

# Engaging Private Landowners in White Oak Restoration

by Chris Erwin



Sizemore and Sizemore staff and Auburn University students support the establishment of a white oak seed orchard at the E.V. Smith Research Center.



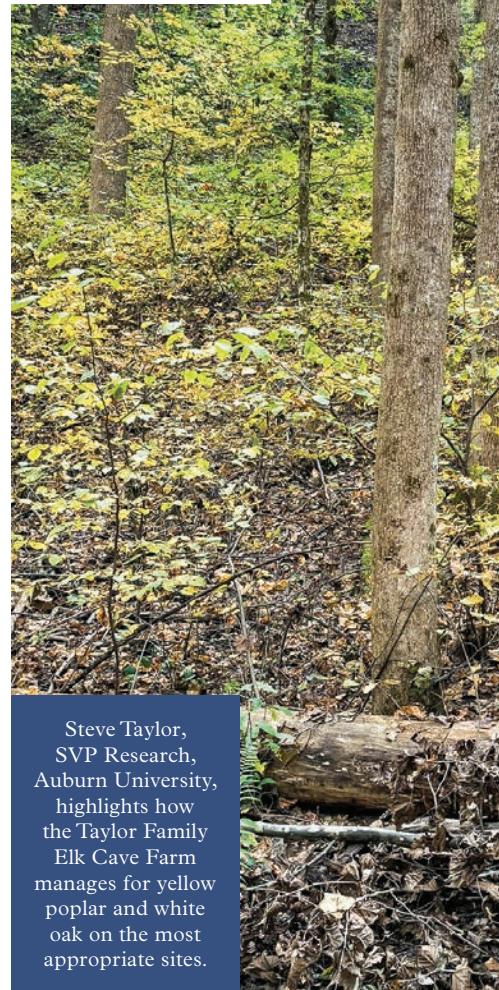
Christopher Will, Central Kentucky Forest Management, discusses recruitment of seedlings into saplings.



White Oak Initiative Board of Directors visit Wallow Hollow Woods in Indiana to learn how they are restoring a historical white oak site.

A few years ago, members from the forest products industry, the spirits industry, universities, state and federal forestry agencies, and nonprofits, worked together to create the White Oak Initiative to address a lack of younger age classes needed to meet the anticipated future demand for white oak. The Initiative worked with the University of Missouri and technology experts at the Timmons Group to identify areas with the greatest potential for successful restoration of white oak. Alabama is one of eleven states identified as the highest potential out of twenty total considered.

As a result of this assessment, the Alabama Forestry Foundation is supporting the White Oak Initiative in a number of ways including participation on its board of directors. In addition, the Foundation coordinated with the University of Kentucky and Auburn University by recruiting 20 volunteers to support the establishment of a seed orchard at the E.V. Smith Research Center near Tallassee.



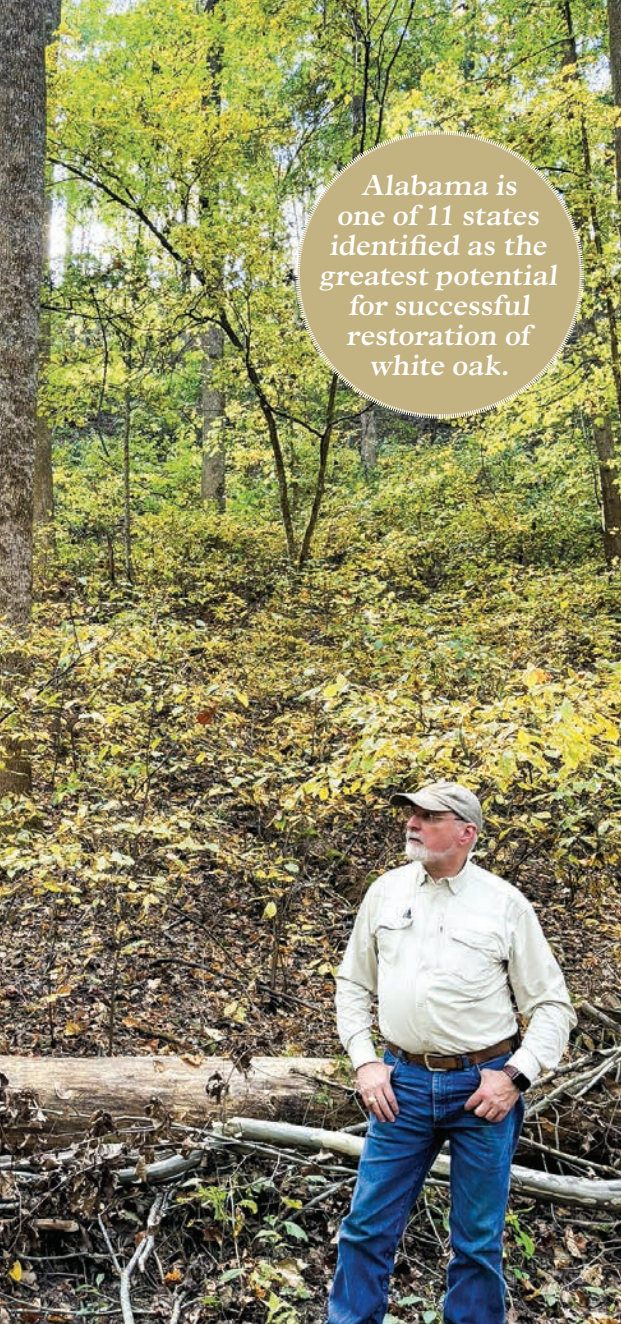
Steve Taylor, SVP Research, Auburn University, highlights how the Taylor Family Elk Cave Farm manages for yellow poplar and white oak on the most appropriate sites.



Scott Taylor, White Oak Initiative Board Member and brother Steve Taylor, SVP of Research at Auburn University.



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Left to Right: Chris Erwin; Alabama Forestry Foundation, Steve and Martha Taylor; Landowners and Auburn University staff, Marie and Scott Taylor; Landowners, and Christopher Will; Central Kentucky Forest Management. The Taylors prepare for the Auburn-Kentucky football game on their farm in Gravel Switch, Kentucky. Marie showcases a special bottle of Redbreast Irish Whiskey with a special label showing it was produced in white oak barrels from the Taylor Family Elk Cave Farm.



Most recently, the Alabama Forestry Foundation was awarded a grant that will support the Alabama Forestry Foundation, Tennessee Forestry Foundation, Kentucky Forest Industries Association, Kentucky Woodland Owners Association, and the White Oak Initiative together in supporting private landowners in learning about how to manage their lands for white oak. This project is supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, USDA NRCS, Altria Group, Brown-Forman, Dendrifund, Jack Daniel's, Woodford Reserve, and Old Forester.

In the range-wide conservation plan, the Initiative identified the highest priority practices to increase the younger age classes including midstory/understory removal, crop tree release, and shelterwood establishment cut. The Alabama Forestry Foundation

has begun hosting events across north Alabama that provide activities like midstory removal through hack and squirt herbicide applications that give landowners hands-on experience with mixing the proper ratio of chemicals, identifying which trees to keep and which to deaden, and building a network of both professionals and landowner peers that can support them. These projects are only available through the generosity of private landowners like Lamar and Felicia Dewberry who hosted 17 landowners on their farm who conducted a midstory removal on a five-acre demonstration site.

To learn more about this initiative and get involved in this project, reach out to Tyler Sibley, Conservation Biologist with the Alabama Forestry Foundation at [tsibley@alaforestry.org](mailto:tsibley@alaforestry.org) or call (334) 481-2155. ▲



Lamar Dewberry looks over his stand of white oak as he sets up a landowner midstory removal activity.