, woman, and child in the United States.

- Alabama has approximately 670 forest products manufacturing operations. Every county in Alabama is home to at least one such operation.
- Alabama's forest industry is the state's second largest manufacturing industry, producing an estimated \$15 billion worth of products annually.
- If Alabama were a separate country it would rank #9 in the world for pulp production and #13 in paper production.
- Alabama is also a major producer of lumber, wood panels, and other products. The state is the 6th leading lumber producing state in the U.S. and the 8th leading wood panel producer.
- Alabama's forest industry directly employs approximately 42,500 Alabamians with an annual payroll estimated at \$2.1 billion. This is the second largest payroll of any manufacturing industry in Alabama.
- Approximately 20% of all manufacturing jobs in Alabama are in the forest products industry. In addition, an estimated 83,700 more Alabamians are indirectly dependent on the forest industry for their employment. Over 7% of Alabama's work force is either directly or indirectly employed by the forest industry.

### Information Sources

1. U.S.D.A. Forest Service
2. AIDT Forest Products Center
3. Alabama Forestry Commission
4. U.S. Census Bureau
5. Bureau of Labor Statistics
6. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
7. RISI
8. U.S. Dept. of Commerce
9. Southern Forest Products Association
10. Western Wood Products Association
11. Alabama International Trade Center
12. Alabama Department of Commerce

*\* Excerpted and condensed from the January 2016 issue of CAPITAL IDEAS, the newsletter of the Alabama Forest Owners' Association, Inc. (AFOA)*