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Third-generation timber farmer sees the forest for the trees

A PUBLICATION OF THE MISSISSIPPI FARM BUREAU® FEDERATION





Foresting FOR THE FUTURE

Story by
CINDY WHITT

THIRD-GENERATION TIMBER FARMER SEES THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

Mississippi is home to 19.2 million acres of forestland with 77% of that land owned by private or nonindustrial landowners. Shugana Williams is part of that majority and the next generation of Mississippi forestry landowners.

In 2017, Williams inherited 165 acres of land in Wayne County

from her father. The property has been in her family since the 1920s when her great-uncle and aunt farmed the land.

“My family is proud that we could be part of the rich forestry industry in Mississippi,” she says. “We’re adding to the culture and the Mississippi agriculture industry.”

She grew up visiting the property and says the land holds many memories for her and her family. She wants to give her two young sons the same experiences and the opportunity to continue her family’s tradition of loving the land.

“We want to build a legacy for them,” she says. “Hopefully, this



Shugana Williams, pictured with her sons, Ethan and Oliver, and her father, Mance Campbell, reforested her family's property near Waynesboro.

will persuade them to get involved in the timber industry to become tree farmers.”

A LEARNING PROCESS

When Williams took ownership of the property, it had not been harvested since she was a child, so it was overgrown with shrubs and volunteer timber – trees that grow on their own instead of being deliberately planted. She needed to clear the land to create a better environment for wildlife and increase the property's overall value, but with a literal forest to tackle, she was overwhelmed and needed help on where to start.

According to the Best Management

Practices for Forestry in Mississippi, harvesting trees is essential to reduce erosion and improve water quality. During harvesting, the trees are cut, processed and transported to a processing facility, and new trees are planted.

Harvesting timber is a big undertaking, but Williams was not deterred. She contacted her county Mississippi State University Extension Service office to learn about the process and find financial resources to help with the project.

Jamie Keith, assistant state conservationist for field operations with the state's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), recommended that she search for a registered forester consultant to help.

Williams contacted Alsworth Phillips Forest Consultants Inc., who were instrumental in educating

her on the harvesting process, including securing bids from logging companies and overseeing the harvest.

“Jamie and the consultant from Alsworth Phillips Forest Consultants Inc. also helped me fill out paperwork to do the cost-sharing program through the Mississippi Forestry Commission,” Williams says.

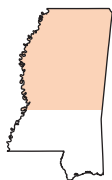
The Forest Resource Development Program provides financial assistance to landowners like Williams to help offset the cost of forestry practices like clear-cutting and replanting after a harvest.

Williams received regular updates from the forester throughout the harvesting process, which took about two years. Of the 165 acres of timber, 135 acres were harvested. State regulations prevented the clear-cutting of the remaining 30 acres near a stream to protect the

FOREST FACTS

19.2M

forested acres in Mississippi



62% of the state's total land area is in forested acres.

62K FORESTRY-RELATED JOBS IN MISSISSIPPI

\$13.1 billion industry in forestry and forest products



OWNER TYPES:

77% private, nonindustrial

16% government

7% corporate

Sources: Mississippi Forestry Association, Mississippi Forestry Commission and Mississippi State University

Mississippi was the first state to establish a reforestation tax credit.

The Mississippi Forestry Association and partners worked to increase the tax credit's lifetime limit to **\$75,000**.

deer and squirrels. She regularly visits the property with her family to check on its growth.

"My father and I visit to see how the timber is growing. And it's great when we go there and see the different animal tracks," she says. "The trees are contributing to the wildlife on the property."

When the project was completed, the Mississippi Forestry Commission gave Williams a stewardship plan to help her maintain the property. The program was developed in 1991 to help private landowners manage and maintain their land with detailed information on keeping their property healthy and productive.

For someone like Williams, who was new to tree harvesting, the state's resources helped her ensure her family's property would last for future generations.

"I'm grateful that I was able to participate and that my children can become part of it," she says. "I hope they can learn about forestry, the value of timber and farming, and build a future." ◀

vegetation and animals in the area.

After harvest, the soil needs to be primed for planting. Following state environmental best practices, the land was burned to remove logging residue, and chemical herbicides were applied to prevent unwanted vegetation from taking root.

MAINTAINING THE LAND

Loblolly pines, one of the most common trees in the state, existed on the property before harvest. Williams had the species replanted because it is adaptable to various sites and grows quickly. Loblolly pines also provide seed for birds and a habitat for quail,

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