

# BUSINESS and FORESTRY



## Talking Trees

Stephen Butler stands with local landowners on a private road leading to property being harvested for timber near Bladon Springs. Also speaking to the group was local resident Daniel Johnson, who talked about the role of his company (Clarkco Oilfield Services) in ensuring that the road was in good condition for equipment to ensure optimal harvesting. (Photos by Dee Ann Campbell)



Butler talks with landowners about the right time to thin in order to get optimal results.

## Local landowners attend Forestry Field Day near Silas

By Dee Ann Campbell  
Sun-Advocate Publisher

SILAS – “You plant trees to make money,” Stephen Butler of the Mississippi-based company TimberCorp told a group of local landowners who gathered for a Forestry Field Day event in Silas on October 8.

Gathering on a 270-acre tract just south of Highway 84 near Silas, Butler talked to attendees at the 2020 Choctaw County Forestry Field Day about thinning of pine plantations for the best results and the best monetary benefit in the long run.

Landowners were given an overview of reasons to thin their properties, including relief from overcrowding in order to stimulate growth, removal of inferior trees, improvement of spacing, reduction of pine beetle risk, and to enhance wildlife habitat,

as well as to provide the greatest possible income from the property.

He also provided information on when to thin sites for optimal growth and income. Such decisions, he said, were based on the site index (based on the age and height of dominant trees on the site), spacing of trees, average tree size, and other factors.

“The better the site, the faster the trees grow,” he said.

He added that in some areas, property owners may want to thin sooner.

“In the old days, they grew trees until they were 40, 50, 60 years old,” he said, explaining that the site index was then based on an average age of 50 years. “Now, that’s changed to a 35-year base age, and some use 25 years.”

Butler said that the site index for the property where the session was taking place was about 68.

“You want to make sure that your smaller trees are marketable,” he said. “Wait until they are ready before you thin.”

But, he said, don’t wait too long.

“If you don’t thin by age 22, you should forget it,” he later advised. “Just clear cut and start over, depending on your goal. If

wildlife is your goal, it’s different. But if you are an investor, this is true.”

The group also discussed types of thinning, including row thinning, selective thinning, and corridor thinning.

“Most of the time, on hand-planted sites, you can’t follow the timber rows,” he explained. “They cut corridors to come in and cut the trees.”

Butler emphasized the importance of working with a good logger who understood the challenges of the site.

Following questions from the group, Butler discussed timber prices and their effect on getting loggers to cut timber. However, the importance of thinning at the right time overrides the desire to wait for higher prices, he added.

“It’s better to thin, even if you don’t get ‘good’ prices at that time,” he advised.

“Thin as soon as you can,” he said. “By 17, 18, 19 years, the window starts to close. Toward that window, take any price to get it thinned.”

In response to questions about planting different types of timber, Butler said that hardwoods need a very high site index to be worthwhile. He explained that they take longer to grow and potentially years to see results.

“Hardwood is not the answer, unless

you’ve got a good hardwood site,” he said. “Right now, most forestry is focused on pine. Even though prices may be down, the volume makes up for it.”

The group then traveled to property located in the Bladon Springs area to discuss issues related to the use of roads and how it relates to optimal gain from timber sites.

“Roads are critical to timber operations,” Butler said, stating that about \$30,000 had been spent on the road leading to that particular property to get the road in better condition for the operation. What began as an initial bid of just over \$86,000 for timber grew to \$180,000 after the road was repaired and trucks could access the site.

“By spending \$30,000, we made \$93,000,” he said. “We got a good road and 1800 acres is now accessible.”

The event was made possible by the Alabama Forest Owners’ Association, and the Bradley Murphy Forestry and Natural Resources Extension Trust.

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A crew with Tyson Logging, Inc., works in the area near Silas where the Forestry Field Day event was held on October 8.

Coming November 4 in The Choctaw Sun-Advocate

New reports and statistics on the importance of the timber industry in Choctaw County and Alabama.