

A Word From The Woods

-by Ray Clifton

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THE PRICE AT THE PUMP AND THE PRICE FROM THE STUMP

I think it's safe to say that the timber supply chain is facing unprecedented challenges in 2022.

The logging world was understandably shocked back in May when Bobby Goodson and his wife Lori announced (on YouTube) that he had decided to shut down his logging business after 37 years.

For those of you who may not know, Goodson was the star of "The Swamp Logger," a TV show that followed his logging business in the swamps of North Carolina. Unlike a lot of other "reality" shows about logging (think "Ax Men"), this show was a fairly accurate depiction of what logging is really like: the attempt to make a profit in a difficult profession in which so many factors are simply beyond control. Things like weather, quotas, breakdowns, fuel costs, labor, and trucking. Goodson faced these challenges with a positive attitude derived from his faith in God and his determination to succeed, and I think that is what made his business and the show popular and successful.

In his announcement, Goodson gave some reasons for his decision. First and foremost was the astronomical increase in the price of diesel fuel. He laid the blame primarily on government policies since the 2020 election, and I think this is something that most of us would agree with. He did not blame the mills – in fact, he acknowledged that his mill customers had reacted with fuel price adjustments much faster than they had in the past in similar circumstances, although some adjustments were still not enough to keep his operation solvent.

There were two things that struck me when I watched the video.

First, Goodson presented **facts**. He discussed how \$5.00/gallon diesel prices had impacted his trucking costs, carefully explaining how expense ratios made it impossible to continue operating, even if he subsidized trucking with the logging side of the business.

Second, both Bobby and Lori emphasized that loggers **can no longer afford to just stay in the woods**. They have to have a voice. Both repeated that all loggers should be actively involved in their logging association and The American Loggers Council. Lori said "They are your voice and need your participation. There is strength in numbers. Work together."

There is truth in both of these points.

If a logger can't provide **facts** (i.e. "at \$5.50/gallon diesel, it costs me an extra \$2,000/week to operate") then his complaints sound like – well, just complaints. *Data* supports arguments for change.

And just as important, one logger here and another there are just "single voices crying in the wilderness." But if a large number of loggers with similar challenges come together, then their individual voices can be the one voice that lead to awareness that real problems exist and practical solutions must be sought.

The Alabama Loggers Council and AFA are "The Voice of Forestry in Alabama." That voice is only effective if your voices are a part of the conversation.

We are currently gathering facts (there's that word again) about the current state of our supply chain in these challenging times. We need to hear from you. Let's have a conversation and seek practical solutions together. Call Joel Moon (256-595-0582) or Ray Clifton (334-703-0218).

Alabama's forest industry is too important to neglect. Let's work together to meet the challenges.

