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THE WILD TURKEY AND ITS MANAGEMENT IN MISSISSIPPI

Adam B. Butler



Photo by Larry Price/National Wild Turkey Federation

Wild turkeys are one of the most sought after game species in Mississippi, and each spring over 40,000 enthusiastic turkey hunters give chase to the Magnolia State's estimated 250,000 wild turkeys. Although dramatic swings in turkey populations occur regularly due to the production of each summer's hatch, the capacity to which local turkey numbers will ultimately grow is dictated by the quality and composition of habitats within a given landscape. Fortunately, many of the bird's habitat requirements are compatible with most production forestry regimes.

When managing for wild turkeys, it is important to understand the bird's life history. Wild turkeys and their eggs are preyed upon by a long list of species, including man. As a result, focusing management on those habitat types that allow populations to replenish themselves is the key to maintaining healthy flocks.

Research supports this concept, and suggests that nest success and survival of the young are the two most important demographics that drive population fluctuations. Both of these factors are linked to the availability of specific cover types, and these can be enhanced through sound silviculture.

Turkeys will readily nest within a variety of land covers, but regardless of where they occur, turkey nests are nearly always found within areas of relatively dense woody and herbaceous vegetation near the ground. Environmental factors such as weather have a strong influence on nesting success and result in year to year differences in reproduction. However, within years, differences are also seen between habitat types. The habitats with the highest proportion of successful nests are typically those in which nesting cover is scattered randomly, rather than uniformly.

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from the Chair...

Dear Colleagues:

I hope the summer has been going well for you. After a fairly nice spring, it now seems that the Mississippi heat is upon us. As you rest from your endeavors in the shade of an old oak tree, we give you the latest issue of the Magnolia Forester. In this issue, Adam Butler discusses wild turkey, Keith Ward showcases our recent and successful Annual Conference, John Kushla offers a note from the membership desk, Ian Munn provides a council report, and Don Grebner contributes an update from the SAF House of Society Delegates.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Capital Chapter for coordinating the 2013 Annual Conference in Jackson from April 8 through April 10. Led by Stephen Dicke, the Capital Chapter worked relentlessly over several months to ensure an informative and smooth-running program. As a result of their hard work and commitment, attendees of the conference reported it a great success. In addition to several excellent speakers, there's nothing like a crawfish and shrimp boil to make Mississippi foresters happy!

Forestry students made an excellent showing at the Annual Conference despite their busy lives at the end of the Spring semester. For 113 years, student members have been critical to the vitality of our professional organization and employers take notice of their participation. The state of Mississippi is blessed to have four- and two- year forestry programs with so many excellent students who will one day manage its natural resources for the greater good of all its residents. When you see students at a local, state, or national meeting please let them know how proud we are of their efforts. I am looking forward to seeing another contingent of students at next year's conference hosted by the Broadleaf Chapter in Vicksburg.

In other news, local chapters continue to sponsor outstanding guest speakers and field trips. The Northeast and Four Lakes Chapters visited the new forestry museum in Bruce following a presentation on timber markets. The Broadleaf Chapter continues to strengthen its membership participation with two meetings as

of publication date. The Longleaf Chapter listened to a program on silvopasture systems in longleaf pine management. Finally, the Student Chapter had a very successful trip to Conclave, placing 4th overall, 3rd in technical competitions, 1st in individual log chopping, and 3rd place in pole felling, photogrammetry, and timber estimation. As well, the Chapter planted a tree on the MSU campus to celebrate Arbor Day and led the planting of 7,200 seedlings on the MSU Golf Course.

On another note, I would like to call your attention to Don Grebner's article focusing on local chapter success stories and BHAGs (Big Hairy Audacious Goals). These efforts are part of the SAF branding initiative to help move the Society forward in terms of promotion as well as membership recruitment and retention. Membership in a professional society like SAF involves active participation and Don and I invite all members to offer their ideas on how the organization can improve. As well, the Mississippi SAF Executive Committee will work to provide some success stories and BHAGs so that Mississippi is well-represented at HSD when it meets later this year.

Finally, please keep an eye out for Mississippi SAF's advertisement in Tree Talk magazine published by the Mississippi Forestry Association. The 1/6 page ad is intended to draw landowners' attention to SAF foresters using the statewide branding campaign ("Is your forester a member of SAF?") initiated in 2012. The ad will appear in four issues of the magazine. Also, please remember to wear your SAF lapel pin if you attend the MFA conference this fall. You can contact James Henderson if you would like to purchase a pin at cost.

As always, the Executive Committee values members' input. Please feel free to contact any of us if you have any comments or suggestions regarding the Magnolia Forester or the Mississippi SAF Chapter in general.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to Mississippi SAF.

Jason Gordon
MS SAF Chair

from the Vice-Chair...

Dear Mississippi SAF Members:

As of the end of April 2013, the Mississippi Society of American Foresters had 312 active members, up from 271 a year ago. It appears that the new dues structure, and recruiting incentives are beginning to reverse the declining membership trend.

Nevertheless, the long-term membership outlook nationwide for our professional society is still questionable. Our national leaders are still grappling with issues to keep the forestry profession relevant in the 21st Century. Mr. Dave Walters, Vice President SAF, spoke at length during our state convention about

long-term membership, engaging our members, and how to attract more new members. There is still active discussion about extending membership to natural resource managers that are graduating, as they still lack a professional society to call "home". SAF would like to be their home, but attracting them while retaining our current professional foresters remains a challenge. If you have ideas on this subject, please contact me so that we can further the membership discussion of the issues at the national level.

John Kushla
MS SAF Vice-Chair

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Executive Committee Meeting

April 2013

- 1. Welcome:** Jason Gordon welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 2. Anti-Trust Statement:** Jason Gordon gave the nation's antitrust statement and urged strict compliance. Any conversations that encroached on the statement would be noted and brought to an end.
- 3. Minutes of Last Meeting:** Marc Measells presented the minutes of the February 12, 2013 Executive Committee meeting and asked for everyone to review. John Auel made a motion to accept. Jimmy Mordica provided the second. Minutes were approved.
- 4. Financial Report:** Marc Measells presented the financial report (sent via e-mail) in the absence of Bob Heinz. Heinz received \$1,534 in 2013 dues on January 31st. Heinz needs contact information for the Four Lakes treasurer. The Broadleaf Chapter still has previous checks that have not been deposited or that have been voided. Heinz stated that local chapters would receive their dues checks via mail unless he didn't have the treasurer contact information (Four Lakes, Loblolly). If you have not deposited checks (Broadleaf), please do so immediately. Don Grebner said he had reviewed the Annual Financial Report and found no problems during his audit. All 2012 financial reporting documents were sent to National Office. The last information Heinz had regarding the IRS status was September 18, 2012 when SAF was going to draft a power of attorney for their CPA to act on our behalf. Jason Gordon or Ian Munn needs to follow up to see what has been done. Heinz searched the financial records for the past four years for royalty payments from the company Syndistar for the "My Friend the Forester" coloring book. However, there is no indication we received a royalty payment. He also did not find any correspondence about this in the box of items he was given upon becoming treasurer. Gordon asked about the next step on coloring book. We will need to contact the company directly regarding this matter. As of March 31, 2013, we have \$6,735.62 in the checking account and \$5,393.87 in the 12-month CD maturing on February 24, 2014 (currently earning 0.40%). James Henderson motioned to accept the financial report. John Auel provided the second. Financial report was approved.
- 5. 2013 Annual Meeting:** Stephen Dicke passed out two handouts regarding registrations and projected revenues and expenses. As of Monday morning, there were 71 paid registrations, 15 invited speakers, and five sponsors for a total attendance of 86. Projected income as of Monday morning was \$9,861 with projected expenses of \$7,766 for a projected net income of \$1,915. However, Dicke expected to receive an additional \$1,050 in revenue (sponsors and on-site registrations) which would put projected revenues around \$10,900. Dicke indicated the projected net income would be around \$3,000. Randy Watkins said two 50 year members planned to attend only the luncheon while the others had registered.
- 6. HSD Chair:** Don Grebner emailed Jason Gordon and all state chairs requesting they send success stories at the state or local chapter level regarding activities that he can report to Council. Grebner requested the success stories be sent to him by July. Grebner also reported that Council has asked each state chapter to come up with "Big Hairy Audacious Goals." The next HSD/Council meeting is scheduled in June. Grebner also reported that National SAF membership slightly increased in 2013.

Executive Committee Meeting

7. Committee Reports

Professional Recognition: Randy Watkins reported we were recognizing eight Golden members this year. It cost \$520 for frames and the Mississippi wooden shaped plaques. Watkins questioned if we should continue to frame all the Golden member recognition plaques. Keith Ward and Brian Mitchell recommended continuing using the frames and plaques. Everyone agreed that was the most appropriate way to present the awards. Jason Gordon also mentioned that we had nominated Emily Schultz as a Fellow. The Fellow selections committee at the regional level would move it forward.

Membership Committee: John Kushla discussed ideas about possibly merging some chapters stating it might be more efficient with less chapters but that we could lose people at some meetings due to the distance they would have to travel to attend. It was noted that if chapters did merge, it would be appropriate to rotate where the meetings were held. Kushla stated we plan to continue with advertising SAF at the MFA Annual Meeting by encouraging landowners to verify that their forester was a SAF member. Ethics will be given at the MFA Annual Meeting and used as a way to promote SAF and the benefits associated with membership. Jason Gordon asked about the exhibit costs and agreed to speak with Tedrick Ratcliff about a possible reduced rate. Don Grebner asked about other forestry meetings we could potentially promote SAF. The group mentioned the Mississippi Urban Council, the Association of Consulting Foresters and the Wildlife Society as possible venues.

Policy Committee: Brian Mitchell stated it had been about four months since renewal of our policy statements without problems. Dr. South emailed Mitchell and made a reference to our Longleaf Pine Policy stating it was good. Mitchell noted that nothing much had been done since December.

Mitchell plans to get the group together in June. Jason Gordon mentioned the fact that National was talking about removing the word forester and that we discussed putting something together to send to National. Don Grebner said the latest solution from National was to say "SAF member" in the strategic plan instead of forester and that this seems to have resolved the issue for now. Jimmy Mordica said it would be ongoing with companies hiring non-foresters and placing them in similar positions. There was discussion about the accreditation process and the overlap in core courses between foresters and natural resource professionals. It was noted they would not be eligible to take the BORF exam.

8. New Business

Tree Talk advertisements: Jason Gordon called for a vote on placing an advertisement in upcoming issues of the MFA Tree Talk magazine. James Henderson motioned that we place a 1/6 page advertisement with color for four issues per year after discussions with Tedrick Ratcliff/Nate Irby. Jimmy Mordica questioned the expense of the advertisement and the annual meeting booth. John Auel said landowners should know importance of SAF and therefore recommended only placing the SAF display during the Ethics course. James Henderson and John Auel jointly made a motion to advertise and John Kushla seconded. Motion passed.

9. Adjourn: James Henderson made a motion to adjourn. John Kushla provided the second. Meeting was adjourned at 4:02 p.m.

chapter NEWS

Broadleaf

Sam Jackson said he did not have much to report. They had eight at their February meeting. They have another meeting on April 25th.

Capitol

Russell Bozeman said they have focused on the annual meeting since their previous meeting in February.

Four Lakes

Jason Gordon reported their first meeting was in combination with the NE Chapter during March. They met at the Bruce Forestry Museum with James Henderson presenting the Timber Market Outlook. Don Bell spoke for a while afterwards and during the tour of the museum. They had 20+ in attendance. Their next meeting is in June with Morgan Varner speaking about fire.

Loblolly

John Auel reported their first meeting was in March at Dorman Lake with Jason giving an update on SAF. They had 18 in attendance. The next meeting will be in June with a presentation about the Teacher Conservation Workshops.

Longleaf

Jimmy Mordica indicated their meeting was in March in conjunction with the Magnolia Chapter. Glenn Hughes spoke on silvipasture and longleaf pine management. They had 12-14 in attendance.

Magnolia

Jeff Keeton indicated their last meeting was with the Longleaf Chapter. They discussed having their next meeting combined with the Longleaf Chapter in May.

Northeast

John Kushla reported they met with the Four Lakes Chapter in March. They are planning their next meeting in mid-May before NE Community College lets out for summer. They planned to discuss the Teacher Conservation Workshops.

Homochitto

Bob Naeger reported there has been no change. No one is interested in taking a leadership role.

MSU SAF Student Chapter

Robert Grala emailed the report which indicated the students placed 4th overall in conclave competitions and 3rd overall in technical competitions. They placed 1st in individual log chopping and took home 3rd places in pole felling, photogrammetry, and timber estimation. The Chapter hosted a Spring Field Day on March 1st to prepare for Conclave. Approximately eight students planned attending the MSU SAF Annual meeting. The Chapter planted a tree on the MSU campus to celebrate Arbor Day. In addition, the Student Chapter let the planting of 7,200 seedlings on the MSU Golf Course which was part of the Maroon Edition Project. The Chapter is planning an Adopt-a-Highway clean-up on April 13th. Eleven graduating students signed up for the SAF graduation rings (request form has been sent to National).

Keith Ward asked about the percentage of seniors that are SAF members. He also mentioned SAF was working with companies to receive a discount based on the number of employees who were also members.

annual meeting

The MS SAF held its annual meeting in Jackson on April 9 and 10 with 89 attendees. The theme, “All Things Wild and Wonderful”, was chosen to reflect forestry’s role in improving wildlife habitat. Fifteen presenters spoke on a diverse group of topics. Joe Mallard of Southern Ag Credit spoke on timberland values and employees from the MDWFP, USFWS, USFS, and MFC spoke on wild turkey management, prescribed burning, ecosystem restoration, and road BMPs. Our keynote speakers included Dave Walters, national SAF vice-president and Cindy Hyde-Smith, commissioner of the MS Department of Agriculture and Commerce. The Blues Rangers provided fantastic musical entertainment. In addition, eight SAF members received their 50-year membership awards and Mr. Oscar Tissue was recognized for his 62 years of SAF membership. Optional activities included bird identification at Lefleur’s Bluff State Park, tours of Forestry Suppliers, Inc. and the MS Agriculture and Forestry Museum, and a crawfish dinner. Evaluations indicated a high level of satisfaction with the meeting topics and events. The 2014 meeting is tentatively scheduled to be held in Vicksburg.



Dr. Donald Grebner (left) was honored for being named SAF Fellow.



Sam Jackson (left) received the Outstanding Young Forester Award.



Jonathan Stoll (left) received the Student Leadership Award.



Oscar Tissue (left) was recognized for 62 years of SAF membership.

annual meeting

50 YEAR SAF Membership Recipients

with MS SAF president Jason Gordon



Joseph Clayton



Charles Dismukes



Bryant Myatt



Cary Williams



Jack Rhodes



Kenneth Johnson

annual meeting



Dr. James Henderson (left) was honored for serving as the 2012 MS SAF President.

Other winners (not pictured)

Robert Heinz, Distinguished Service

Wendell Graham, Golden Member/50 year

Douglas Blount, Golden Member/50 year

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A special thanks to our sponsors and exhibitors. We could not have had such a great meeting without you!

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F&W Forestry Services, Inc (Keith Ward)

Resource Management Services, LLC (Robby Toombs)

Southern AgCredit (Joe Mallard)

Mississippi Land Bank (Matthew Raff)

South Mississippi Electric Power Association (Randy Watkins)

Oscar Tissue

Stephen and Susan Dicke

Exhibitors

LandMark Spacial Solutions, LLC (Johnny Thompson)

College of Forest Resources and MSU Development Foundation (Jeff Little)

Firewise - Mississippi Forestry Commission (Bill Kitchings)

Haglof, Inc. (Brian Mitchell)

Forestry Suppliers, Inc. (Brigg Abercrombie)

International Forest Company (Chris Johnston)

Southern Ag Credit, ACA (Joe Mallard)

Annual Meeting Committee - Stephen Dicke, Russell Bozeman, Keith Ward, James Floyd, and Kenneth Johnson

Council Report

Council met in Bethesda, MD at the SAF Headquarter on March 2013

Highlights by Ian Munn, District XI Council Representative

1. Council reviewed the effectiveness of the recruitment discount program with respect to its impact on member recruitment. Twenty members have taken advantage of the program, recruiting over 100 new members since December 2012. Obviously, the program can be expanded greatly. Few members are successfully using this tool to recruit new members.
2. The sale of property at National Headquarters continues to move forward. Preliminary Site Plans were submitted to Montgomery County and were accepted without comment. Final sale of the property is dependent on the County approving the developer's development plan. Receiving no comments on the initial site plan is a good sign of progress. An additional 1.5 million dollars was paid in May.
3. Regarding changing "forester" to "natural resource professional" in the strategic plan, we held a lengthy discussion of the matter. The minutes of the Council Meeting abbreviated the discussion of the matter as follows:

Mr. Munn recapped that LA SAF took issue with the SAF core values abandoning use of the term forester for natural resource professionals. Council decided to meet with LA SAF members and hear their concerns. At the LA SAF meeting the suggestion was to replace forester with SAF Member.

Mr. Houghton reported that at the last MN SAF meeting the state society also considered the question and agreed that changing forester to SAF Member.

Mr. Goergen said Council needs to begin looking now at how we can protect the identity of forester while at the same time being welcoming of other natural resource professionals. We cannot wait to do this five years down the road he said.
4. Council approved a new Executive Vice President Employment Agreement and Position Description. This agreement will replace a 2004 agreement which was outdated due to changes in law and SAF needs. Council also approved a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Executive Vice President tied directly to his areas of responsibilities as listed in his Position Description. These KPIs are also tied to SAF's 2013-2017 Strategic plan. Consequently, the EVP's performance will be evaluated with regard to SAF's progress with regard to its long range goals. Furthermore, the evaluation will be conducted in a consistent manner from year to year and will become part of the EVP's employment file.
5. Council also explored ways to evaluate its own performance. Some key considerations included the following:
 - It's important to get a 360 degree review so we don't rate ourselves higher than we really are.
 - In order for a 360 degree review to happen, staff must also evaluate Council's performance.
 - HSD should also evaluate Council. Send evaluation to HSD chair and chair should then distribute to HSD members.
 - Stressed the importance of Council collaboration with national office staff.
 - The Council KPIs need to be more measurable.
6. Financially, SAF is performing satisfactorily. YTD expenditures are currently within budget and dues receipts are ahead of schedule.

House of Delegates Report

Highlights by Don Grebner, Mississippi Chair

I hope that 2013 has been going well for you all. I am your Society of American Foresters House of Delegates (HSD) Chair for 2013. As Chair, my responsibility is to be a focal point between State Chapters and Council. This will partly be done through periodic emails to State Chapter Chairs as well as the organization and operation of the House of Society Delegates Annual Meeting prior to the SAF National Convention. As HSD Chair, I would like to make a request of Society members in Mississippi.

First, please forward to your state chapter chair (Jason Gordon) "Success stories" that your local chapters have achieved. Success stories may include membership recruiting efforts, sponsorship of a student at a Natural Resources camp, an outstanding chapter meeting, or other activity. I would like to collect these stories and possibly ask a representative to present them at the HSD Annual Meeting. Jason will work with you to fill out the needed information describing your success story.

Second, an important role that HSD plays within the Society is to gather issues and concerns generated by State Chapters and present them to Council on a quarterly basis. These can be reported in the quarterly Council workbook. In addition, if time allows, they may be included as potential topics to be discussed at the HSD Annual Meeting. Again, contact Jason for more information.

Third, the National staff and Council have been undergoing a branding exercise for moving our Society forward for some time now. Council has charged HSD to provide assistance with the development of "Big Hairy Audacious Goals." To determine whether a goal meets the BHAG status, it must be: (1) clear and compelling; (2) an audacious 10 to 30 year goal; (3) measurable, understandable, action-oriented, exciting, compelling; and (4) fit within the SAF brand framework. My challenge to you is to provide one "BHAG" to the

Mississippi SAF Executive Council by the first week of July. Possible ways to meet this challenge can be done through in-person or electronic discussions. Please make sure that the BHAGs that you develop satisfy the criteria mentioned above. The information that we compile from all of you will be published in the HSD workbook, used at the National Convention, and will be seen not only by other State Chapter Chairs, but by Council members as well. Your effort will help Council in their efforts to move the Society forward.

Thanks for your help! I look forward to talking with you in the near future.

Don Grebner
HSD Chair



Mississippi Society of American Foresters

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THE WILD TURKEY AND ITS MANAGEMENT IN MISSISSIPPI

continued from page 1

This suggests that managing mature upland stands for nesting cover by thinning to slightly under-stocked densities with prescribed burns conducted at regular intervals, which yields “clumps” of thicker cover throughout the stand, can provide a better nesting area for hens than areas of homogeneous cover, such as young regeneration areas or utility right-of-ways.

After they hatch, young wild turkeys experience extreme rates of predation early in their lives. Proper habitat in close proximity to nesting cover can help mitigate losses. Brood habitat can be found in lush, low-growing cover of moderately thick forbs and grasses. Proper brood cover will primarily offer concealment for the young turkeys, but will also harbor numerous insects and offer enough openness for easy foraging. Lack of brood habitat is arguably the most limiting factor to turkey populations throughout the state, but forestry practices such as thinning and burning, in addition to the creation and maintenance of permanent wildlife openings can increase the prevalence of this critical habitat type.

Although the thick ground cover needed for nesting and brooding can be some of the most essential habitat for wild turkeys, it is important to be mindful that these covers are mostly avoided outside of the reproductive season. Adult turkeys prefer open woods with little understory to obstruct their ability to scan for predators. As a result, turkey habitat management becomes a balancing act between offering sufficient, well-dispersed thick cover for nesting and brooding while maintaining more open habitats in which adult turkeys prefer to spend much of their time.

For many heavily forested properties, implementation of a prescribed fire regime, expansion of open space devoted to wildlife, and retention of mature hardwoods and wide Streamside Management Zones are three practices that can increase use by wild turkeys. In pine stands prescribed burning should be implemented at a frequent rotation on all burnable acres. Radio telemetry studies demonstrate turkey use of upland pine stands increases tremendously in the months following prescribed fire. In fact, late winter prescribed burning is one of the most effective management techniques that can be applied to attract turkeys to a given area just prior to the opening of the spring season. The benefits of fire are short-lived, however, and turkey use of burned pine stands declines relatively soon (less than 1½ years) in the absence of other disturbances, therefore, fire return intervals on most sites should target a 3-year rotation. This frequency allows for intense utilization by adults during the first year post-burn, brood cover during



features

the second, and nesting cover during the third, before resetting the process. Ideally, areas burned at different times should be well dispersed across a property in 50 – 150 acre blocks.

Permanent openings are an important feature for wild turkeys, and can be a hub that centralizes springtime turkey activity in a given area. Turkeys seem to prefer openings that are less than 10 acres in size so that they are never more than a short flight away from the tree line. Providing one opening of this size per 100 acres of land, which is maintained in quality native vegetation via periodic burning or dormant season disking, or established into preferred wild turkey plantings such as clovers, small grains, or chufa, may increase a property's attractiveness to wild turkeys. If the sacrifice of production timberland for wildlife openings does not fit with management objectives, then "daylighting" roadsides should be considered. Daylighting refers to the clearing of timber and brush for a minimum of 30' off either

road shoulder, and allows for the establishment of permanent linear openings along roadways.

Finally, if wild turkeys are a management objective, mature hardwoods should be retained, and conversion of these areas into pines should be avoided. This, however, does not imply that these areas are "off limits" to silvicultural treatments, as selective harvests in mature stands can help foster the groundcover for nesting and brooding previously discussed. These types of treatments can be particularly important in hardwood dominated landscapes such as in the Mississippi Batture or along other major river drainages. Similarly, in upland stands, Streamside Management Zones with hardwood timber should be left as wide as is feasible. SMZs intersperse mast producing hardwoods within the landscape, and will serve as one of the most used habitat features for wild turkeys throughout the year.

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