

Historic Notes on the Oakmulgee Division Of the Talladega National Forest



**Robert G. Pasquill, Jr.
Forest Archeologist / Historian
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of the Talladega National Forest,
National Forests in Alabama**

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Introduction

What we know today as the Oakmulgee Division of the Talladega National Forest came into federal ownership through two separate processes. The eastern portion of the Division, that is, the area east of the Cahaba River, was originally part of the Oakmulgee Purchase Unit. Although the idea of the Oakmulgee Purchase Unit was created at least as early as 1923, the proclamation of the purchase unit did not occur until 1935.

On January 21, 1935, the Oakmulgee Purchase Unit was established by the National Forest Reservation Committee. The purchase unit covered a gross acreage of 280,423 acres. An acquisition program was initiated, and by July 1, 1946, a total of 66,518 acres had been acquired by the federal government. At that time, the acquisition funding was reduced and the acquisition program was halted. On July 17, 1936, the area was established as the Oakmulgee District of the Talladega National Forest by proclamation of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (USDA Forest Service 1947a).

The western portion of the Oakmulgee Division, that is, the portion west of the Cahaba River, was acquired by the federal government through the Resettlement Administration. The Resettlement Administration was one of the “New Deal” programs created by the Roosevelt Administration. It was created by Executive Order 7027, signed by President Roosevelt on April 30, 1935 (Resettlement Administration 1936:1). The Resettlement Administration began acquiring tracts of land in what was called the West Alabama Planned Land Use Demonstration Project. The farm families that had been living on the acquired tracts were relocated to more suitable farm land. In 1937, Congress passed the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenancy Act, creating the Farm Security Corporation which provided long-term, low-interest loans to farmers to buy land. Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace terminated the Resettlement Administration and established the Farm Security Administration, which took over the responsibilities of the Resettlement Administration and administered the Farm Security Corporation’s loan program (Watkins 1999:389).

On May 11, 1938, President Roosevelt issued a proclamation directing that the lands acquired or in the process of acquisition by the Farm Security Administration be set aside as an addition to the Talladega National Forest (USDA Forest Service 1947b). On May 19, 1938, *The Greensboro Watchman* reported that 87,218 acres of the West Alabama Land Use Project had been assigned to the National Forests.

Early Forest Service Descriptions of the Land

In October 1923, William W. Ashe, “Assistant District Forester” out of the Washington Office, wrote a reconnaissance report for land acquisition of the proposed Oakmulgee Purchase Unit. The Oakmulgee Purchase Unit at that time consisted of 73,994 acres. Ashe stated that the land was located in Perry, Chilton and Autauga Counties. The southeastern corner today is actually located in northeastern Dallas County rather than Autauga County (Fig. 1). Ashe reported that “all of the proposed unit has been lumbered. The original forest on the up-land was largely long-leaf pine. This timber has been cut over and the cut-over lands have been repeatedly burned.” Ashe observed, however, that enough of the old trees had been left to serve as seed trees, and that there was a light restocking of young longleaf pine. Shortleaf was also restocking in about 15 percent of the area.

Most of the areas cleared for farming were located down in the alluvial bottoms. In these bottoms, a stand of old timber remained that could be “suitable for sawmilling purposes.” The wide bottoms that had not been cleared for farming were stocked with gum and oak. The old fields were for the most part stocked with sweet gum and shortleaf pine. Approximately 10 percent of the bottoms were in cultivation (Ashe 1923:1-2).

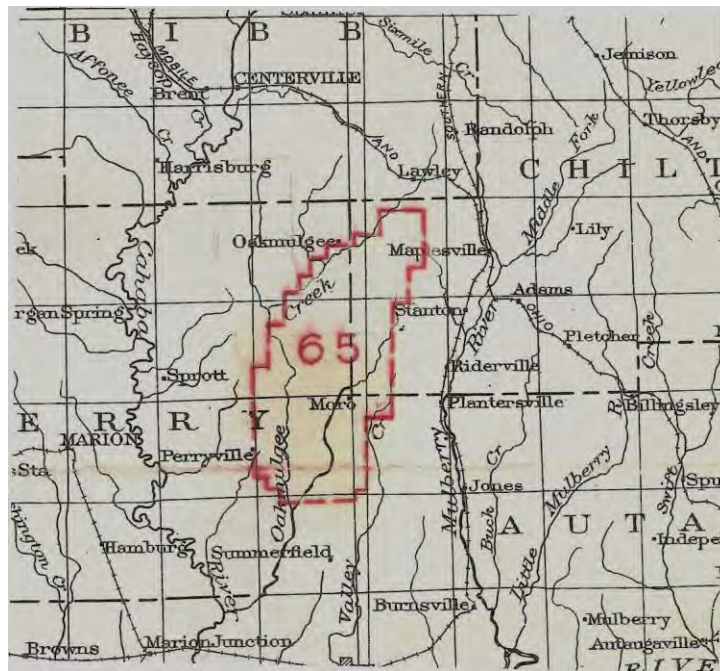


Figure 1. Map of the Proposed Oakmulgee Purchase Unit No. 65, October 1923.

Erosion was identified as a problem throughout the area. Ashe reported “nearly all of the slopes which have been cleared show evidence of excessive soil erosion... much of the soil which had been washed down the hill sides has been deposited on the alluvial.”

There was also a great deal of erosion along the banks of the streams. According to Ashe, one of the main contributing factors to the erosion was frequent fire that had left the soil in many places “practically bare, there being no humus and but little leaf litter.” While the area was not described as mountainous, it was “very broken and consists of low, usually parallel ridges... with their sides much dissected and with the middle slopes often quite steep.” The soils were sandy loams and loams which were easily eroded.

Ashe also reported on the local industries and ownership of the land. Farming was the only local industry at the time of the October 1923 report. The timber had been previously cut out. There was very little timber remaining for sawmilling purposes. Lumbering had been “extensively carried out a few years ago (Ashe 1923:2). The purposed unit was, for the most part, owned by nearby residents, but there were two large tracts that made up a large portion of the unit. The nearby cities of Birmingham, Selma and Marion all contained numerous wood-working plants which would provide excellent markets for building materials. There were no waterpower developments on the proposed purchase unit. Ashe stated that the streams on the unit were too small for waterpower purposes. The proposed purchase unit was of interest to the federal government primarily for the reason of checking the erosion in the area. The eroded soils from the unit were going directly into the Alabama River near the head of navigation.

Ashe concluded his report with some discussion of the value of the land. Since there was so little timber left on the land, he believed the land could be purchased from \$4.00 to \$6.00 an acre. Areas that have been completely cut-over could be purchased for \$3.00 an acre. The farmed bottomlands would be sold at a higher price. The purchase unit, while small in size, was desirable in order to check the erosion. It was also desirable because it was in the longleaf pine region (Ashe 1923:3).

In August 1926, William W. Ashe wrote a reconnaissance report for land acquisition for the proposed Cahaba Purchase Unit, located in Perry, Bibb, Hale, Tuscaloosa and Chilton Counties. The proposed Cahaba Purchase Unit consisted of 220,000 acres in two divisions on either side of the Cahaba River. The area of the 1923 Oakmulgee Purchase Unit was included, although the land on the eastern side of the Cahaba River was nearly doubled in size (Fig. 2).

The proposed Cahaba Purchase Unit was drained by the tributaries of the Cahaba River and Black Warrior River, both navigable streams. The soils in the unit were partly loose and friable and subject to excessive erosion. While acquisition of the unit could have been considered under the Act of March 1, 1911 (Weeks Law), the unit was being proposed under Section 6 of the Act of June 7, 1924 (Clarke-McNary Act) for the purpose of timber production (Ashe 1926:1-2).

Ashe addressed the purchase unit’s capacity for timber production. The entire area had once been forested with longleaf pine with a very small amount of shortleaf pine mixed in across the uplands. There had been some loblolly pine along the streams. Ashe stated that since “the replacement which is taking place is very largely longleaf, the capacity for timber production is based upon the yield of that species.” The original growth of

longleaf pine had reached a height of 85 to 100 feet, with a yield of eight to 12 thousand feet per acre (Ashe 1926:2).

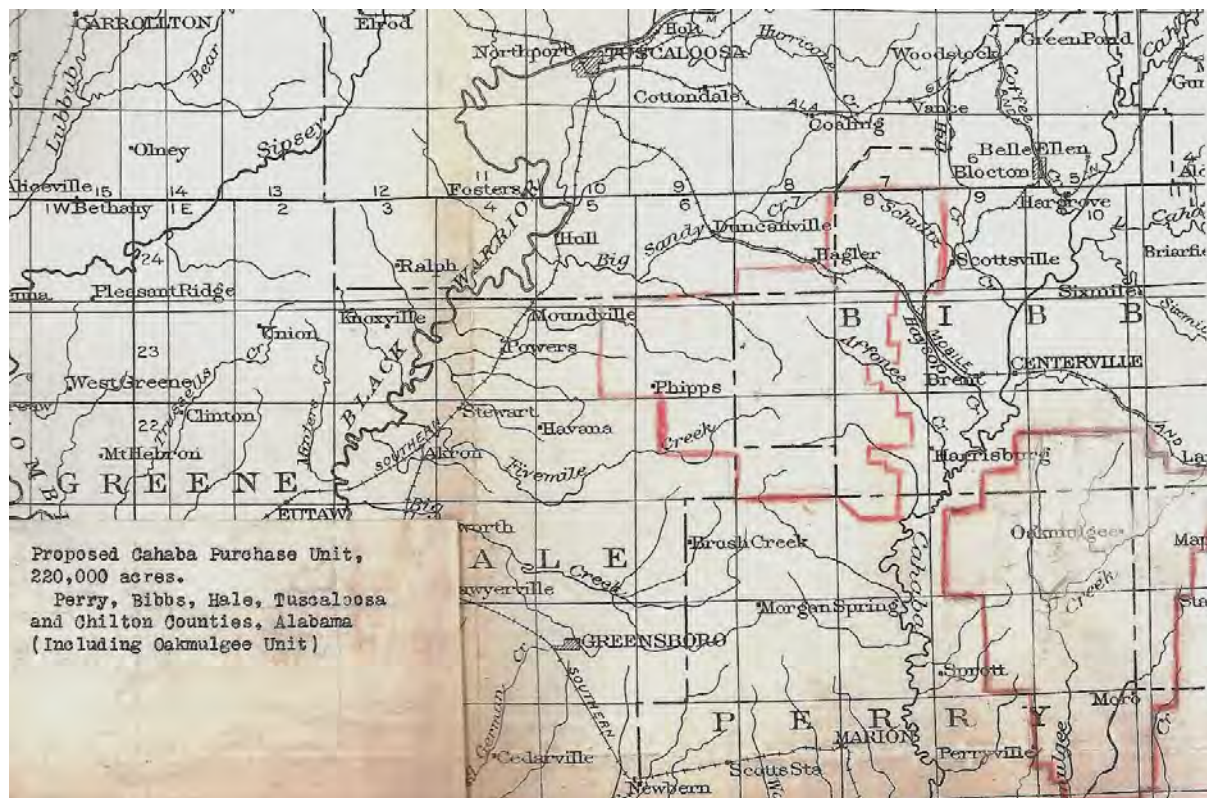


Figure 2. Map of the Proposed Cahaba Purchase Unit, August 1926.

Ashe estimated that about 15 percent of the entire unit was in farms, but that at the present time, only eight percent of the area was cleared and in cultivation at the time of his report in August 1926. Most of the uplands had been cut over or heavily culled. However, in the central and southern portions of the area west of the Cahaba River, there was still a large amount of uncut longleaf pine timber. Most of this remaining longleaf was owned by one company – the Kaul Lumber Company, which at the time of the report was logging the longleaf for its plant near Tuscaloosa. Ashe did not think it was probable that Kaul would desire to sell any large amount of their old timber (Ashe 1926:2-3).

Across the proposed purchase unit the area had been carefully cut over. A number of small trees, eight to 12 inches in diameter, had been left as seed trees with as many as three to eight per acre. They were “fairly uniformly distributed” and aside from occasional fires and damage by livestock, the longleaf pine had re-established itself as seedlings or saplings on more than 30 percent of the cut-over lands.

The eastern division, or Oakmulgee Division, was largely cut-over land owned by the Jackson Lumber Company or Riderwood, Alabama. Mixed in with the Jackson lands

were tracts owned by Ramsey & Oden, formerly the Mineral Land Company, or Birmingham, Alabama. The division contained two ranges of rough hills, trending to the south, separated by the forks of Oakmulgee Creek (Ashe 1926:3).

Although the cut-over lands were bare, Ashe was confident that the longleaf pine would make a recovery. There were enough seed trees on over 80 percent of the upland area to restock the areas in the next 10 to 15 years “if the land is afforded continuous protection against fire.” These seed trees were small trees that would not produce seed for several more years after they were released. Ashe wrote, “Greatly accelerated growth begins almost immediately upon release of these small trees from the competition of the larger trees; and with this renewed vigor there is at once developed a normal capacity for seed production.” There was a considerable amount of scrub oak on the cut-over lands, but Ashe was confident the oak trees would not interfere materially with the restocking of the pine (Ashe 1926:4).

Ashe’s 1926 reconnaissance report included discussion of the transportation network across the western division of the proposed purchase unit. He considered the area as “well provided with transportation facilities.” The main line of the Alabama Great Southern Railroad, running between New Orleans and Birmingham, ran along the western edge of the area. The Moundville Station was only six miles from the proposed unit. The main line of the Mobile & Ohio Railroad, running from Memphis to Montgomery, ran along the northern edge of the area. The Hagler Station was located along the northern edge of the area, and the Eoline Station was located along the eastern edge of the western division (Fig. 2). The Kaul Lumber Company had a main line logging road which traversed the western division from the northwest to the southeast with numerous spurs. The Kaul system was entirely temporary, and expected to be removed once their logging operations were completed. Ashe stated that the old road beds were of little value to future operations due to the erosion in the area, however, the Kaul Lumber Company’s system reached every portion of the area through spurs off of their main line. The area was well suited for railroad logging. The many earthen roads that crossed the area were in poor condition. There was only one highway in a good state of repair. This was the highway from Centreville to Duncanville, and then on to Tuscaloosa (Ashe 1926:5-6).

Ashe listed lumbering, turpentine and farming as the chief industries in the region. While there were some small portable logging mills in operation, owned by farmers, the Kaul Lumber Company dominated the lumbering in the western division. Up to this point in time, only a portion of the longleaf pine had been worked for turpentine prior to being cut. Ashe reported that the Kaul Lumber Company had a large turpentine camp and all of its remaining timber was expected to be turpentine before being logged. The timber was being worked by the cup and gutter system. This system minimized the hazards to the trees from forest fire (Ashe 1926:6).

The Kaul Lumber Company turpentine camp was called “Camp Hugh” and it was located between Tuscaloosa and Pondville just southwest of Keeton Corner, most likely along the main rail line (Figure 3).

The Kaul Lumber Company had built a mill site near Tuscaloosa, Alabama in 1912 called Kaulton. Unlike most temporary logging towns, Kaulton was designed as a clean, attractive community “calculated to attract labor, and also to raise the standard of living, which is to raise efficiency.” White employees lived in five and six room single family dwellings or smaller duplex houses. The houses had kitchens, large rooms with high ceilings, and doors and windows with screens. The workers had access to doctors, a club, bathhouse, ball fields and playgrounds, a school, and a company store. Black employees and their families lived in a separate town about a half mile from Kaulton, with access to similar services to those of the white employees.

In September 1931, John Kaul, the owner of the Kaul Lumber Company, passed away. The operations were taken over by a group of trustees, headed by his son, Hugh Kaul. The timber industry across the South was suffering from the Great Depression. The company’s sales were hurt by the economic collapse and timber production was in decline. In October 1931, the Kaulton mill ceased operations, and the Kaul Land and Lumber Company was dissolved. The Kaul Lumber Company still owned large tracts of land, and continued to operate out its offices in Birmingham, Alabama.
<http://www.bplonline.org/Archives/collections/industry/kaullumbercompany.asp>
 8/16/2006).

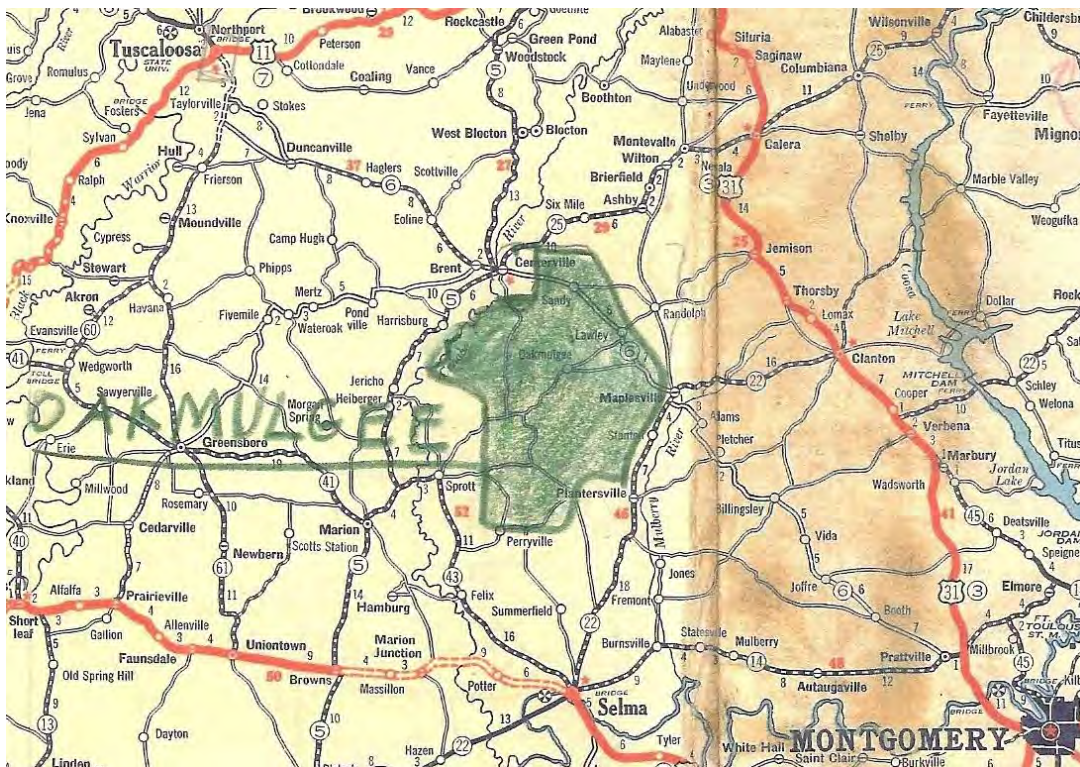


Figure 3. 1934 Texaco Road Map, Alabama and Georgia, Camp Hugh can be found between Duncanville and Pondville.

Camp Hugh's post office was opened from 1913 to 1931, (<http://postalhistory.com> 8/16/2006). According to an on-line genealogical database, John Culpepper registered for the military draft at the age of 18 on September 12, 1918. According to the draft records, Culpepper was a "Negro, Turpentine laborer at Kaul Lumber Co." His address was given as "Camp Hugh, Bibb Co." Alabama. His nearest relative, Annie Mae Culpepper, also lived at the camp (<http://gen.culpepper.com/archives/al/bibb.htm> 8/16/2006).

The farms in the area were of small to medium sized, worked in most cases by the owners. While some of the farmers showed evidence of prospering, Ashe observed that the general area was not adapted to profitable farming. In spite of this, there were few abandoned farms in the area, and a considerable area in "new ground." Ashe took this as evidence of the farming being extended (Ashe 1926:6-7).

In the western division, there were very few "scattered forties." In other words, there were very few small farms. The vast majority of the land was owned by Kaul Lumber. In addition to the landholdings of the Kaul Lumber Company, which held a total of 59,010 acres in the western division, the land along the Big Sandy Creek were owned by the Big Sandy Iron and Steel Company. At the time of Ashe's 1926 report, these lands had been recently cut-over. Ashe also reported that a portion of this land contained coal beneath the surface (Ashe 1926:7-8).

In the eastern division, or the area on the eastern side of the Cahaba River, the Jackson Lumber Company and Ramsay and Oden of Birmingham, Alabama had extensive holdings. Much of the land in the southern and western edges of the eastern division was owned by the Black Warrior Lumber Company of Demopolis, Alabama. The other lands within the eastern division were owned by farmers or other landowners, but their individual holdings were not larger than one or two sections (square miles). Ashe stated that 85 percent of the eastern division could be acquired without encroaching upon the farms (Ashe 1926:8).

Ashe's recommendations in his 1926 reconnaissance report were that the proposed Cahaba Purchase Unit should be considered for acquisition under the Clarke-McNary Act. The unit had the capacity for timber production. The soils were such that successful farming was not a possibility. The land in the unit was considered "a permanent forest type." The general accessibility of the area, the transportation systems, and the favorable conditions for restocking were all supporting factors. Within a few years seed trees would be available. Ashe recommended that the unit be presented to the National Forest Reservation Commission for approval as a purchase unit (Ashe 1926:8).

In September 1934, another reconnaissance report was submitted to the National Forest Reservation Commission. This report, covering the proposed Oakmulgee Purchase Unit, that is, the land on the eastern side of the Cahaba River, was written by Wingate I. Stevens, Regional Forest Inspector. The purchase unit was approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission on January 21, 1935.

According to Stevens, there were in Alabama “a number of large areas of forest land which should be in public ownership to assure proper protection and satisfactory future yields of wood products.” The proposed Oakmulgee Purchase Unit had been cut over and had received very little protection from forest fires. It was highly unlikely that the area would receive the proper protection and management for satisfactory production under private ownership. The idea of the area becoming a National Forest had the support of both Senator Bankhead and Alabama State Forester Bunker (Stevens 1934:1).

The boundaries of the unit had been laid out to include the maximum of cut-over lands, submarginal farmland, and areas that were best suited for forest production. The areas that were well-suited for farming were avoided. The Cahaba River was made the boundary on the western edge of the unit to include as many large tracts of cut-over land as possible. Along the river were many small tracts and small farms. These areas were excluded from the proposed purchase area. Additional areas in northwestern Hale County, southwestern Bibb County, and parts of Greene, Pickens and Tuscaloosa counties were to be considered as a separate purchase unit at a later time (Stevens 1934:2).

The lands adjacent to the proposed Oakmulgee Purchase Unit were considered good farmlands, and it was recommended that they remain in agriculture. However, Stevens stated that the lands immediately south of the unit in Dallas County contained a high percentage of submarginal land. Stevens suggested that it might be advisable to acquire more farmland at a later date (Stevens 1934:2).

Stevens described the area as having been cut over twice since logging operations had begun in the area in 1880. A high percentage of the area had been burned frequently enough that the desired species were not adequately restocking. Stevens was optimistic that pine and poplar would do well and grow rapidly in the area once fire was controlled. There was also a small amount of loblolly pine in the area that would “bring about a fairly good income within a short time.” Whereas none of the area was classified as “unproductive,” Stevens thought that within 40 years the area would begin to give excellent financial returns. Under proper management, every acre within the proposed purchase unit could produce excellent timber stands (Stevens 1934:2).

Stevens also observed that there was a great deal of land in the State of Alabama with similar forest growth. Acquisition of the Oakmulgee Purchase Unit would provide an opportunity through the demonstration to promote a widespread interest in proper forest management. There was also an opportunity to demonstrate methods of soil erosion control. The soils in the counties of the purchase unit were subject to severe sheet erosion, and in the more hilly area, subject to gully erosion. There were excellent opportunities to work cooperatively with the Soil Erosion Service. Stevens also noted that there would be no need to cooperate with Homestead Projects, one of the many facets of the Resettlement Administration. The area was sparsely populated and there were no abandoned lumber or mining towns within the purchase unit which had stranded families (Stevens 1934:2).

Stevens' report included a description of the transportation system and accessibility of the area. The Southern Railroad line ran along the eastern side of the unit and also crossed from Selma to Demopolis about ten miles south of the unit. The Mobile & Ohio Railroad, running from Tuscaloosa to Montgomery ran across the northern part of the unit. The longest haul distance from anywhere in the unit out to a railroad loading point would not exceed 18 miles (Stevens 1934:2-3).

The unit was also surrounded by improved graveled highways. These graveled highways were drivable at all times of the year, wet or dry. The nearest hard surfaced highway was Highway 31, running between Birmingham and Montgomery, which was located approximately 15 miles from the eastern edge of the unit. Within the unit, the roads between the small communities were considered good. The back roads within the unit were poor in wet weather, but could be traveled by truck and auto throughout the year (Stevens 1934:3).

Stevens' 1934 report also included a general history of the area. According to Stevens, the early agriculture of the area was self sustaining through the mid-19th century. Just before the Civil War, better and nearer markets were responsible for an increase in cotton production, which was raised as a money crop. Crop rotation was not practiced at that time, resulting in soil deterioration and abandonment of old fields. By 1934, farmers were rotating crops and using fertilizer. Very little new land had been cleared in the previous 20 years. However, erosion and bad management had caused the abandonment of many farms, and there were still many badly eroded areas under cultivation in 1934. These eroded patches were $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ acre in size. Stevens stated that the eroded areas could be reforested within five years.

There had been little manufacturing in the area, either before or after the Civil War, other than home spinning. Cotton was shipped to manufacturing centers. When the cotton production increased and the population increased in the surrounding areas, textile mills moved closer to the source of the cotton. By 1934, the larger towns in the surrounding area had textile mills and manufacturing plants.

Lumbering had begun in the area around 1880. The primary logging company was the E.E. Jackson Company, which had operated over the entire area, eastern side of the Cahaba River, from 1888 until the end of the First World War. During this time, most of the proposed Oakmulgee Purchase Unit was cut over twice, and in some places, three times. The E.E. Jackson Company brought the timber to large mills by logging railroads and trams. By 1934, the logging operations were smaller, and a number of small portable mills were scattered across the area. The timber was hauled to these small portable mills using trucks and teams. According to Stevens, the smaller logging operations had even begun to take pulp wood out of the area (Stevens 1934:3-4).

In describing the cover conditions, Stevens reported that the original stand of timber across the unit had been primarily long leaf pine with stands of hardwoods in the bottoms and on moist slopes. Stevens had interviewed an "old surveyor and logger who operated over most of the area during the late [18] eighties and until about 1900," who estimated

that the “original” forest cover was made up of longleaf pine (50%), shortleaf pine (8%), loblolly pine (4), and hardwoods including chestnut (38%). By the time of Steven’s report in 1934, there had been a large increase in the percentage of shortleaf pine and loblolly pine. The pines, which made up eighty percent of the total, consisted of longleaf (25%), shortleaf (30%), and loblolly (25%). The hardwoods, making up twenty percent of the total, consisted of oaks (7%), yellow poplar (3%), gums (6%), and others (4%). The oak species consisted of white oaks, red oaks, black oak, and a small amount of Spanish and water oak. Under the category of “other” were included additional hardwood species, including hickory, elm, ash, sycamore, beech, birch, and maple. Stevens considered the beech, birch and maple as being of “poor quality and unimportant.” The chestnut had vanished (Stevens 1934:6-7).

The Oakmulgee Purchase Unit, 1935

The Oakmulgee Purchase Unit of the Talladega National Forest was established by the National Forest Reservation Committee on January 21, 1935. The purchase unit contained a total of 280,423 acres. The purchase unit delineated the gross area that land acquisition could be conducted. Land acquisition activities began immediately (USDA Forest Service 1946).

On February 21, 1935, *The Marion Times-Standard* reported that the government was planning to buy a “huge acreage here for reforestation.” A preliminary survey was under way which would lead to the purchase of more than 280,000 acres of timber lands in Perry, Hale and Chilton counties for reforestation purposes. The survey had begun that week under the direction of M.E. Brashears, the party chief for the U.S. Forest Service. Mr. Brashear was quoted as stating that suitable key plats were being obtained and that other cut-over lands would be added later. The huge tract of government land would eventually become part of a National Forest.

On March 28, 1935, *The Marion Times-Standard* reported that R.E. Rae, U.S. Forest Service party chief, had announced that a permanent National Forest was to be established in the area with probably headquarters in Marion, if a sufficient amount of land was offered for sale at a reasonable price. Mr. Rae and his crew of engineers were examining the timber lands which had been offered for sale east of the Cahaba River between Plantersville and Centreville. The article requested that anyone having land that they wished to sell to the government should contact Mr. Rae, who had established temporary offices in Marion.

The Oakmulgee District, Talladega National Forest, 1936 - 1942

On July 17, 1936, the area was established as the Oakmulgee District of the Talladega National Forest by presidential proclamation. On June 4, 1941, the National Forest Reservation Committee approved the acquisition of an additional 11,520 acres in the

southern end of the district. By July 1, 1946, a total of 66,518 acres had been acquired by the Forest Service (USDA Forest Service 1946).

On September 16, 1937, *The Marion Times-Standard* announced that the District Ranger of the Oakmulgee District would be giving a series of radio programs under the title of “The Forest Service, Need, Origin, Organization, Expansion, Activities, Your Forest, Your Fault, Your Loss.” The programs were to be aired on Station WHBB in Edgeworth, Selma, Alabama. The first program, “Need” was to be discussed by Orion J. Peevey, in charge of the Oakmulgee District.

The article went on to further explain that the Forest Service was a comparatively new thing in the area, only having been in place for two years. Since its establishment, much work had been done on the construction of roads, lookout towers, picnic grounds, and in the prevention of forest fires. A considerable amount of land had been acquired by government for the protection of watersheds and growing of timber, “which is essential for the continuance of a civilization.” A total of eight radio programs were planned. It was hoped that the programs would answer any questions the public may have about the Forest Service. The public was also invited to send any questions to the Oakmulgee District, care of Station WHBB, or to a mail box address in Selma.

On May 15, 1938, *The Tuscaloosa Times* reported that the Agricultural Department had announced the transfer of the 87,000 acre West Alabama land use project from the Resettlement Administration to the United States Forest Service. The Resettlement Administration was being liquidated. The badly eroded and burned over land, located in Bibb, Hale, Perry and Tuscaloosa counties, was being converted into a forest, game refuge and recreation area.

With the transfer of the land use project lands, the Oakmulgee Ranger District nearly doubled in size. The transfer of land and facilities would take place over the next two fiscal years, finishing in Fiscal Year 1940.

On October 6, 1938, *The Marion Times-Standard* announced that the “Forestry Service” would be granting hunting permits to Perry County hunters. According to District Forest Ranger Cecil E. Clapp, “in charge of all National Forest lands in Bibb, Chilton, Dallas, Perry, Hale and Tuscaloosa Counties,” permits would be issued to persons desiring to hunt on the Government-owned land. Hunters also needed to purchase the regular county or state hunting license. The permit could be acquired by writing to Ranger Clapp, care of “The U.S. Forest Service, Selma” or by contacting any of the Forest Service tower men or other field men.

According to the article, the only area on the forest that was not open to hunters was the newly-established game refuge, consisting of 60,000 acres, located in the center of the area formerly under the supervision of the Resettlement Administration in Hale, Tuscaloosa, Bibb and Perry Counties. The boundaries of the game refuge were in the process of being posted by the Alabama Department of Conservation at the time of the article.

On July 12, 1940, *The Tuscaloosa News* announced that Lake Margaret was open to Alabama's fishermen. The lake had officially opened for fishing on July 1, 1940. According to State Conservation Commission Dr. Walter B. Jones, it was reported that 2,000 pounds of bream and bass were taken by 203 anglers on the first day the lake was opened to the public.

The West Alabama Resettlement Administration Program, 1935 - 1938

The Resettlement Administration (RA) was a "New Deal" program created by Executive Order 7027, signed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on April 30, 1935. The executive order was signed under the authority vested in the President by the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935. Rex G. Tugwell, the Under Secretary of Agriculture, was the director (Resettlement Administration 1936:1).

The Resettlement Administration consisted of four programs. The Land Use Program was the first phase. Its purpose was to take some 10 million acres of submarginal land out of crop production and convert it to its best use. In 1930, there were 100 million acres of submarginal land, with 650,000 families living on this land. By 1936, the Lands Utilization Division of the Resettlement Administration had purchased 9.5 million acres of submarginal land across the country. This land was to be converted to parks, wildlife refuges, or converted back to grasslands. The land improvement projects would create jobs for the stranded families living on the submarginal land, as well as people on the relief rolls. By 1936, more than 55,000 people had been employed (Resettlement Administration 1936:2).

The Resettlement Program was the second phase of the RA. Its object was to provide adequate homes and farmlands for the people living on the submarginal land being purchased. With the money received from the purchase of their lands by the government, these families would be moved to better farming locations. Families needing assistance in relocation would be helped by the Rural Resettlement Division. There were two general types of resettlement projects. The "infiltration type" consisted of adjacent farms in existing farm districts. The "group-settlement" consisted of adjacent farms with certain community services being provided, such as schools and canneries. In most cases the farms were leased, and after a trial period, sold to the new settlers with long-term loans (Resettlement Administration 1936:2-3).

The Rehabilitation Program, the third phase of the Resettlement Administration, represented an emergency aspect of the work. Its purpose was to reestablish the credit of the indigent farmer on suitable farmland by making small loans, granting funds in emergency situations for subsistence needs, and providing voluntary arbitration in farm debt cases to aid creditors and debtors in adjusting their financial difficulties. The loans allowed the farmer to replace the working capital that had been wiped out by the depression (Resettlement Administration 1936:3-4).

The Suburban Program was the fourth phase of the Resettlement Administration. It consisted of building communities on the outskirts of urban areas for low-income city workers and suburban farmers. Each community was designed to house 750 families in row houses and apartments, with its own stores, post office, community center, schools, parks and playgrounds. These communities, also known as “Greenbelts,” also acted as protection against future undesirable development. “Greenbelt communities were to be as safe, healthy and pleasant as modern science can make them.” (Resettlement Administration 1936:4).

The West Alabama Planned Development Project was one of four land development projects in Alabama. The other three projects were the East Alabama Planned Development Project, also known as the Tuskegee Land Utilization Project and now the Tuskegee National Forest; the Pea River Planned Development Project in Dale and Coffee counties, now part of Fort Rucker; and the Oak Mountain Planned Development Project, now part of Oak Mountain State Park (Resettlement Administration 1936:124).

The four planned development projects conducted various land management activities such as reforestation, soil rehabilitation, and other natural resource management. In June 1936, the West Alabama Project was employing an average of 608 men each week. The Tuskegee Project was employing an average of 241 men each week. The Pea River Project was employing an average of 609 men each week, and the Oak Mountain Project was employing an average of 327 men each week (Resettlement Administration 1936:139).

The Resettlement Administration’s Land Utilization Division bought up millions of acres of submarginal farmland and transferred them to states, the National Park Service, or the Forest Service. The Resettlement Division relocated displaced and stranded persons. In 1935, Representative William B. Bankhead of Alabama introduced a bill to help tenants and farm laborers become farm owners through government loans at low interest and with long terms for repayment. The bill was endorsed by Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, who said, “I know of no better means of reconstructing our agriculture on a thoroughly sound and permanent desirable basis than to make as its foundation the family-sized, owner-operated farm.” (Schlesinger 1958:380).

The bill passed the Senate but did not come to a vote in the House. In 1936, President Roosevelt appointed a Special Committee on Farm Tenancy to report in early 1937. Based on the committee’s report, the Bankhead bill was finally passed and enacted in the summer of 1937 (Schlesinger 1958:381). The President’s Special Committee on Farm Tenancy also asked for some kind of effort to promote land ownership by small family farmers, including former sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Congress passed the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenancy Act of 1937. This act created the Farm Security Corporation, which provided long-term, low-interest loans that would allow poor farmers to buy their own land. Secretary of Agriculture Wallace terminated the Resettlement Administration and established the Farm Security Administration (FSA), which took over the responsibilities of the Resettlement Administration and administered the Farm Security Corporation’s loan program. These programs, however, were never able to help

more than a small portion of the sharecroppers and tenants. The strong political power of the southern plantation owners was more than the administration or the Department of Agriculture could challenge. There was never enough funding (Watkins 1999:389).

News of the possibility of the government acquiring submarginal land in West Alabama was reported as early as January 1935. *The Centreville Press* reported on January 24, 1935 that a survey of “cut-over” land was to begin in Bibb County and five other counties. The survey was being conducted by the Alabama Relief Administration. The federal government would be looking at “unproductive marginal acres” with the idea of relocating the farmers to better land. After government experts had surveyed the land, local committees would obtain options on the property and offer it to the federal government at the appraisal price. The land was to be purchased through the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation.

Thad Holt, the director of the Alabama Relief Administration, was quoted in the article, “Our experience has shown that poor land is making poor people, and that the tax returns to the state and counties does not liquidate the cost of health, educational and other services rendered to these families by the state and county.”

The article concluded by saying that the government expected “to make the project self-liquidating through the sale of pine pulp to paper mills and hunting licenses to sportsmen.”



Figure 4. Photograph from 1936 Resettlement Administration Report on Tuscaloosa District. Captioned: “This shows an area heavily stocked with black jack, but in an area that has not been allowed to burn for several years. Young long leaf pines can be seen reaching up even with the tops of the black jack. With continued fire prevention these trees will soon shade out most of the black jack. Note the cultivated strip in the far background which is typical of the Area.



Figure 5. Photograph from 1936 Resettlement Administration Report on Tuscaloosa District. Captioned: “This shows the second year of cultivation of an approximately ten acre field. The three wide gullies shown are from 5 to 8 feet in depth. No attempt had been made at terracing. This year they were forced to turn at each of these gullies because they were so deep that they could not cross them with their implements.”

On February 28, 1935, *The Marion Times-Standard* reported that the farmers in northern Perry County had met to listen to Congressman W.B. Oliver discuss the government's plans to purchase approximately 165,000 acres of submarginal farm lands in Perry, Bibb, Tuscaloosa and Hale counties. The government planned to grow timber on this land. The farmers who sold their land to the government would be assisted through a financing organization in purchasing other lands more suitable for agricultural purposes. The program would be under the direction of Mr. Foy Helms, project manager of the Land Policy Section, A.A.A. (Agricultural Adjustment Administration), who had established offices in Greensboro.

On March 7, 1935, *The Centreville Press* reported that the farmers of Hale, Perry and Bibb Counties had met at Pondville. The Bibb County Agent, C.L. Hollingsworth, had assisted in having Congressman W.B. Oliver come to explain the government's plans to purchase 165,000 acres of submarginal land. The area would be reforested and areas established for game preserves.

According to the article, more than 60 percent of the area had been logged and burned over, and about 76,000 acres had been “devastated or worn out by poor farming methods to the extent that they will have to be planted to trees.” Some of the area was reseeding naturally. Most of the area being considered for purchase had good possibilities for game management, and the Forest Service would be cooperating with the State in game protection. The Forest Service also estimated that there were 1,600 families that would

benefit from future employment in the establishment and maintenance of the proposed national forest, with jobs being created in fire protection and timber improvement work.

The article also stated that government surveyors and engineers were already working in Bibb County, and that the newspaper understood, perhaps optimistically, that “the cash will be paid as soon as purchases are approved.” The Kaul Lumber Company, the Jackson Lumber Company, and the Alabama Mineral Land Company were among the large land owners in Bibb County that were planning to sell to the government. There were also many small land owners who planned to sell land, and then buy or rent better land for farming and other purposes.



Figure 6. Photograph from 1936 Resettlement Administration Report on Tuscaloosa District. Captioned: “This is one of the most desirable farms in the eastern part of the Purchase Area near Camp Hugh. Note the people working in the background. A relatively small acreage of this farm is suitable for cultivation, but this particular field does not require terracing to prevent erosion.”

On April 11, 1935, *The Marion Times-Standard* announced that the proposed submarginal land project, that would involve the expenditure of several million dollars over the next few years, would be abandoned by the government unless the options could be obtained by Saturday on at least 150,000 acres of cut-over timber land in Perry, Hale, Bibb and Tuscaloosa counties (the paper came out on Thursdays). This news had been announced by Mr. Helms two nights earlier at a meeting in Greensboro with the committees of the four counties involved. Another meeting was scheduled for that afternoon at the North Perry Consolidated School to try to obtain additional options. The submarginal land, poorly suited for agriculture, would be retired into forests, game preserves and recreational spots. The present residents on this land would have farms on better soil made available to them.

On April 14, 1935, *The Tuscaloosa News* reported that landowners of 25,000 acres in Tuscaloosa County had signed agreements to sell their land to the government following a meeting in Duncanville. Another 13,000 acres of submarginal land in the county remained unsold. According to the article, the goal of the project was to convert poor farm lands into “a broad and attractive fish and game preserve.” The article stressed that the government was not forcing any owners to sell their submarginal land, but rather, offering a fair price based on the findings of the appraisers. The government was also ready to assist anyone who sold their homes in finding other farms on land that would produce a better yield.

On May 23, 1935, *The Marion Times-Standard* reported that with the options obtained from the Kaul Land and Lumber Company on 67,000 acres of cut-over lands in Perry, Hale, Bibb and Tuscaloosa counties, the success of the submarginal land project was virtually assured, according to Foy Helms, the project supervisor. The government would spend several million dollars in returning these submarginal lands, which were poorly suited for agriculture, into forests, game preserves, and recreational spots. Better farm soil would be made available to the present residents through a financing agency which was in the process of being set up, according to Mr. Helms. With the Kaul Tract, the property on which options had been obtained increased to more than 80,000 acres.



Figure 7. Photograph from 1936 Resettlement Administration Report on Tuscaloosa District. Captioned: “The above photograph is an area showing small patches in cultivation. This land is owned by Kaul Land & Lumber Company and is being cultivated and pastured, rent free.”

On July 4, 1935, *The Greensboro Watchman* announced that the “sub-marginal land park project” was nearing success, publishing an article that had originally appeared in *The Tuscaloosa News*. More than 120,000 acres had been contracted for purchase in

Alabama's western sub-marginal area. The sterile acres were to be used to create a "great hunting and recreation preserve." According to A.W. Jones, the Hale County Agent, 150,000 acres had been appraised, but 25,000 acres remained to be purchased on option before the project was assured. Agents were presently "scouring the territory for places for resettlement" for those people that had sold their farms to the government. Mr. Jones was also quoted as saying the project might be expanded to 175,000 acres, and that the success of the project was "regarded as assured." The article concluded that "sportsmen and lovers of outdoors too will revel in the development of the sub-marginal tracts. For from them is expected to be a paradise of verdant retreats threaded with streams to be stocked liberally with fish and abounding in wildlife."



Figure 8. Photograph from 1936 Resettlement Administration Report on Tuscaloosa District. Some of the more severe gullies in the proposed purchase area.

On July 18, 1935, *The Marion Times-Standard* announced that the submarginal land project had been approved as a federal government project, and that work was to begin around August 1st. It was expected that more than 500 men would be employed by the project. Employment would be given to those who had signed options to sell their land and in other ways cooperated with the government. In making the selections of who would work on the project, at least one member of each family who had signed an option would be hired. At the time of the article, supervisors from the project were still busy taking additional options in the area.

On July 25, 1935, *The Centreville Press* contained an article explaining the plans for the resettlement and rehabilitation of the farmers who had sold their land to the government. According to Mr. R.K. Greene, Alabama Rehabilitation Director of the Federal Resettlement Administration, the resettlement of families who had proven their "integrity, worth and ability to purchase small farm and home sites" was expected to begin during the winter months. The families that would be given an opportunity to purchase small farms on long term loans were to be carefully selected by the

Rehabilitation division based on their past performance. Mr. Greene emphasized that the resettlement plan contained no “something for nothing” inducement, but rather, would be based on business principles and a “pay-as-you-go” basis. Every family was required to repay the Resettlement Administration for any advances. The previous year, the average amount of money advanced for crops per family was \$95.67, for a total of \$542,071 in advance payments. At the time of the article, just over 83 percent of this amount had been paid back to the Resettlement Administration.

The repayment of debts was one of the primary considerations in the offering families the opportunity to purchase a small farm. Other qualities to be taken into consideration were “honesty, character, dependability; willingness and desire to work; having the pioneer spirit which meets any challenge of adversity; resourcefulness in helping themselves rather than depending upon others; thrift, preparation for future emergencies; growing and storing and preservation of crops and foodstuffs; conservation and care of land and buildings now occupied by the family; saving surplus feed crops, care of animals and demonstrated managerial ability, which would embrace all enumerated qualifications.”

Director Greene emphasized that the Resettlement Administration was not planning on removing any of the rehabilitation families to other areas of the state. Every effort was to be made to keep the families in the same county if suitable land could be obtained at reasonable prices. Director Greene also stated that all lands to be purchased would be appraised according to its crop value. No land was to be purchased above its appraised value in terms of farm income. In other words, the farms would be purchased based on what the land could yield. No land would be purchased that did not have the possibility of being rehabilitated.



Figure 9. Photograph from 1936 Resettlement Administration Report on Tuscaloosa District. Captioned: “This is a typical family far back in the hills, on steps of their none too secure home. This family is anxious to take advantage of an opportunity to find a new home and better their conditions on more productive soil.”

On October 24, 1935, *The Greensboro Watchman* and *The Centreville Press* reported that the West Alabama Project had been approved. On October 22nd, W.A. Hartman, the regional director of the Division of Land Utilization, Resettlement Administration, in Montgomery, had announced the final approval of the West Alabama land purchase project in Tuscaloosa, Bibb, Hale, and Perry counties. Options were being accepted on 100,000 acres for an estimated purchase price of \$373,000. The land, voluntarily offered to be sold to the government, was seriously eroded and depleted of its resources, and had failed for years to produce a reasonable profit. There were more than 500 farm families living on the acreage to be purchased by the government. Those families desiring assistance from the Resettlement Administration would be helped in relocating on more productive farms as close as possible to their present farms.

According to Mr. Hartman, the development of the depleted land “not only should reduce the costs of local and state governments now bear for upkeep of roads and schools, but also should in time create a new source of wealth through increases in timber, recreation resources, and grazing lands.” Mr. Hartman also pointed out that the checks for the land purchased would not be sent out for sometime, as the work of clearing the titles had to precede the transfers.

On December 20, 1935, *The Tuscaloosa News* reported that plans were going ahead on the “huge land project.” Word had been received from the regional headquarters in Montgomery that the Resettlement Administration was moving ahead with its 100,000-acre land utilization project at Greensboro. There were 150 men working on the project area, cleaning brush and removing fire hazards. There had been some discussion of establishing a transient camp at the project, but the issue was settled, and the labor would be done by people who had sold their land to the government. The project was designed to cost \$712,000. It was located in Hale, Bibb, Tuscaloosa and Perry counties. At the time of the article, only \$30,000 of the allotment had been released to the administration. This article also appeared in December 26, 1935 issue of *The Centreville Press*.

On February 6, 1936, *The Marion Times-Standard* announced that work on the \$712,000 project had begun with 170 men working. The number of men working on the project was expected to increase “as rapidly as men can be called out, both from WPA and Resettlement Administration clients.” There were 300 farm families stranded on the project area that were unable to make a decent living. Dr. W.A. Hartman, assistant regional director of the Resettlement Administration was expecting these families to be relocated onto more productive land. Hartman was quoted, “It is human engineering.” He said, “If life can be made more secure for these people and turn into an asset land that today is a liability, the money expended will be a sound investment.” This same article appeared in *The Centreville Press* on February 13, 1936.

On February 27, 1936, *The Greensboro Watchman* reported that there were now 900 men at work on the submarginal project in Hale, Perry, Bibb and Tuscaloosa counties, according to Mr. Foy Helms, project supervisor. The men were cutting fire lanes, building truck trails and roadside improvements. The project had received 150,000 long

and short leaf young pine trees that the men were in the process of planting. Another half million pine saplings were expected to be received the following week.

On May 7, 1936, *The Greensboro Watchman* carried an article taken from the April 22nd edition of *The Tuscaloosa News*, reporting on the progress of the West Alabama Planned Use Demonstration Project in Hale, Perry, Bibb and Tuscaloosa counties. The project was now under the supervision of Mr. Robert K. Greene, who had his offices in Greensboro. While 100,000 acres had been approved for the project, options had been obtained on only approximately 94,000 acres at the time of the article. Of this number, 84,000 acres had been accepted for purchase by the Resettlement Administration. The break down of the 100,000 acres approved were listed by county as follows: there were 12,000 acres approved in the southeastern corner of Tuscaloosa County, there were 48,000 acres approved in the western portion of Bibb County, there were 9,000 acres approved in the northwest corner of Perry County, and there were 31,000 acres approved in the northeastern corner of Hale County.



Figure 10. Farm Security Administration (FSA) Photograph by Walker Evans, Summer 1936. #LC-USF33-031306-M2. Captioned: “Floyd Burroughs and Tenge Children, Hale County, Alabama.”

There were 292 families living on this land that would be directly affected by the project. This number included both owners and tenant families. One member of each family was eligible for employment on the land use demonstration project. The project work had begun on February 3, 1936. The process of relocating these families to more productive land, identified as the most important phases of the program, had begun. At the time of the article, there were 1,200 people working on the developmental program. These people were either taken from the relief rolls, the rehabilitation program, or former

residents of the purchased area. They were all from the four counties involved in the program.

According to the article, the developmental program was designed with three main activities: forestry, upland game and recreation, in order of importance. With forestry the primary focus, by the time of the article, most of the work conducted had been devoted to the establishment of a fire protection system. This system included the erection of three 100-foot steel lookout towers and construction of truck trails and fire breaks. There was also a fire protection patrol regularly covering the project area. Tree planting had been limited at this point as the nursery stock was not available for use during the current transplanting season. However, approximately 200 acres had been planted to longleaf pine, live oak, red river oak, osage orange and Chinese elm. A nursery had been established, and was prepared to produce approximately 1 ½ million longleaf pine seedlings that would be ready for transplanting next March. Approximately 50 bushels of acorns from red river oaks and white oaks had been planted. These seedlings would also be ready for transplanting for the next planting season.

A considerable amount of work had been done on road repair and maintenance. A crew of approximately 100 men had been assigned to do this type of work since the beginning of the project. Work had also begun on the clearing for an impounding dam that would create a lake of approximately 100 acres. Recreational facilities were to be constructed at this lake.

On June 11, 1936, *The Greensboro Watchman* reported on the “Progress of the Rural Rehabilitation.” The article concentrated on the people in Hale County, but would have applied to many of the rural farmers throughout the project area, as well as the former residents of the project area. Those families that had borrowed money from the Resettlement Administration to carry them through the crop year would be required to follow a farming plan. According to Hurtis Parr, the County Supervisor, there were 421 families in Hale County that were receiving rehabilitation aid that year. The families that had received loans were learning how to budget their farm income and follow proper business methods. According to Mr. Parr, “Most of our farmers were forced to go on relief because they failed to use business methods and employ sound judgment in planning their farm operations.” The Resettlement Administration was working with the farm families to ensure they did not return to relief status.

When each family received their loan, they agreed that both their farm and home would be managed according to plans drawn up with the help of J.L. Lawson, the county agricultural agent, Miss Lulu Jordan, the county home demonstration agent, and Miss Eloise James, the Resettlement Administration home supervisor and county supervisor. According to Mr. Parr, under the management plan, farm produce was to be divided into three groups – food crops, feed crops, and cash crops. The emphasis was to be placed on making a comfortable living for the family, with a second priority being placed on feed for farm animals. Cash crops were a third priority, based on the fact that “living at home is less expensive and more certain than living out of stores.”

On January 14, 1937, *The Greensboro Watchman* announced that the lands of the West Alabama Planned Land Use Demonstration Project had been posted against all hunting and trespassing. The article appeared as a letter from R.K. Greene, the Project Manager of “LD-AL-9” (Land Demonstration-Alabama-9). One of the objectives of the Resettlement Administration’s conservation program was the re-establishment of game and wildlife on the project area. In order to accomplish this goal, it was necessary to prohibit all hunting, trapping, and fishing on the project area for a period of three years. During this period, game and fish for restocking were to be released. The biological conditions for the propagation for wildlife would also be improved over this period. Mr. Greene asked for “the cooperation and support of all good citizens in this conservation measure which will eventually greatly benefit our section of the state.”



Figure 11. West Alabama Resettlement Administration Project. Captioned: View looking north across lake basin from spillway of recreational area. #360917.

On June 17, 1937, *The Greensboro Watchman* announced that a park was being made on the submarginal land. The article, written as a letter signed by “H.G.B.” invited the public to visit the submarginal project “if you want to see some beautiful scenery and work in progress.” The author of the letter had visited the project with Mr. Robert K. Greene and Mr. Wilhelm, surveying the work being done on the dam at the “old Owens Mill site.” After visiting the dam, they drove around the hills of Bibb and Tuscaloosa counties with Mr. Jack Johnson. The project area would for “ere many years be covered with long leaf pine timber, and a land of great value and beauty.” At the time of the

article, there were “several hundred men” at work on the project, replanting trees, making roads and building the dam.



Figure 12. West Alabama Resettlement Administration Project. Captioned: “Bridge under construction across spillway at recreational lake.” #360919.

On June 24, 1937, the editor of *The Greensboro Watchman* reported that Mr. Robert K. Greene, the head of the submarginal land project, had taken reporters from the paper on a tour of the project. There were approximately 600 men working on the project at the time. This number was about 400 men less than had been formerly employed.

At the time of the article, 100 miles of fire lanes had been cut through the forests of the 12 mile by 12 mile project area, and one main highway had been constructed. The primary work being done at that time was the construction of the dam on Five Mile Creek, under the supervision of Mr. Carroll Smith. The dam would create a 110-acre lake. The large concrete spillway was nearing completion, and work on the 1,200-foot dam was progressing rapidly. The base of the dam was 120 feet, and would be 17 feet high and 40 feet wide at the top when finished. According to the author of the article, the dam “looks to us as if it should last forever.” The lake, they predicted, would become a fisherman’s paradise in the years to come.

From the dam, the group drove “up and up and up” until they were “on the top of the world” until they came to “the fire tower in Hale county.” This would have been the

“Lake Tower” constructed less than a mile west of the lake. This was one of three towers; one had been built in Bibb County (Pondville Tower) and the third in Tuscaloosa County (Shiloh Tower). The article challenged the public that “if you have nerve enough you may climb to the top of the tower, which is 100 feet high, and get a view that we imagine is as beautiful and impressive as any to be found in all the land.” At the foot of the hill, on the west side, a home was under construction for the keeper of the fire tower.

The “modern structure” was being built at a cost of \$4,000. Water was to be supplied to the home from a well driven by a windmill. Another project that was to begin shortly was the construction of a deer preserve. The area was to be “wired in” and stocked with deer.



Figure 13. West Alabama Resettlement Administration Project. Captioned: “Dwelling and garage at western tower.” (Lake Tower) #360920.

On August 12, 1937, *The Marion Times-Standard* had two articles on how the Resettlement Administration was helping the farmers get out of debt. Through the RA’s debt adjustment program, the debts of 2,300 Alabama farmers had been reduced from \$2,486,572 to \$1,939,580, a reduction of \$546,992. The debt adjustment work was voluntary, and being conducted by committees under RA supervision. The committees served as mediators between the overburdened farm debtors and their creditors. They suggested arrangements that allowed the farmers to retain their land and possessions. They also provided a plan for their economic rehabilitation. The committees, however,

had no authority to enforce the suggestions. The farm debt adjustment service was free to debtors and creditors. Mr. C.A. McKinnon, of Auburn, was in charge of the program.

Another aspect of the Resettlement Administration rural rehabilitation work was working with farm women in the curing of meat and canning of fruits and vegetables. During 1936, farm families in Perry County stored meat and canned home-grown fruits and vegetables valued at \$8,834.67, according to a report issued by Mrs. Maude C. Woodfin, home management supervisor of the Resettlement Administration Rural Rehabilitation Division. Additional home economics guidance given in the county included helping farm women “live within their incomes, keep accounts, can and store large amounts of food raised on the farm, and generally improve their families’ living standards.” According to the survey, Resettlement farm women in Perry County cured 37,181 pounds of meat; canned 3,569 quarts of vegetables and 6,772 quarts of fruits. They also stored in their pantries 4,111 gallons of syrup, 1,838 bushels of potatoes, and hundreds of bushels of other vegetables and fruits.

There were 153 women included in the report, with 91 identified as white and 62 as “colored.” The value of the food canned and stored averaged \$57.74 for each family. Cured meat was valued at 12 ½ cents per pound; potatoes at 50 cents per bushel; tomatoes and other vegetables at 15 cents per quart; and canned fruits at 10 cents per quart. The food raised for home consumption in 1936 was “far in excess of previous years” according to Mrs. Woodfin. Gardens had been planned for 1937, which would “enable farm families to meet still more adequately the food needs of their families.” Canning was expected to be on a larger scale for 1937, as 50 farm families had purchased steam pressure cookers. Women were going to be encouraged to store even more dried foods to eliminate the time and cost of canning. “By making the farm produce all that it can for home consumption, farm families are enabled to have more cash to meet other family needs, thus providing a more adequate farm living.”

On September 2, 1937, *The Greensboro Watchman* reported that Mr. Robert K. Greene had announced that a shipment of 400 quail had been shipped to the submarginal land project from a hatchery in Sumter, South Carolina. The birds were to be released in coveys of 12 to 15 birds in suitable places on the Resettlement Project.

On September 23, 1937, *The Greensboro Watchman* announced that Mr. Robert K. Greene had resigned from the Land Use Project in Hale, Perry, Tuscaloosa and Bibb counties. He had served as the project manager for a year and a half, with a total of four years of service for the federal government. He was succeeded by Mr. David W. Wilhelm, who had been working on the Land Use Project for the last two years, serving as the Works Director, Planning Engineer and Development Engineer. *The Greensboro Watchman* reported on June 16, 1938 that Mr. Greene had been elected Probate Judge of Hale County. He would begin his service as Probate Judge in November 1938 following the general elections.

On February 3, 1938, *The Greensboro Watchman* contained an “Editor’s Article” regarding the Land Use Project. As soon as the “weather breaks and the warm breezes

begin to blow” the editor planned to visit the submarginal area and see the dam that had been built across Five Mile Creek. The dam had created a lake that would cover 150 acres, and would be a “fisherman’s paradise” in a few years. The lake had been stocked with “many thousands of trout and bream” by the Government. The editor noted that “of course the Government will have rules and regulations in regard to fishing.” While the lake was 20 miles from Greensboro, the editor wanted the readers to know that there were good roads leading to the lake. According to the article, the government had spent nearly \$400,000 developing the submarginal area. A deer park had been created within the area, the fencing for the park cost some \$10,000.



Figure 14. West Alabama Resettlement Administration Project. Captioned: “Repair shop and equipment shed constructed at work center.” #360914.

On May 19, 1938, *The Greensboro Watchman* announced that the 87,000-acre West Alabama Land Use Project had been assigned to the U.S. Forest Service for permanent supervision. The West Alabama project comprised of 87,218 acres “in the corners of Bibb, Hale, Perry and Tuscaloosa counties.” At the time it was purchased by the federal government, the land consisted of badly eroded fields and idle or burned-over timber land that had been acquired to convert it to productive use as a forest, game refuge and recreation area.

According to the article, there had been more than 150 families living in the area when the project began, trying to make a living on the submarginal land. Wasteful lumbering

and farming, and periodical fires had reduced the land to a condition where the government thought that the purchase was needed to prevent further resource deterioration. The timber resource had been greatly reduced and the soil and game supply seriously depleted. The development of the area had been carried out in cooperation with the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Work projects included extensive measures to ensure fire prevention and control, the reforestation of cut-over timber land and the improvement of existing timber stands, construction of fire towers, truck trails, and ranger facilities. Another project of notice was the construction of an \$80,000 impounding dam that created “a magnificent lake bordered with beaches and recreation areas.” This lake, along with a system of numerous had “provided splendid recreational opportunities for this entire country side.” The article also mentioned a deer park “of many acres” that had been enclosed by a fence costing \$10,000.

The article concluded by suggesting that few people in West Alabama had “grasped the huge scale on which it has been carried out, nor have we appreciated the facilities which it has placed at our doorsteps.” Many people, the article suggested, may have been thinking that the project was “another one of those temporary federal things on which vast sums would be spent – here today, gone tomorrow.” It was expected that the announcement that the project had been turned over to the Forest Service would be received with pleasure.

Oakmulgee Working Circle, Talladega National Forest, 1943

On October 21, 1942, Frank Razor, the Forest Supervisor for the National Forests in Alabama, submitted revisions of a timber management plans to the Regional Forester for the Black Warrior, Conecuh, Oakmulgee and Talladega Working Circles. Due to a shortage of maps, there were only two copies of the map for the Talladega Working Circle included, and no maps for the other areas. The attached letter from Razor stated, “You will immediately notice that these plans are very sketchy and are not based on sound factual data. We have not had the funds with which to make detailed management plan surveys and obtain growth data.” The forests, according to Razor, had not yet reached a point where they could be managed on a strict silvicultural basis, with the exception of the old part (northern half) of the Black Warrior National Forest.

Giving an uncertain budget and many factors beyond the control of the Forest Service during the early days of the United State’s entry into World War II, Forest Supervisor Razor stated that it was not possible to state definitely what timber would be cut from the National Forests over the next three years. Razor stated that the one guiding principle to timber harvesting at this time should be, “Cut as much timber as possible, as long as the trees need to be cut to improve the residual stand, or the timber is essential to winning the war.” Forest Supervisor Razor thought this three-year plan would cut all the timber necessary to improve the forest conditions, and aid in winning the war. The one limiting factor in amount of timber harvested was the lack of men available to administer the timber sales. The District Rangers would be handling the sale of more timber than ever before.

In July 1943 a timber management plan for the Oakmulgee Working Circle was submitted and approved by the Regional Forester. This plan covered proposed timber cutting activities for the next three years. As of June 30, 1943, the Oakmulgee Working Circle contained 155,044 acres of government-owned land over a gross area of 421,606 acres. This included 67,939 acres that had been purchased by the government through the Oakmulgee Purchase Unit, 361 acres of public domain land, and 86,744 acres that were transferred from the Soil Conservation Service that had acquired through the Resettlement Administration. By Forest Service standards, the working circle was not considered to be well consolidated (USDA Forest Service 1943:2).

According to the 1943 timber plan, the population in the area of the working circle had been in decline since 1920. As the timber had been cut from the area, and several years of unprofitable cotton crops, many people had left the rural areas and moved to the towns and industrial centers to seek employment. This trend had continued since 1940 with the increase in war related industry. It was also pointed out that the soils eroded very easily, and “many farms simply washed away, leaving too little fertile land to support a family (USDA Forest Service 1943:3).

Cahaba Working Circle, Talladega National Forest, 1946

In 1946, a ten-year timber management plan was developed for the Oakmulgee Division of the Talladega National Forest. The division was divided into two “working circles.” The eastern portion of the division was designated as the Cahaba Working Circle. The western portion of the division was designated as the Pondville Working Circle.

By 1946, four fire towers had been erected across the Cahaba Working Circle (Maud, Perry Mountain, Dallas and Cahaba), giving coverage to the entire area except for 1,000 acres north of Highway 6 (present-day Highway 82). The Oakmulgee District had received no assistance from the Civilian Conservation Corps, and as a result, only two forest service roads had been constructed. The Oakmulgee District had begun timber sale activities in 1939 “on a fairly substantial scale.” In 1940, plans were made to begin a timber survey, but the project was delayed by the entry of the United States into World War II. A planting survey conducted in 1941 “only lightly touched” the Oakmulgee District, as the area was adequately stocked or had sufficient seed trees. In 1945, it was determined that an inventory of the timber stands was needed. The inventory was conducted and a timber type map produced. The 1946 “Timber Management Plan” was produced from this inventory (USDA Forest Service 1946).

Transportation Plan of the Talladega National Forest, Oakmulgee Division, 1948

According to the 1948 “Transportation Plan of the Talladega National Forest Oakmulgee Division” the only developed recreational area on the Oakmulgee Division was the picnic area on the shores of Payne Lake. The annual use of the picnic area was approximately

9,000 persons. It was expected to rise to 11,000 in the near future. Hunting and fishing on the large Oakmulgee Wildlife Management Area, located in the western half of the division, was responsible for a large percentage of visitor traffic (USDA 1948:2).



Figure 15. US Forest Service Photograph. Captioned: “110 acre artificial lake, built by Resettlement Administration and managed by Forest Service and State. Payne Lake – Aug. 1949. #458600.

Early Facilities and Improvements on the Forest

The following information was taken from a ledger entitled “Old Real Property Records” for the National Forests in Alabama, and individual site plans for the various tower sites, found in the Supervisor’s Office in Montgomery.

Perry Mountain Fire Tower Site - The Perry Mountain Fire Tower Site is located in T21S/R11E, in Section 34, located in the old Oakmulgee Purchase Unit, east of the Cahaba River. The fire tower consisted of a 99’9” steel tower with a seven-foot steel cab. The tower was constructed in 1936, but the cab itself was not completed until 1938.

A watchman’s dwelling was constructed at the base of the tower in 1937. The dwelling was a standard Region-8 watchman’s dwelling, plans A-701 to A-704, consisting of a two-room cabin measuring 16 feet by 31 feet 10 inches. The water system, constructed in 1939, consisted of a hydraulic ram and a 30-gallon storage tank in the attic of the dwelling. Landscaping conducted on the site in 1938 and 1939, consisted of planting



**Figure 16. US Forest Service Photograph.
Captioned: "Perry Mountain Tower in
process of construction." #346440.**



**Figure 17. US Forest Service Photograph.
Captioned: "Perry Mountain Tower."
#359524.**

shrubs on two acres, construction of a parking area and approach road, and guard rails around the parking area. A "Type 3" latrine, drawings R-4801 to R-4805, was

constructed on the site in 1938. According to the 1940 site plan, the water source was a spring located 607 feet east of the watchman's dwelling.

Maud Fire Tower Site - The Maud Fire Tower site was located in T22N/R11E, in Section 18, located in the old Oakmulgee Purchase Unit. The Maud Fire Tower was torn down in the early 1960's. The 99'9" steel tower with seven-foot cab was constructed in 1937. The standard Region-8 watchman's dwelling, measuring 16 feet by 31 feet 10 inches, was constructed in 1937. A well was dug at the site in 1938 with a concrete pipe, hand pump, and a water storage tank in the attic of the dwelling. A garage was constructed on the site in 1941. Landscaping conducted on the site in 1938, consisted of planting shrubs on two acres, construction of a parking area and approach road, and guard rails around the parking area. One sanitary pit type privy was constructed on the site in 1938. According to the 1940 site plan, there was a garden plot 80 feet to the northwest of the watchman's dwelling.

Cahaba Fire Tower Site - The Cahaba Fire Tower Site is located in T21N/R09E, in Section 16, in the old Oakmulgee Purchase Unit. The 99'9" steel tower was constructed in 1936. The standard Region-8 watchman's dwelling from Plans A-701 to A-704, measuring 16 feet by 31 feet 10 inches, was constructed in 1937. A well was dug at the site in 1938 with a concrete pipe, hand pump, and a water storage tank in the attic of the dwelling. Landscaping conducted on the site in 1938 and 1939, consisted of planting shrubs on two acres, construction of a parking area and approach road, and guard rails around the parking area. A "Type 3" latrine, drawings R-4801 to R-4805, was constructed on the site in 1938. According to the 1940 site plan, there was a cistern located immediately to the west of the watchman's dwelling, and a weather station located 120 feet to the east of the dwelling.



**Figure 18. US Forest Service Photograph.
Captioned: "Latrine – Dallas Tower –
Oakmulgee District. #359595.**

Dallas Fire Tower Site - The Dallas Fire Tower Site was located in T19N/R10E, in Section 13, in the old Oakmulgee Purchase Unit. The tower was dismantled in the late 1960's. The 99'9" steel tower was constructed in 1936. The standard Region-8 watchman's dwelling from Plans A-701 to A-704,

measuring 16 feet by 31 feet 10 inches, was constructed in 1937. A well was dug at the site in 1938 with a concrete pipe, hand pump, and a water storage tank. The water tank was not attached to the dwelling. A cow shed was also constructed on the site in 1940. Landscaping conducted on the site in 1938 and 1939, consisted of planting shrubs on two acres, construction of a parking area and approach road, and guard rails around the parking area. A standard Region-8 latrine was constructed on the site in 1937. According to the 1940 site plan, there was also a chicken house located 70 feet south of the watchman's dwelling.

The Shiloh Fire Tower Site - The Shiloh Fire Tower Site was located in T24N/R07E, in Section 28, in the old West Alabama Resettlement Administration Project area. The tower was dismantled in the 1960's. The 100-foot International steel tower, with seven by seven foot cab, was transferred to the U.S. Forest Service from the U.S. Soil Conservation Service in 1940. According to the 1940 site plan, other improvements on the site included a watchman's dwelling with a 500-gallon precast septic tank. Water was supplied to the site by a well with a windmill. A fire hydrant was located 30 feet to the west of the dwelling. There was also a garage located 60 feet north of the dwelling, and a barn located 70 feet to the south of the dwelling. A smoke house, a chicken house, and a hog house were enclosed by a fence and located southwest of the dwelling.



Figure 19. West Alabama Resettlement Administration Project. Captioned: "Development at Northern Tower showing garage, tower and dwelling." #360913.

The Pondville Fire Tower Site - The Pondville Fire Tower Site is located in T22N/R07E, in Section 12, in the old West Alabama Resettlement Administration Project area. The 100-foot International steel tower, with seven by seven foot cab, and other improvements on the site were transferred to the U.S. Forest Service from the U.S. Soil Conservation Service in 1940. There was no record of the watchman's dwelling being transferred to the Forest Service however, according to the 1940 site plan the standard watchman's dwelling had been constructed 1,368 feet south of the tower. Other improvements included a standard towerman's barn from Plan RO#206-1, measuring 21'2" by 30'8"; a standard chicken house from Plan RO#206-A-1, measuring 10 feet by 16 feet; a standard two-car garage from Plan RO#213-A-1, measuring 20 feet by 30 feet; and a standard smokehouse from Plan RO#206-C-1, measuring four feet by eight feet. The landscaping done around the site was constructed in 1939 and 1940. According to the 1940 site plan, there was also a 500-gallon concrete tank for water storage. A two-inch line connected the storage tank to a fire hydrant. The end of the water line did not attach to the dwelling, but rather, ended several feet to the northwest of the dwelling. A 500-gallon septic tank was located immediately to the east of the dwelling. The 1940 site plan also showed a rain gauge 40 feet to the northeast of the dwelling.

The Lake Fire Tower Site - The Lake Fire Tower Site is located in T22N/R06E, in Section 15 in the old West Alabama Resettlement Administration Project area. The 100-foot International steel tower, with seven by seven foot cab, and other improvements on the site were transferred to the U.S. Forest Service from the U.S. Soil Conservation Service in 1940. Other improvements included a standard towerman's barn from Plan RO#206-1, measuring 21'2" by 30'8"; a standard chicken house from Plan RO#206-A-1, measuring 10 feet by 16 feet; a standard two-car garage from Plan RO#213-A-1, measuring 20 feet by 30 feet; and a standard smokehouse from Plan RO#206-C-1, measuring four feet by eight feet. A hog house and a standard latrine from Plan RO#214-B-F, measuring 4 ½ feet by 4 ½ feet, were transferred to the Forest Service in 1940. The landscaping around the tower site had been completed in 1940. According to the 1940 site plan, there was "Rife Ram" located 166 east of a spring house. The ram pumped water 472 feet uphill to a 350-gallon concrete storage tank. The site plan also showed a fire hydrant in the center of the site, and a 500-gallon precast septic tank south of the dwelling.

Lake Margaret Recreation Area - The Lake Margaret Recreation Area, now called the Payne Lake Recreation Area, is located in T22N/R06E, in Section 14, in the old West Alabama Resettlement Administration Project area. According to the real property records, the improvements at Lake Margaret that were transferred to the U.S. Forest Service from the Soil Conservation Service in 1940 included a chicken house, a woodshed, a cowshed, registry booths, and a pump house. These improvements were constructed in 1940. There was also a barn constructed on the site in 1940, apparently built by the Forest Service, along with a combination one-car garage, tool and woodshed. This combination garage was built in 1940 to 1941 from Plan B-804. Landscaping on the site grounds included a 200-foot sand and gravel road, and the leveling and sodding of an acre area around the Lake Margaret Warden's Dwelling. This work was done in 1940 and 1941.

The dam, transferred from the Soil Conservation Service in 1940, measured 800 feet long, with a four foot by four foot by 120 feet long reinforced concrete culvert or sluiceway gate, a fish trap and spillway. Other recreation improvements included a bathhouse, a standard 10-foot by 20-foot picnic shelter from Plan RO#220, and standard five by eight foot latrines. The real property also recorded that the “Lake Margaret Deer Corral” measured 650 rods (10,725 feet) around its perimeter. A corral with this length of fencing would enclose an area approximately 165 acres in size. The fence corral was built from Plan RO#211.



Figure 20. West Alabama Resettlement Administration Project. Captioned: “Camping at Payne Lake.” #458614.

Elliott Creek Administration Site - The Elliott Creek Administration Site, located in T23N/R06E, in Section 22, served as the field headquarters and work center for the West Alabama Resettlement Administration Project. The improvements at the administration site, transferred to the U.S. Forest Service from the Soil Conservation Service in 1940, consisted of two standard truck sheds constructed from Plan RO#221-1, measuring 26' by 64'7 1/2"; a standard oil and grease house, measuring 10 feet by 10 feet; a standard blacksmith shop, measuring 12 feet by 16 feet; and a standard latrine, measuring 9 feet by 12 feet. The real property book states that the warehouse was constructed in 1940 and 1941, but this is in error, as photographs from the late 1930's show the warehouse being built at the same time as the truck sheds.

There were several other structures immediately to the west of the administration site, including a standard towerman's barn, measuring 21'2" by 30'8". The barn had a value of \$1,038.47 at the time it was transferred to the Forest Service in 1940. There was also a standard chicken house, measuring 10 feet by 16 feet. The chicken house was valued at \$418.25 in 1940. A standard smoke house, measuring four feet by eight feet was also present. The smoke house was valued at \$111.03 at the time of transfer.

Fire Towers on the Oakmulgee District

In the summer of 1994, Ernie Wallace, long-time technician on the Oakmulgee Ranger District, wrote his reminiscences of the fire towers and the "watchmen" on the district.

I started to work with the Forest Service on June 5, 1961. At that time, the Oakmulgee Ranger District of the Talladega National Forest was split into two districts. All government land on the east side of the Cahaba River was Oakmulgee R.D. and all government land on the west side of the Cahaba River was the Tuscaloosa R.D. I worked on the Oakmulgee side until 1970 when it all became Oakmulgee.

There were four fire towers on the Oakmulgee side in 1961. There were Maud, Cahaba, Perry Mountain, and Dallas towers.

I knew about Maud Tower before I was employed by the U.S. Forest Service because I lived near it. My daddy took my brother and me to Maud Tower when it was fairly new in the mid 40's. We lived several miles from the tower and we went down the G.M. & O. Railroad, which is now Magnolia Gas Line. I remember a house there, but do not remember who lived in the house. I think there was a windmill pump in a bored well and a wooden "stave" water tank on the side of the fire tower. We later moved to within 1 ½ miles of Maud Tower, and my brother, Dwight, and I rode an old plow horse over there on Sunday afternoons. The towers stayed open in those days because there was very little vandalism. One could go up in the cab of the tower and look out. The lookouts that I remember who worked Maud Fire Tower in the 1940's and 1950's were Onis Edwards, Louie Riffe, and M.C. Moore. During this period of time, the lookouts usually lived in a standard built house and manned the fire towers. All of them had some type of water system and no electricity. The entire network of fire towers had their own old-fashioned hand ringer type telephone system. They all had an Osborne azimuth fire finder and an azimuth cross-out map on the wall. They obtained readings from each other and pulled strings on the cross-out map to determine where the fire was located. Maud Tower was given to the Alabama Forest Commission and was torn down in about 1963 and moved to Baldwin County and re-erected.

The first fire tower that I worked was Cahaba. In 1961, Mr. Ed Lovelady had just retired from the U.S. Forest Service and had just moved out of the house at Cahaba Tower. Some of the furnishings were still in the house. There were some vegetables in the garden. Mr. Ed had built a miniature play house for children, and it was still there. The

house was later sold to Mr. Dudley Crowe, who tore it down and moved it. Cahaba was the only fire tower with electricity on the east side in 1961. Carvel Foster was the lookout at Cahaba Tower when I started, and he gave me my training. The day started by signing in on the radio by giving an in service "10-8", and starting the log book where all the radio transmissions and smoke bearings were recorded throughout the day. I was to hang out the flag and check the fire finder for accuracy by sighting on a white board across some gullies about ¼ mile away. If it was off a degree or so, I shook the desk until it read right. I was to sweep and dust every day and wash the windows once a week. Since this tower was in the middle of both districts, the lookout often served as a radio communications link. At 1:00 PM I would call Mrs. Louis Snipes on the telephone when she had gotten the weather charts and record the class fire day in the log. At that time, Cahaba and Pondville were the only towers with a telephone and a permanent radio. The telephone in Cahaba was a "Ma Bell" black telephone, but we still had six miles of telephone line that the Forest Service kept up to the nearest community where we hooked to the Bell system lines. I had to answer Mrs. Eula B. Riffe's call every 15 – 30 minutes, depending on the fire danger. She was working Perry Mountain Fire Tower with a battery-type canvas pack radio set, and they wouldn't let her turn it on all the time. She could only use it to call in or report a smoke. They later let her keep it on all day when they discovered that all those transmissions were using up the batteries. In 1961, there was an old tube-type civil defense radio in Cahaba Fire Tower. It played music stations but was rigged to where the Civil Defense could break in with a message if needed. I never knew of them doing so. The aerial was a wire that hung down the tower and all in the trees around there. Lookouts in the 1950's were Ed Lovelady, Carvel Foster, Ernie Wallace, Dwight Wallace, and John Lee O'Neil. 1970's lookouts were Levy McFarland, Ernie Wallace, John Lee O'Neil, Dwight Wallace, and Penson Ballard. Ballard worked it some in the 1980's until the time of aerial detection but it has been used some occasionally since then. J.D. Gray was in charge of fire control on the east side when I started and Aaron Snipes on the Tuscaloosa side. There was a wooden-type fire box at Cahaba and also at Perry Mountain Fire Tower. They were still maintained with tools and a firebox seal (no lock) like they were in the fire "warden" days. The post rack that held the box is still at Cahaba, but the boxes were discontinued in the 1960's.

I don't remember ever seeing a house at Perry Mountain Fire Tower but the foundation is still there. I remember a spring for water being on the east side of the tower. There was one out-building there in 1961. I understand that J.D. Gray and Louie Riffe had lived in the house at some time. Mrs. Eula B. Riffe was working the tower when I started on a "call when needed basis." She worked until the mid 1970's. After she retired, the tower was worked by Dwight Wallace, Ernie Wallace, John Lee O'Neal and others. For several years in the late 1970's and early 1980's, the tower was worked by Wendell Hallman and later by L.C. Stewart. Perry Mountain fire tower was uniquely different from the other fire towers on the district in that the corners are pointing north, south, east, and west rather than the sides.

Dallas Fire Tower was torn down in the late 1960's and the Forest Service traded the land where it stood in the 1970's. I didn't know anyone who worked the tower before I started to work, and I am the only one that I remember working it after 1961. When I knew of

the fire tower, it had been vandalized so that no one even repaired the windows. We put wooden shutters on the windows in the early 1960's, and I made a map with a sight on it to use when I worked the tower. When I found a fire, I would have to orient my map by sighting on Perry Mountain Tower and then get a reading on the fire. When it was cold, I would open one plywood quadrant at a time and look out. My face would get so severely chafed from the cold, damp wind. There was a house foundation there also, but I didn't ever see the house. There was a 30" concrete curbed well on the east side of the tower. I remember a model – T Ford car body on the south side of the tower in the early 1960's. Once Ranger Bill Walker and I painted the cab of the Dallas Tower. We took the window sets out, and Mr. Walker climbed up on top of the cab and painted the top while I held a safety rope wrapped around a tower post.

I don't know much about the towers on the west side or the old Tuscaloosa District. I remember being told of Shiloh Fire Tower being torn down in the 1960's. I understand that they cut the tower down for scrap iron much one would fall a tree. The man who bought it cut one leg of the tower with a torch. He then cut a piece out of the leg to let the tower lean over and then he cut the other three legs. I remember Mr. Johnny Johnson worked the Lake Fire Tower and Mrs. Lois Snipes worked Pondville lookout in the 60's. I communicated with them by radio for readings on smokes that we could mutually see. These two towers were also worked by Aubrey Hudson, Otha and Clonnie Fondren, and Dannie Spence when the regular tower people were not available. Ann Bonner, L.C. Stewart, and Wendell Hallman worked Pondville some in the 1970's. The only time Lake Tower was used was in extreme conditions. I worked both towers occasionally, one or two days at a time, in the 1980's. Pondville Fire Tower was completely sand blasted and painted in the early 1980's.

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