

A CLAY COUNTY ALABAMA "WALK IN THE FOREST" TOUR



By Don East - *Special to the Clay Times Journal*



Photograph's by Kacie Smith

On Saturday, October 8th 2011, a group of forty-three out-of-state visitors conducted a "Walk in the Forest" tour in Clay County, Alabama. The event was held on the certified Tree Farm and Treasure Forest of Don C. East, situated along Fox Creek in east central Alabama. This environmental education event was hosted by the Clay County Forestry Planning Committee, sponsored by the American Forest Foundation (AFF), and supported by the American Tree Farm System (ATFS). The "Walk in the Forest" program is designed to help people develop an appreciation for nature and an understanding of why caring for the American Forests is so important to all its citizens.

The diverse tour group of forest landowners, educators, administrators, and business men and women on the tour were all former U.S. Navy cryptologist who spent a career working with highly classified military codes and ciphers during the Korean, Vietnam, Cold War, and Gulf Wars. Members of the tour group were from Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, Kentucky, North and South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. For the most part, this was their initial exposure to the Tree Farm System.

Those on the tour were provided six educational stops where certified foresters and other professionals presented the benefits of proper forest land management. Topics presented were both long leaf and loblolly pine plantation management, streamside management zones, wildlife habitat enhancement, "patchwork management," prescribed burns, wildlife food plots and plantings, forest road construction and maintenance, and the importance of historical and other special sites located on Tree Farms.

Providing presentations at the various stops were W.N. McCollum, Earl Smith, Lamar Dewberry, Nick Jordan, and Don East. Transportation was handled by Josh Benefield and John Decourcey. Kacie Smith recorded the event with her photography.

The Don East Tree Farm and Treasure Forest is named "The Creeks Tree Farms" and is a past winner of several environmental, forestry and wildlife management awards, including the ATFS Alabama Tree Farmer of the Year runner up for the ATFS Southern Region (16 States) Tree Farmer of the Year, the Alabama Treasure Forest's Helene Mosley award, and the National Forest Landowner of the Year from the Forest Landowner Association.

The cooks for the day's event were Marie and Jim Gasser. At the end of the tour, they provided a great hamburger and hot dog meal for the hungry tour group members. The picnic site was at a set of rapids on scenic Fox Creek where the remains of an 1840s water powered mill, an ancient Indian grinding mortar, and a placer gold mining site provided the setting for a presentation on the need for protection of historical and special sites on forestland.

The tour group concluded the tour with a greatly enhanced appreciation for sound forest management and all the benefits that flow from such practices. They were especially impressed with the intense forestry and wildlife management taking place here in Alabama.