Message from the Editor

As I write this, I am in my office looking through the window at a beautiful spring day. Springtime, as we all know, is a time for renewal. From the first cardinal singing in the morning to the chorus of frogs at night, we are reminded that life springs eternal and that nature renews itself on a regular basis. Perhaps this is a good lesson for all of us – taking time to get outside and renew ourselves – spiritually, emotionally, and in some cases, physically. Whether you are like me and prefer to spend spring mornings listening for the first gobble of the day or would rather fish for hungry bass and crappie or go for a hike with the family, get out there and enjoy it. I know that even a couple of hours in the spring woods puts an extra bounce in my step and a better outlook on the day. And, if you get a chance, take a child with you and start introducing them to a lifetime of enjoying the outdoors.

In this issue, Melissa Regan shares an important message with us – the best way to enjoy the outdoors is when you are physically prepared to hit the woods. Just like athletes have to stay in shape to be at their best, hunters can be more successful by adhering to some type of physical exercise during the off-season. Trust me, it will pay dividends. We also have articles about a little known activity (hunting bobcats with dogs) and a well known activity (planting food plots). Our species profile is about a very much underappreciated, and often maligned, wildlife species. We round out the newsletter with a hunting club profile and some introductions to our Recreational Team. I hope you enjoy the newsletter and, more importantly, take opportunities to enjoy some time in the spring outdoors.  

Darren Miller, Newsletter Editor
Fit for the Hunt

Melissa Regan, Inventory/Recreational Lease Specialist, MS/LOU Timberlands

We have all taken the hunter education and safety courses. We know that to be safe in the woods we wear our fluorescent orange. We know we have spotted our target, surveyed the area, and are aiming at the identified, legal game animal and not a fellow hunter. We know that we carry our gun with the muzzle pointing in a safe direction, we don’t climb into our stand dragging our weapon behind us, and we keep our finger off the trigger until we are ready to shoot. We have been taught these, plus many other safety tips, over and over. But, have we ever considered our personal health and fitness level and how our bodies react to the sometimes strenuous activity of hunting? Consider this. A hunter will hike into the woods most likely on uneven ground and hilly terrain, carrying a weapon and perhaps other equipment. After reaching his or her destination, he or she will then climb into his or her tree stand. The physically “unfit” will definitely be feeling their heart pounding in their chest by the time they get settled in. And, if the hike to the stand doesn’t get the old ticker beating faster, when that trophy buck steps out, the adrenaline rush will surely cause it to pound. If you are successful in your hunt, then you have the task of getting your harvested game out of the woods. All this can be quite the workout.

A noted cardiologist said that a heart attack is three times more likely to take a hunter’s life than a gunshot wound. He especially cited those hunters who have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes as well as those who have a known heart problem to be at greater risk. It is always smart to have a personal safety plan that includes carrying a cell phone, a commitment to never hunt alone, and to always let someone know where you are hunting. This really applies to all hunters, regardless of your health status.

As part of a club safety plan, a sign in/sign out source showing a hunters arrival time and stand location is critical should emergency personnel need to be called. A local club had an incident this past hunting season when a member lapsed into a diabetic coma while in the deer stand. As the day progressed, the hunter had not come home. As soon as it was realized a problem existed, the club members rallied together with their safety plan and emergency personnel were directed into the area where the hunter was located with the least amount of confusion. The hunter was retrieved from his stand and is recovering. This club had their safety plan and was able to activate with success.

Hunting is an activity that is enjoyed for a variety of reasons including sport, food, the outdoor experience, and just for the fun of the hunt. Being physically fit will make this a more enjoyable activity. Before heading to the woods this next season, take a minute to think about your personal health and fitness level. If you don’t think you are as fit as you should be, see your doctor and get advice on a fitness plan. Regardless, make a commitment to get active before hunting season gets here.

Be fit and be safe!
Bobcat Hunting: A Family Tradition

Ryan Giddens, LAP/Land Use Forester, Arkansas/Oklahoma Timberlands

When most people think of hunting with dogs, they think of deer, squirrels, and maybe rabbits. If you’re like me you may not have ever thought about bobcat or “cat” hunting as it is referred to by some. I had the opportunity last year to meet with a family in southwest Arkansas whose love for this type of hunting goes back many years.

Mr. E. Finney Clay, 82, has a passion for hunting bobcats like no other. This passion has also been passed along to his son Carey, who is often referred to by his dad as his “Dog Boy”. Finney’s obsession of bobcat hunting with dogs began as a 15 year old in Central Texas where he heard his first cat race. Needless to say, he was hooked for life.

Mr. Clay acquired his first bobcat hounds in 1958, four running Walkers and two Old Timey Julys. He started breeding his line of IFSB Registered Clay Hounds in 1968. The hounds that Finney has bred are all line bred back to Ole Ch. Mark S. The detailed record keeping by the Clay family is evident as you look through the breeding records that have been compiled over the years. By breeding his own line of dogs, Mr. Clay can be assured that his hounds won’t run anything except bobcats. Currently, he has about 20 cat dogs ranging in age from 3 to 7. There are 73 offspring from the Clay hounds scattered among a few good friends of Finney. Mr. Clay does not sell any of his dogs although many have offered substantial amounts of money to have a chance at this bloodline.

Mr. Clay hunts all across the Southeastern U.S. and even has a camp in north Florida where he tries to spend as much time as possible. According to Carey, his dad says his only regret is “that there are only seven nights a week to hunt”. A typical bobcat hunt usually begins by loading up 6-8 dogs plus a couple of puppies. Strike dogs are put on top of the dog box and the Clays drive the roads within a particular hunting club. Once the hounds smell a bobcat, they are released to find where the cat has gone. All of the dogs have GPS tracking collars so they can...
easily be seen on the display screen of the onboard monitor. The chase has been known to last into the early morning hours. If the bobcat is treed, the Clays use a CO2 powered paintball gun to knock the cat out of the tree. The hounds then dispatch of the Bobcat.

Mr. Clay and his son do this type of hunting more so because they enjoy the sound of well-trained hounds in action than they do trying to reduce the bobcat population. Bobcats are highly territorial and when one cat is taken out, another one usually moves in. The fact that hunting bobcats with dogs is a low level method of predator control means that the population is not adversely affected in the long run. This sustainability is a good thing for Mr. Clay and hunters like him who pursue the cats. If you are looking to remove some bobcats from your lease or just want to hear some hounds doing what they love to do, keep the Clay family in mind because they are always waiting to hear the next good cat race.

E. Finney Clay and hounds with a Bobcat that was run into a culvert on Self Creek Hunting Club after a nearly 3 hour chase.  Photo by Carey Clay

Photo by Joe Hughes

Photo by Darren Miller
Tips for More Productive Wildlife Food Plots

Dr. Bronson Strickland, Extension Wildlife Specialist, Mississippi State University

It’s springtime in the South, which means it’s time for turkey season, bass fishing, and preparing for your wildlife food plots. Food plots will never replace good wildlife habitat management, but food plots are an affordable way to provide high-quality forage for wildlife. A productive, warm-season food plot can generate up to 4,000 pounds of high-quality forage per acre for your deer herd – so, pardon the pun, but that’s a lot of bang for the buck!

I have the opportunity to work with many landowners on food plot programs. During that time, I have learned a lot about how to create and maintain a productive food plot. Below I will highlight the strategies for making the most of your food plots.

The first step in creating a productive food plot is site selection. The two most common mistakes I see are planting in wet, bottomland areas and planting in shady areas. Planting in a bottomland area can be very productive as long as the soil doesn’t hold too much water. If you routinely see standing water in the area to want to plant, the site will likely generate much lower forage yield, or you may have an outright crop failure. Secondly, many food plots are planted in very narrow alleyways or roads where only an hour or two of direct sunlight is available to the plants. Many wildlife forages can grow in this environment, but forage production will be minimal. Planting along roads can be an excellent place for a food plot, but be sure the road opening is wide enough to allow several hours of direct sunlight. Another tip is to orient long, narrow plots from east-to-west, rather than north-to-south, as this will expose the food plot to more hours of direct sunlight.

Once you have identified the site, always take a soil sample for nutrient analysis. In Mississippi, a soil test thru the MSU Extension Service costs only $6.00 – this will be the best money you can spend on your food plot! A soil analysis report will provide the pH of the soil as well as the availability of phosphorous, potassium and other micronutrients that are critical for optimal plant growth. Once you have the results from your soil test, adjust the pH by adding the recommended amount of lime. In some cases you may have to do this for multiple years to neutralize the soil and bring the pH up to 6.0 or greater. Next, get the recommended mixture of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium fertilizers from the farm supply store. Simply applying a few bags of triple 13 fertilizer on a plot is not advisable, and can even be counterproductive in many instances! Adjusting the pH and adding right type of fertilizer based on the crop you want to grow is critical for a successful food plot.

After you have taken care of the soil, and are ready to plant, make sure you follow the...
recommended seed rate and planting technique. Many people think that adding double the amount of seed is good, but many times you can actually decrease forage yield by crowding too many plants on the plot. Just think how a cotton or soybean farmer sows the exact amount of seed so each plant gets the right amount of nutrients to optimize growth. Also remember to follow the planting instructions for seed depth. Clover, for example, should not be planted any deeper than ¼ inch, so disking in clover seed along with wheat or oats will severely reduce the clover germination rate.

You have selected a good site for plant growth, taken a soil test, applied the correct amounts of lime and fertilizer, and planted the right amount of seed at the proper depth – all you need to do now is sit back and enjoy a highly productive food plot, right? Well, maybe. You visit your food plot a month after planting and notice you have a nice stand of Johnson grass! I personally never realized what impact herbicides can have on food plot until I began experimenting with various warm-season food plots. The weed pressure can be immense. We are lucky to have so many pre-emergence (applied at or before planting) and post-emergence (applied on the growing plants) herbicides that can control weeds in your growing food plot. Spend some time identifying the weeds commonly found in your food plot and researching the most effective herbicide options. Unfortunately, when you have a severe weed problem, you may have to sacrifice the area for a year or two and spray with a non-selective herbicide like glyphosate (e.g., Roundup) to eliminate annual and perennial weeds to “reclaim” the site for your food plot.

The final tip for productive food plots is the use of exclosure cages. If your food plot is doing what it was designed to do, you may misidentify deer browsing for crop failure. Often times when planting small plots, or in areas with high deer densities, the deer will literally eat all of the forage that is produced, which leads many people to believe they experienced a crop failure. By installing one or two small (3’ x 3’) exclosure cages on your food plots you will be able to determine exactly how much forage your food plot is producing and how much has been consumed by deer.

Remember, just as a farmer does not produce a bumper crop of corn or soybeans by accident, you cannot expect highly productive food plots by accident either. The more preparation you devote to you food plot program the more your deer and other wildlife will benefit.

For more information about wildlife food plots, please refer to our comprehensive Extension Publication “Supplemental Wildlife Food Planting Manual for the Southeast” which can be found at http://msuces.com/pubs/publications/p2111.pdf.
Hunt Club Profile: Mossy Break Hunting Club

Peyton Weeks, Planning Forester, North Louisiana Timberlands

In hunting, success should not always be defined by the harvest rate; it should be about the experience. Very few hunters each year actually bring home the trophy animal that they have always dreamed about anyway. Hunting clubs across the South are going from a “my hunting lease” to an “our hunting lease”. Mossy Break Hunting Club in De Soto Parish Louisiana is one of those clubs.

“Our hunting lease” means an “open lease”. This means that no one is tied down to a bad spot, everyone works together to benefit the whole club and not just his or her stands, and it should promote communication which is always a positive for anything organized. Open leases have a sign-in board or book. It is generally first to sign in gets first stand choice. Homesteading an area is usually frowned upon. Plus, this is a great safety tool for being aware of everyone’s location on the lease. New members no longer feel they only have bad stands to choose from. Mossy Break took on this open concept about four years ago and they have not looked back.

Mossy Break is composed of approximately 2,400 total acres, while being split into two pieces (each part is about 1,200 acres) about five miles apart along the I-49 corridor. The land type consists of rolling pine plantations, hardwood flats, and the almighty swamp. There are 15 members, with most living within 50 miles of the lease. To say they are a diverse group of people would be an understatement. Some work in the medical field, some in the timber industry, educational system, some are self employed, and there is always the one that should be incarcerated (don’t laugh, you have one too). They all have one common goal, the love of hunting! I did not say killing. I said hunting, even though they are a very successful group of hunters. In 2011, there were more than a dozen bucks and does harvested. All of the bucks met a stringent size restriction while several made it to the taxidermist.

People often talk about being concerned about the future of hunting to a lack of hunter recruitment. However, Mossy Break has embraced the “youth movement” as can be seen on any opening weekend. These 15 members have 35 children in all and they love to have the kids out to enjoy the hunting experience. It looks as though they are going to have to build a lot more stands in the years to come.
Thanks to the suggestion of a reader (and keep them coming to me by sending suggestions to jessica.homyack@weyerhaeuser.com), this feature is focused on the largest species of rattlesnake in the world, the eastern diamondback rattlesnake (*Crotalus adamanteus*). These impressive snakes can grow to be >7 feet in length and >12 lbs and have fangs >1 inch. Eastern Diamondbacks occur throughout the Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Plain, typically in sandy pine flatwood forests and are often associated with Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) burrows. This pit viper preys on small mammals and rabbits by ambushing them from a retreat. Individuals can probably live up to about 20 years and females do not bear young until about 6 years old. Although they are typically not aggressive, the venom of eastern diamondbacks is especially destructive to tissues. Remember – most venomous snake bites occur when people are intentionally disturbing a snake, so if you see one, leave it alone!

This species of snakes has played an interesting and reoccurring role in our nation’s history. It appeared on the yellow Gadsden flag that shows a coiled rattlesnake with the words “Don’t Tread on Me” below, and colonists displayed this flag during the American Revolution. Ben Franklin famously commented that rattlesnakes have many qualities that make them an appropriate symbol for our country and suggested that the colonies repay Great Britain with a shipment of rattlesnakes for the practice of sending convicted criminals to the thirteen colonies. And finally, rattlesnakes on the “Don’t Tread on Me” flag have resurfaced as a symbol of the Tea Party.

Unfortunately, this impressive species has been in decline for decades, reportedly due to habitat degradation and killing for their skins, rattlesnake roundups, or out of fear. Currently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is reviewing a petition that requests the species be listed as federally threatened. North Carolina protects this species under their state Endangered Species Act so that is illegal to harm them there. Other states in the southeast have no special protection for the snakes, but roundups are slowly being replaced with events that showcase snakes without killing them, such as the newly named “Claxton Rattlesnake and Wildlife Festival” in Claxton, Georgia.
Coming Soon!!!

New and Improved Weyerhaeuser Hunting Website!

The Weyerhaeuser Hunting Lands website will soon have a new look that will provide a better and much more enjoyable experience. Some of the new and improved features you can expect are:

- Redesigned homepage that is more user-friendly.
- Improved search filters on “Available Areas” page to help you identify properties of interest.
- New “Property Details” page available while searching for properties to lease that provides all of the important information about an RLU - all in one place!
- Redesigned “Account History” page to help you more easily manage reservations, bids, account information, create documents, and view documents.
- A Trophy Room to show off your latest hunting experience!
- Are you looking for a club to join? Or, are you a club looking for members? Our new Find a Club/Find a Member functionality can help you with that!

You can still find us at www.weyerhaeuserhuntinglands.com. Hope you check it out!
Meet Your Weyerhaeuser Recreational Team

Editor’s Note: During the next few issues, we will be introducing you to the Weyerhaeuser Southern Timberlands Recreational Management Team. In this installment, we introduce you to Weyerhaeuser’s two southern wildlife scientists/biologists.

Jessica Homyack

Dr. Jessica Homyack is a Certified Wildlife Biologist ® that provides support to the Timberlands business and conducts cooperative research to understand how intensive forest management contributes to biodiversity. She has been employed by Weyerhaeuser for 3 years. Jessica grew up in Pennsylvania (yes, she is a Yankee), but moved around the country while gaining professional experience and degrees in wildlife science at West Virginia University, University of Maine, and Virginia Tech. Jessica lives in New Bern, NC with her husband, three-year old daughter, infant son, bird dog, and an ancient pet kingsnake. Her young family keeps her busy, but she does dream about the days when they will be old enough to take small game hunting and into a deer stand with her. When she does find a free moment, she enjoys fishing, running, hiking, growing things to eat, and cooking. She enjoys hearing about everyone’s adventures afield, so be sure to send any good stories her way. (jessica.homyack@weyerhaeuser.com).

Darren Miller

Dr. Darren Miller is also a Certified Wildlife Biologist ® that has been with Weyerhaeuser for nearly 15 years. In addition to providing technical support to Southern Timberlands and managing wildlife-related research, he also manages Weyerhaeuser’s Southern Environmental Research Program. Darren was born and raised in Louisville, KY and spent a childhood hunting squirrels and rabbits and fishing for smallmouth with his Dad, older brother, and great uncle. Darren obtained a B.S. in wildlife management from Eastern Kentucky University and an M.S. in Wildlife Ecology and Ph.D. in Forest Management from Mississippi State University where he studied black bears and wild turkeys. Darren lives in Starkville, MS with his wife of 20 years, Michelle, and their 2 daughters, Hannah (16) and Heidi (12). Darren enjoys hunting and fishing with his family, including keeping a pack of rabbit dogs.
Weyerhaeuser Recreational Team Contacts

Arkansas/Oklahoma Region

Ryan Giddens  870-286-4363
13972 Hwy. 278 W
Dierks, AR  71833
ryan.giddens@weyerhaeuser.com

Mississippi/Louisiana Region

Melissa Regan  601-731-7915
211 Armstrong Road
Columbia, MS  39429
melissa.regan@weyerhaeuser.com

Mississippi/Alabama Region

Ken McCool  662-245-5217
29 Tom Rose Road
Columbus, MS  39701
ken.mccool@weyerhaeuser.com

North Louisiana Region

Peyton Weeks  318-238-7228
5810 Hwy 1 Bypass
Natchitoches, LA  71457
peyton.weeks@weyerhaeuser.com

North Carolina Region

Travis Perry  252-633-7100
1785 Weyerhaeuser Road
Vanceboro, NC  28586
travis.perry@weyerhaeuser.com

Photo by Darren Miller
WEYERHAEUSER OUTDOORS NOW ON FACEBOOK

Have you found us on Facebook yet? Our page name is “Weyerhaeuser Outdoors”. Our goal is to provide a quality experience for all outdoors enthusiasts. On the Weyerhaeuser Outdoors page, you can:

- Catch up on the latest outdoors news and information, both in Weyerhaeuser and in your local community;
- Interact with other enthusiasts;
- View photos of nature and wildlife, and post your own photos;
- Brag! Let’s see the results of your hunts and outdoor adventures!

Be sure to go to the Weyerhaeuser Outdoors PAGE and click the "like" icon at the top of the page. This is where you'll find the latest news and info about Weyerhaeuser Outdoors. And, the best place to share your stories & photos. If you aren’t sure about how to use Facebook, just ask your teenager or your grandchild; they will have you social networking in no time!

We want to hear from you!

We are looking for hunt club members to submit questions (wildlife management, forestry, hunting, etc.), ideas for articles, comments, and photos to include in future newsletters. We would also like to feature different Weyerhaeuser hunting clubs in our newsletter. If you have something of interest for us or are interested in having your club profiled, please send an email to MSALHunting@Weyerhaeuser.com and we will work with you to get a story on your club into a future newsletter - Editor