



Mississippi has abundant natural resources—from the \$16 billion in economic value from forestry, forest products, wildlife, and fisheries industries and resources to the 18.6 million acres of forestland and 14,000 miles of streams, rivers and creeks. The forests, rivers, streams, and natural areas are a rich heritage and tradition, which we pass on to future generations.

The importance and prominence of natural resources has changed over the past 50 years. In 1954, when the School of Forest Resources was created, forest resources were studied as a commodity.

Over the years, we have seen a shift in the value and emphasis of natural resources. Throughout the past 50 years, scientists and exceptional students have brought national and international recognition to the College of Forest Resources. The college and center have boosted economic development of Mississippi's natural resources—the commodity—but also promoted the state's environmental integrity.

Because of these achievements, Mississippians appreciate that the state's economic stability depends heavily on a healthy forest resource. However, like politics, economics can make for strange bedfellows.

When forestry research began at Mississippi State, the economic value of land was appraised primarily on its ability to produce timber. In those days, no one would believe that whitetail deer in the future could add \$400 or more per acre to the value of land. Today the land's ability to produce whitetail deer or turkeys may have greater weight than that of timber in determining its monetary value in many geographic areas. Other recreational values contribute significantly to its appraised value.

Consequently, today's research includes an array of topics from timber production to recreation and environmental impacts. Accordingly, natural resources research has become multifaceted, with a team approach. Scientists in all three departments—forestry, forest products, and wildlife and fisheries—work together for the betterment of the environment and natural resource management. Scientists in the Forest and Wildlife Research Center are achieving breakthroughs on several fronts: rice fields for waterfowl, row crops and fence rows for quail, and forests for fiber, recreation and water quality.

Engineered wood holds great promise for utilization of small-diameter trees. Research in spatial technology has created county-level timber resource information that will attract new forestry-related industries and enhance existing ones. Research

in agroforestry is attracting considerable attention from landowners who want to manage for multiple resources. The research program in the Forest and Wildlife Research Center represents a good balance in research needs for industry, private landowners and public agencies. Economics dictates full and responsible use of ecosystems.

Quality research and education have revealed landmarks that will continue to guide us as we go beyond the horizon.

Aldo Leopold, considered the father of wildlife ecology, once said, "Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land. Harmony with land is like harmony with a friend; you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left." This land ethic is being embraced by society, and our culture is demanding strong input into the management of natural resources, like never before. Those who work in natural resources, have always had a love for the land and a desire to conserve our resources even in a commodity-driven world. For perhaps the first time in history, scientists are working together to determine how to grow the best trees, create habitat for wildlife, and get the highest value from the timber, all at the same time.

Funding will follow society's demand for holistic solutions to environmental problems. Alternative land uses that emphasize optimization over maximization of land values will be increasingly in vogue. Multidisciplinary research opportunities and funding will follow Leopold's land ethic. Yes, economics will make for nontraditional, if not strange, bedfellows. How do we prepare for future research and education in natural resources considering society's demands? First, leadership in the university must have a clear, strong vision for natural resources. Natural resources are too important to this state and to future generations to not have a well-defined path. Secondly, natural resource research and education in the university must have focus. Quality research and education have revealed landmarks that will continue to guide us as we go beyond the horizon.

We have made great strides in natural resources conservation in the past 50 plus years of our history as a professional program at Mississippi State University. To address the challenges that face us in the decades ahead we must engage in communication as never before. We must tie our issues to the most pressing issues facing society. We must pass our natural resources on to future generations with pride in a job well done. We have a tremendous opportunity to become a world class leader in natural resource education and research. Let's make a difference.

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