Butler & Company, Inc.

FORESTRY AND REAL ESTATE SERVICES

111 S. Cedar Ave.
P.O. Box 88
Demopolis, AL 36732

Office: (334)289-0051
Fax: (334)289-1972
Email:
butlerandcoinc@bellsouth.net

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The Alabama Forestry Commission Needs Your Help

Dear Landowner/ Homeowner:

Today, the Forestry Commission is facing a crisis that will result in a catastrophic reduction in our capability to continue protecting you and Alabama's forests. As a forest landowner and homeowner, you receive a major benefit from the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC), even if you have never called on us for assistance. Our firefighters are on call, for you, every hour of every day, to protect your property from wildfires.

Over the past several years, we have taken extraordinary measures to reduce our operating costs in the face of steadily declining revenue. Although the Alabama Forestry Commission is a "public safety" agency, in the past 16 months we have been forced to reduce the number of firefighting crews by nearly 25 percent. With our current staffing levels, we do not have the personnel to provide landowners and homeowners with adequate fire protection during periods of high fire occurrence.

The Governor's recommended 2012 State General Fund (SGF) budget for the Alabama Forestry Commission is $7.7 million. This is a reduction of $5.8 million from the 2011 SGF budget. A reduction of this magnitude, combined with other losses in revenue, will result in the AFC having only 50 percent of the firefighting crews needed to protect over 22.7 million acres of forestland and over 8,000 communities identified as moderate-to-high risk areas for fires. Reductions of this size will result in many counties having little or no protection from wildfires. We will reach a point where we cannot respond to multiple wildfires, resulting in fires which destroy tens of thousands of acres of forest land, along with homes and other structures. The state has seen a steady growth the past few years of more and more

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homes being built within forested areas, increasing the risk of wildfire damage and complexity of forest fire fighting.

Additionally, these reductions will mean all AFC services with the exception of firefighting would have to be eliminated. If you value the forests of Alabama and the services of the Forestry Commission, please call, write, or visit your local legislators and ask them to keep the AFC's general fund appropriation for 2012 level to what was received in 2011. We expect the Legislature to begin considering the 2012 budgets within the next several weeks and your contacts are critical to help ensure the AFC can continue to provide fire protection for the homeowners and forest landowners of Alabama, as well as other services provided by the Forestry Commission.

The ability of the Forestry Commission to provide even the most basic services is at stake. I hope you will join many of your fellow landowners who are already making contact with legislators and other leaders in state government. Thank you in advance for helping in this most important effort.

Sincerely,
Linda Casey
State Forester

A sample letter to your legislator to protest these cuts can be found on the AFC website and can be easily personalized. Please support the AFC and their efforts today!

Tropical Soda Apple: The Plant from Hell

Tropical soda apple (TSA) is relatively new to the United States. Native to Argentina and Brazil, TSA was first discovered in Glades County, Florida in 1988. Twenty-three years later this aggressive weed has infested millions of acres of pasture and lawn in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, North and South Carolina and Tennessee. Aptly called the Plant from Hell, TSA was listed as a noxious weed in Florida as soon as 1994 and added to Federal Noxious Weed List by 1995.

Tropical soda apple spreads rapidly. It reduces biological diversity in natural areas by displacing native plants. Plant thorns can restrict wildlife grazing and create a physical barrier to animals, preventing movement through infested areas. This invader also serves as a host for viruses that infect important vegetable crops. It is located in open semi-shaded areas such as pastures, ditch banks, roadsides, recreational areas, citrus groves, sugar cane fields, and wet areas of rangeland. It is typically found in soils that are poorly drained and sandy, but cannot survive extremely wet soils.

Tropical soda apple can produce new plants from seeds and root segments. Each berry produces 200 to 400 reddish-brown seeds. Each plant can produce 50,000 seeds. Research shows that seeds of a TSA plant will germinate up to a depth of 3.5 inches and that a germination rate of 75% is common. Seedling emergence primarily occurs from October through May. TSA roots have buds that regenerate new shoots. The root system can be extensive, with feeder roots located a few inches below the ground and extending 3-6 feet from the crown of the plant.

Maintaining a quality turf through proper fertilization, watering, insect and disease control is the first step in tropical soda apple suppression. Proper cutting will also maintain good growing conditions for the forage and keep TSA from gaining a foothold.

If the plant has made it to your land, mowing will greatly suppress the growth of tropical soda apple and may kill seedling plants. Properly timed mowing can also delay fruit production. However, mowing alone will not effectively control mature plants. Clean off all equipment when leaving a pasture or area that is infested with TSA. Be sure to clean vehicles, mowers, tractors, and shoes.

For sparse infestations, TSA plants should be individually sprayed in their entirety for control and to prevent additional seed and fruit production. Herbicide treatments should be applied to ensure adequate cover-

age, resulting in maximum uptake and control. Treated areas should be monitored on a monthly basis. New seedlings should be sprayed and TSA should not be allowed to set fruit. This is an important preventative control that will help limit the spread of this weed. For dense infestations, mowing should be performed first and a broadcast herbicide application should follow 50 to 60 days after the first mowing. No matter which method of control you choose, remember to collect and destroy all berries.

The invasion of TSA is so bad in some areas that experts are considering the use of biological control in treating this weed. Methods being considered include the release of non-native beetles to eat and weaken the plant, the release of a weevil that develops inside and destroys the TSA flower and the development and release of a TSA specific virus. At this time those methods are being studied and therefore are not recommended.

Once established, tropical soda apple is difficult to remove and usually requires repeated treatments. Early treatment is the key to successfully managing a TSA infestation. If you suspect that tropical soda apple had invaded your lands, call Gary to schedule an inspection and start treatment.

Tropical Soda Apple: Identifying Features

- Tropical Soda Apple is an upright, thorny perennial subshrub or shrub reaching 3 to 6 feet in height.
- Stems are upright-to-leaning with many hairy branches that are covered with broad based white-to-yellow thorns.
- Leaves are alternate, oak-leave shaped, 4 to 8 inches long and 2 to 6 inches wide. Margins are deeply lobed. They are velvety, hairy with thorns projecting from veins and petioles and their color is dark green with whitish midveins above and lighter green with netted veins beneath.

- Flowers bloom from May to August. They are terminal small clusters of five white petals. The petals are at first extended, then becoming recurved. Yellow-to-white stamen project from the center.
- Fruit is sweet smelling and attractive to livestock and wildlife and POISONOUS TO HUMANS! Fruit are spherical, hairless, pulpy, golf-ball size berries. They are mottled green like a watermelon over the winter ripening to yellow in June.

We want to hear from you!

Email your thoughts and requests to butlerandco-inc@bellsouth.net, fax them to (334)289-1972 or mail them to P.O. Box 88, Demopolis, Alabama 36732.

White-Tail Deer Management

The white-tail deer is a medium sized deer that is native to North America and can be found in all 67 counties in Alabama. Deer were once nearly eliminated from the state. Fewer than 10,000 deer, restricted largely to isolated river bottoms of southwestern counties, existed in Alabama during the early 1900s. Habitat management allowed the white-tail deer populations to increase to an estimated 1.4 million deer in Alabama today and consists of creating and maintaining adequate water, food and cover for the herd.

Deer need about three to six quarts of water per day. Much of this water requirement is met by moisture in the food they consume. Deer may use water from ponds, streams, rivers and even dew and accumulated rainwater. These water sources are readily available throughout the state, so water is usually not a problem for deer to find.

Deer require an abundance and variety of nutritious foods for growth, reproduction, and maintenance. On the average, a deer eats 4 to 6 or more pounds of food daily for each 100 pounds of body weight. One deer may eat more than a ton of food per year. More fascinating is the fact that deer seem to be able to determine which foods are most nourishing. Foods readily consumed in one area may not be eaten in another area if more nutritious options are available. Deer consume over 700 different varieties of leaves, bark, grasses, legumes, weeds, soft-stemmed plants, acorns, other nuts, fruits, corn, soybeans, mushrooms, lichens and mosses.

Deer prefer areas that provide cover for most of the year. Cover is used for concealment and protection during the fawning period, thermal protection against the extreme heat and cold and concealment while resting and during heavy hunting times. Ideal cover includes dense un-thinned pine stands, dense 3-4 year old openings created in forestry operations, overgrown abandoned fields, evergreen thickets and any other area that contains thick vegetation. Areas that can provide both food and cover are highly used by deer.

Several forest management techniques are useful for managing deer habitat. They include prescribed fire, timber thinning, food plantings, and fertilization programs. Luckily, these silvicultural practices can enhance both timber production and deer habitat if properly implemented.

Prescribed fire is very useful in managing for deer. Studies show that deer actually prefer to consume plants grown on areas treated with prescribed fire. This is because burning releases nutrients in the forest floor's litter and returns them to the soil. This enriches the new plant growth and makes them the more nutritious option for the deer. These plants respond immediately after a fire with increased production. As always, prescribed fire should only be attempted by trained personnel working under a burning plan.

The ideal habitat of deer should consist of 70 to 80 percent in pine and 15 to 25 percent in mixed pine-hardwood and bottomland hardwood. The pines should be thinned to a basal area of 50 to 60 square feet per acre every 6 to 10 years. This will provide some cover but also open up the overstory and encourage the production of understory vegetation. The mixed-pine hardwood should be thinned to a basal area of 20 square feet of mature mast species per acre. This will allow the increase of mast, fruit and browse production. Any thinning of bottomland hardwood should be extremely selective and in accordance with the Clean Water Act. Care should be taken in any thinning project to save any fruit bearing tree located in the stand as these are important food sources for deer.

Food plots can help to supplement a deer's diet during the seasonal fluctuations in food supplies. As a general rule, 5 percent of the habitat should be planted in food plots. Plots should be in irregularly shaped

areas and located away from major roads and other access routes. They should be scattered throughout an area. Plants favored by deer in food plots include American jointvetch, barley, clovers, corn, soybeans, oats, rye, ryegrass, vetch and wheat.

Fertilizing woodlands and patches of native vegetation is an effective but underused method of attracting deer. Studies show that deer are more attracted to fertilized areas than non-fertilized areas, because fertilization increases the palatability and nutritional content of the vegetation as well as digestibility due to increased levels of protein. One only has to look in the *Alabama Whitetail Records* to see the value of increased soil fertility. Records show that 85 percent of the deer recorded in the state come from the most fertile area in the state, the Black Belt Region, which comprises only 3.5 percent of the land area in Alabama.

The comeback of the white-tail deer is an astounding feat and would not have been possible without the sound management practices listed above. Call Gary Butler for assistance in implementing these practices on your land.

Did You Know?

- The North American male deer (also known as a buck) usually weighs from 130 to 300 pounds. The female (also known as a doe) usually weighs from 90 to 200 pounds. Newborn deer (also known as fawns) usually weighs from 4 to 6 pounds.
- Length ranges from 62 to 87 inches, including the tail, and the shoulder height is 32 to 40 inches.
- Muscles and skeletal structure of deer are well adapted to running. Deer are capable of exceeding 30 miles per hour for short intervals.
- Deer have dichromatic (two-color) vision; humans have trichromatic vision. Deer cannot see oranges and reds.
- 1 in 10,000 females have antlers.
- The white-tailed deer has a four-chambered stomach. Each chamber has a different and specific function that allows the deer to quickly eat a variety of different food, digesting it at a later time in a safe area of cover.
- All white-tailed deer are capable of producing audible noises, unique to each animal.
- The white-tail deer is the state animal of Arkansas, Illinois, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and South Carolina and is one of the state animals of Louisiana.

Hiring the Right Home Inspector

Homebuyers spend a lot of time searching for the perfect house for themselves and their families. That house is the biggest purchase they will probably ever make. A savvy homebuyer knows that they need to have the best possible home inspector in their corner to tell them if they will truly end up with a house of their dreams or if that dream will become their worst nightmare. But what is the best way to determine who the right inspector for the job is?

Some less knowledgeable homebuyers hire an inspector on the recommendation of their real estate agent. They don't realize that both the agent and inspector have a financial incentive for things to go well. The agent wants his commission and the inspector wants repeat business from the agent. To avoid this potential conflict of interest, the homebuyer should get three to five recommendations from their real-estate agent. Not only should they ask for several names, but they should ask the tough questions such as "Would you hire any of these to inspect your home?" and "Who's the deal-killer in this area?" The home buyer will be best served by the inspector who finds the most flaws and thus, kills the most deals.

Before hiring an inspector, the homebuyer should conduct an in depth interview. The inspector should make time to answer any questions the homebuyer has. Listen not only to his answers, but for hesitation. If he's seasoned and knows what he is doing, the answers should roll right off his tongue. Ask about the inspector's credentials and experience. Does the inspector have a professional bio that can be looked at? Does the inspector carry errors and omissions insurance, which is sort of like malpractice insurance for an inspector? If he doesn't, he should be asked why he doesn't carry it. Has he been refused coverage because of previous mistakes? Does he guarantee his work? Some inspectors have written guarantees to reimburse the consumer for eligible repairs that may develop during the guarantee period, regardless of whether it was an oversight on the inspector's part or just normal wear and tear. A good inspector should have no problem standing behind their inspection with a written guarantee for a reasonable amount of time after the inspection.

Ask if the inspector puts his findings into a narrative-style report or just a long checklist. Ask to see a sample. Look at it to assess whether you're comfortable with the language and can understand it. Also see that the inspector is thorough, and covers all of the areas that he says he will cover. Ask to come along when the home is examined. Be wary if he says no. Lastly, ask how long it normally takes him to do an inspection. A home inspection usually takes three to four hours. Be suspicious of anyone who claims it won't take that long.

Once the interview is concluded, the homebuyer should investigate the inspector. Check for complaints with the licensing board, or whatever body oversees them, and ask if the inspector is active and up-to-date. Ask if there are any complaints against the inspector. Call any professional associations that the inspector belongs and do the same. Realize that all associations are not equal. Ask what criteria they follow for allowing membership. Some allow members by payment of dues only. Some require that a certain number of jobs be completed. Some require continuing education. Lastly, call the local Better Business Bureau.

While no home inspector will find every potential problem with a home, a good inspector will find most of them. With a little inspecting of your own, you'll be more apt to end up with a home of your dreams and not your worst nightmare.

Listings in West Central Alabama




67 acres +/- in Lowndes County: Timber/Recreational/Pasture land located 3 to 4 miles north of White Hall with frontage on the Alabama River. Would make an excellent small farm and recreational tract or an excellent timber and recreational property. Asking $3,000.00/acre. Call Gary Butler for more information at 334-289-0051.


143 acres +/- in Sumter County with Highway 80 frontage: Great hunting along the beautiful, prestine Sucarnochee River. Approximately 15 miles from I-59/20. $2,000.00/acre. Call Stan for more information at 334-654-1144.

286 acres +/- in Walker County: Sections 32 & 29, Township 17 South, Range 7 West.

40 acres +/- in Walker County: Section 32, Township 17 South, Range 7 West.

Residential Listings in West Central Alabama


608 7th Avenue East, Linden!! Brick home with 3 bedrooms and 1 bath. Good condition. Good location. Corner lot. Great opportunity! Listed at $74,500.00. Call Frank at 334-216-3683 for more information.




NEW LISTING!!!!!! 1304 Maria, Demopolis!! Spacious 2200 Heated Square Foot home with three bathrooms and three baths. New granite countertops in kitchen. Ro Tucker built kitchen cabinets. Office. Formal dining room. 300 Square Foot Florida Room. 2 Car Garage. Fenced in back yard. Storage Shed. Great price..... $239,900.00! Call Frank at (334) 216-3683 to see this move in ready home.

Thinking about selling your property? Why not list it with Butler and Company? Call Gary at 334-289-0051 to discuss your options.

Forest Management & Consultation • Real Estate Sales & Appraisals

Butler and Company, Inc.
P O Box 88
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Demopolis, Alabama 36732

To receive this newsletter via email, please send an email to butlerandco inc@bellsouth.net.

Housing Market Far From Healthy

The Department of Commerce data shows that building permits fell 8.1 percent in February to the lowest level since the 1960s. Builders broke ground on 479,000 homes, a decline of 22.5 percent over January's numbers. This was the lowest level since April 2009.

Existing-home sales fell 9.6 percent in February to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.88 million following three straight monthly increases. Single-family home sales fell 9.6 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.25 million in February from 4.70 million in January, and are 2.7 percent below the 4.37 million pace in February 2010. Existing condominium and co-op sales dropped 10.0 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 630,000 in February from 700,000 in January, and are 3.1 percent lower than the 650,000-unit level one year ago. Total housing inventory at the end of February rose 3.5 percent to 3.49 million existing homes available for sale, which represents an 8.6-month supply at the current sales pace, up from a 7.5-month supply in January. Distressed homes accounted for a 39 percent market share in February, up from 37 percent in January and 35 percent in February 2010.

Source: Department of Commerce Press Releases

We hope that you have enjoyed this newsletter, but if you haven't and wish to opt out of future issues, please send an email to dawnatbutlerandcoi@bellsouth.net with your name or organization.