

# Another Conservation Success Story...

## Stephens County, Georgia

March 2008

### Owens Farm: A Tradition of Conservation

Ken Owens has been farming all of his life. His grandfather owned a farm and when he was about 12 years-old, his late father, Talmadge Owens, moved his family to their current location. Talmadge was big in providing a habitat for the wildlife through conservation means and Ken is carrying on his father's traditions. Ken's son, Houston, at age 16, is showing cattle from the Owens cattle farm with the Future Farmers of America .

The Owens farm is currently in a trust owned and run by the Owens; Ken, Glenn (his brother) and Mary (his mother). They also raise cattle on other parts of their land which includes their grandfather's old farm.

But these traditions were in danger all because of a small bug called the Pine Beetle. In 1997 the Pine Beetle infested the Owens tree farm killing all of the pines. "Some of the pines were over 50 years old," said Owens. They tried to save the pines through spot cutting but it was too late and they had to clear-cut.

The clear-cutting left the land exposed to the weather and over time the rain starting eroding the land. The road that the loggers used to haul out the logs had become filled with ruts from the rain. The rain was also washing away the top soil effecting the growth of some of the newly planted loblolly pines.

The Owens tried to handle the erosion problem but they were not having a lot of success. Then one day the Management Forester, Gregg Jameson intervened. "I approached Mr. Owens about his roads one day. Several of them were on steep slopes and some of them were damaged and eroding after the timber harvest and site preparation for replanting. I was familiar with the Broad River 319 project and asked if he would be willing to work on bettering the erosion problem on his roads. He responded 'Let's do it.'," said Jameson.

"The North Fork Broad River 319 Project is a cost share program made possible by the Clean Water Act, Section 319," said Russell Biggers, district conservationist for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Services. "The project was a 60/40 cost share; with 60



A broad base dip located at a critical point along the road moves the rain water off the road.



Turkeys take flight from the food plot that use to be a logging deck area. In the background to the left is one of the roads that was repaired by putting down fabric and rock. Owens said, "It was a quagmire before it was repaired."

percent from a grant and 40 percent by the landowners," said Nianne Mullis, project coordinator, Chestatee-Chattahoochee Resource Conservation & Development Council in Demorest.

This work involved moving one of the steep roads, putting broad base dips at critical points along the roads to move the rain water off the road and into the field of trees, laying down rock on the roads to help stop wash out, putting broad base dips throughout the hill side to help stop the water from washing off the top soil and filling in the local creek that feeds a pond on his neighbors property and seeded the land so grasses would grow.

The wildlife habitat is of major concern to the Owens and they did not leave them out of their plans. "We took the logging deck areas and turned them into food plot areas for the wildlife," said Owens.

Biggers has worked with the Owens for a long time and believes that they are stewards of the land. "I have worked with the Owens' close to twenty years with conservation practices on their land. At one time Mr. Talmadge Owens served as a District Supervisor. The Owens have always been willing to take some land out of crop production and manage it for wildlife," said Biggers.

"We have always been connected to the Natural Resource Conservation Service as long as I can remember. Everyone has been great to work with and very knowledgeable about the programs," said Owens



Because of their concern for and work with conservation, the Owens Farm was selected as the 1,000,000 acre of land in Georgia's Forest Steward Program in 2003. Ken Owens proudly stands next to the sign.

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Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D  
706-894-1591

 **Natural Resources Conservation Service**  
706-779-2134

Stephens County Soil And Water Conservation District