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November 2006 FEATURED ARTICLES

Recovering from the Storm

Devastation from Katrina Brings Positive Change

By Julie A. Best

It has been over a year now since Hurricane Katrina; and before that Hurricanes Ivan and Dennis, came through Alabama wrecking havoc with many Alabama forests. How does one manage such a tangled mess of trees? Brewton resident Dr. Salem Saloom, a retired general surgeon who owns land in Conecuh County, tells his story.

Dr. Saloom says, "We had extensive damage from recent hurricanes—Ivan, Dennis, and Katrina. We own 1181 acres that we manage for wildlife and timber and lease another 644 for hunting. The day after the storm, I called a friend, who is also my next-door neighbor and a logger, and I talked with my consultant forester. I got commitments from these individuals that they would help me.



Dr. Saloom, right, talks frequently with his local NRCS district conservationist Walker Williams to keep abreast of Federal programs that could help him achieve his forest management goals.



Hurricane damage left acres of timber on the ground on Conecuh County property owned by Dr. Salem Saloom.

“After the storm, I went to the forest. There were places where I couldn’t even walk it was so badly damaged. We had acres of timber on the ground. We started working to clear some timber out and to salvage it. We worked for about a month. Because of all the storm damage, timber companies cut prices. At that time, the forester thought it best to hold off and to see if prices would go up. That was in November/December of 2004.

“We came back in July and did the rest of the clean up in about four additional months. We salvaged a lot of timber. Of course, there were lots of places where we couldn’t get any timber out, especially in the bottomland that was wet. We worked hard to get all this damaged timber out and cleaned up.

“Since that time, we made a decision that in some plots we did not have enough stems per acre left to manage. So, out of 1181 acres, we clear cut 136 acres. We site prepped in the fall of 2005, and in January 2006, we replanted all of that 136 acres in longleaf.”

A timber loss of the magnitude described by Dr. Saloom is devastating. There are federal programs available to assist with the effort. USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), through a special provision of the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program, had cost-share funds available to help clean-up the downed timber, to create fire lanes, and to prescribe burn the downed debris as a result of damage from Hurricanes Katrina and Dennis. The purpose of the EWP program is to undertake emergency measures to safeguard lives and property from floods, drought, and the products of erosion on any watershed whenever fire, flood or any other natural occurrence is causing or has caused a sudden impairment of the watershed. The downed timber in forests as a result of recent hurricanes has created a potential fire hazard for Alabama. The EWP cost-share assistance was to be used to help alleviate that potential problem.

Dr. Saloom was proactive in getting the clean-up effort under way. He says, “When you see something like the devastation of the hurricanes, you think, this will never be as nice as it was. But, you have to move away from that thought and just understand that it is a time for re-creation. That has been my motive. My motive was to make it better than it has been. The hurricanes just gave me another opportunity to do that.”

Dr. Saloom tells an interesting sideline to the hurricane devastation. “We have had a cabin on our forest property for about 20 years. Over the years, we have added and rebuilt this cabin. We had nine longleaf pines fall in our yard at our home in Brewton. The hurricane put three of them on the house. When it came time to clean that up, we cut them into 16’ logs, got a portable sawmill in and cut the logs into lumber suitable for building. We have just finished adding another room on the cabin with that timber, including two porches. There was also a lot of cedar on the property destroyed by the hurricanes. I have cut the cedar, collected it, and taken it to a sawmill where it has been cut up into lumber, dried, planed and V-grooved, and the new room is finished with the cedar.”



After cleaning up the downed timber, the land was site prepped and replanted.



Instead of focusing on all the negatives of the storm, Dr. Saloom chose to focus on the possibilities. "I have been wanting to plant longleaf pine and have admired the way longleaf performs in terms of all the positive benefits and the character of the wood, its resistance to southern pine beetle infestation as well as the quality of lumber and poles that is produced. It is also more resistant to wind damage as compared to loblolly and slash. Our property is a natural longleaf site. The storm damage gave me an opportunity to start changing over from loblolly to longleaf.

**With a positive attitude, Dr. Saloom used
downed timber to add on to the forest cabin.**

"Before the storms, the land was about 1-2 percent open land, including roads and food plots. It has been our intention to have the land in 5 percent open land to provide

better habitat for turkeys. The hurricanes opened up more land and gave us an opportunity to make larger food plots and larger wildlife openings as well as planting longleaf in a spacing that would be conducive to further wildlife habitat improvement."

Dr. Saloom says his local NRCS office keeps him informed of cost-share programs that could be beneficial to him. He says, "I make a point to talk to my NRCS office frequently and stay in touch with my local district conservationist. Consequently, I know about the cost-share programs that will be beneficial to us."

Dr. Saloom, like many Alabama forest landowners, lost a lot of timber as a result of recent hurricanes. Instead of focusing totally on the negative, he has chosen to take a positive attitude, to salvage what he could, to clean-up the rest, and to create a situation that has the potential to be better than it was before the storms. He would be the first to admit that he has been blessed in life-not only with financial resources, but also with a vision to improve the natural resources that have been entrusted to him.

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