



# MANAGEMENT

## Key to Keeping Forestland in the Family

**By Karen Brasher**

Family forests are disappearing at the rate of nearly 4 acres a minute, according to a recent survey by the U.S. Forest Service.

While urban sprawl explains some of the disappearance, much of the problem is a lack of proper forest management skills.

As the current generation of forestland owners passes land to their heirs, that generation is not prepared to manage the land, said Andy Londo, research and extension professor in the Mississippi State University Department of Forestry.

"A forest management plan is key to saving money, increasing profits and decreasing taxes on family forests," Londo said.

The Pinchot Institute for Conservation, along with the U.S. Forest Service, recently completed a survey of the next generation of family forestland owners and found that heirs who will inherit the land are often professionals living far away, have weak bonds to the land and have little involvement in management of family forests.

To combat this apparent knowledge gap and save family forests, the MSU Extension Service has produced a publication to help landowners manage their family forest.

"With over 300,000 private landowners managing nearly 19 million acres, the publication, *Managing the Family Forest in Mississippi*, is timely," Londo said.

Funded by a grant from the Mississippi Forestry Commission, the publication features the importance of management planning, best management practices, hardwood and pine management, forest economics, taxation, harvest and marketing.

"To many landowners, forest management means only managing for timber production," Londo said. "However, in its broadest sense, forest management includes aesthetic values, wildlife, water quality and just enjoyment of owning timberland."

Landowners must manage their forests for the values most important to them so that they get the maximum benefits from their property, Londo added. The publication assists landowners in developing a management plan, beginning with determining their individual objectives.

"A management plan is like a road map," Londo said. "If you go on a trip without a map or directions, you may eventually reach your destination; however, most of the time you take a few wrong turns along the way."

Similarly, landowners who conduct management activities without a plan can often make costly wrong turns or mistakes that will take years to overcome, Londo added. Timber is a valuable commodity, and landowners cannot afford to ignore the importance of properly managing their forestland. The publication also provides numerous contacts to help landowners along the way.

"Landowners can get assistance through a variety of state agencies, professional foresters and forestry organizations," Londo said. "For instance, the Mississippi Forestry Commission, through the Forest Stewardship Program, can produce management plans for landowners."

"We want this publication to provide landowners with up-to-date information that will help them manage their forests responsibly," Londo added.

While reading the publication will not make landowners professional forest managers, it will help them understand what professionals recommend and why. Hopefully, the publication will help forests stay in the family and ease the transition for new forestland owners, Londo said. *Managing the Family Forest in Mississippi* is available through county Extension offices.