

An Interview with
JOHN J. LANGDALE

by
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JOHN J. LANGDALE

HKS: I'd like to start with your father. We don't have much on tape yet about your branch of the family. What are your recollections of your father, and how did you get to be a forester?

JJL: I was born in 1927 near the old Langdale homeplace. My father was born in 1885, March 16th, and he grew up about a mile and a half west of Council where I was born. He attended Normal College and Business Institute in Abbeyville, Georgia.

My uncle Noah and my uncle Harley, his brothers, attended the same school. After he finished school he taught there, and he came back home and then he went to Jacksonville and got him a job with Barnett Bank, and worked there maybe a couple of years. His father asked him to come back and help him run the business at Council. He was thirty-eight years old when he married, and he married a schoolteacher that was teaching there at Council at the time. She was reared up at Homerville, the county seat. And of course I was born in '27, my sister was born in 1925, February 22nd, and we lived there on the place and managed the tract of land. It was about twenty-eight thousand acres that they had purchased some time back through the years. And he was a member of the local school board there, Clinch County Consolidated schools, and he was county commissioner for about fifteen years or longer, Clinch County commissioner.

He ran a turpentine operation there. We sold crossties and occasionally we'd have a sawmill come in and saw lumber. We control burned. I went to school at Fargo and then to Homerville for one year, Homerville High School. Then I went Georgia Military College for one year. I went from Georgia Military College into the navy, and spent about eighteen or twenty months in the navy.

HKS: This was after World War II but before the Korean War.

JJL: No it was during, it was 1945.

HKS: Okay.

JJL: I enlisted on February 6th, 1945. I finished high school at Georgia Military College and then I entered into the Junior College there, but I decided I'd better go on into the service, rather than be drafted into the army. I wanted to go into the navy, that's what I did then. My father died in 1955, after I went to the University of Georgia and came out in 1951. I first started in June 1947 in the Savannah division, University of Georgia, and then I went to University of Georgia--Athens in the fall of 1948. I graduated in '51 and came back to Council and helped him with his business until he died in 1955. Then I ran that business down there, managed it until '65, 1965, before I came up here.

HKS: It's kind of complicated the way the family businesses are and who owns shares. Johnny showed me an organizational chart but it's a lot of companies.

JJL: The original homeplace down there had six shares. When my grandfather died and my grandmother died, there were six children, three girls and three boys living. When my father came back from Jacksonville, working at the Burnett Bank, my grandfather decided to give him, he had five hundred shares is what he had, he wanted to give him one hundred shares, and the rest of them got eighty shares each. My father had one hundred shares where the rest of the five had eighty shares, there were five hundred shares of stock in the company. That's what we have now, my sister and I own fifty shares each of J. W. Langdale Company. Then we have another

company down there that's called Langdale Woodlands that was bought in 1935, about seventy-five hundred acres. We purchased it for fifteen hundred dollars in 1935, '37, 1937. My two boys own seventeen and a half shares of that.

HKS: Okay. I'm not sure how important it is to try to write the story about the company and all its subsidiaries.

JJL: Actually in that family there were four people who owned that Langdale Woodlands in '37.

HKS: You're vice-president and manager of The J. W. Langdale Company?

JJL: Right.

HKS: What's its primary business?

JJL: It's growing timber, tree farming.

HKS: Okay, but not manufacturing.

JJL: No. Just tree farming. We did have cattle and hogs at one time, but we don't have that anymore.

HKS: Is that company trying to acquire any more land?

JJL: Yes.

HKS: The ownership map that you have on the wall, that's J. W. Langdale Company's land?

JJL: No, that's all the land.

HKS: All the land for all the companies.

JJL: J. W. Langdale Company owns this tract here which we bought three years ago and these two right here.

HKS: The orange colored.

JJL: This is Langdale Woodland, which was bought in 1937.

HKS: It's in Florida.

JJL: Right, all of it's in Columbia County, Florida. And it's about half swamp country.

HKS: Wetlands we call it now, right?

JJL: Right.

HKS: I asked Harley this yesterday. Why didn't you expand more into Florida? Is there any particular reason?

JJL: Judge Langdale went to Mercer University and got a law degree. He came up to Valdosta and lived here. My uncle Noah followed him to Valdosta because my father was still there, he was still working there at J. W. Langdale Company. There wasn't enough to keep them all employed, so he remained there in Clinch County, and they came up here. Judge was in turpentine, we were in the turpentine business down there, too, at that time. Started the turpentine business back in '94, my grandfather did and we continued that operation until about 1977.

HKS: And the primary reason you stopped that is because it's a paper by-product now.

JJL: Right. And the scarcity of labor to work it, you know. Most all of the people moved to town. These welfare programs took over too much.

HKS: When I was here several months ago, we drove east to Waycross. Along that highway I could see trees that somebody's taken gum out of. Now who can afford to do that?

JJL: These small tracts around these farms and all, that's were most of your turpentine is, back in the northeast of here, around these fields where you have farm labor. They do that part time during the summer months, they work turpentine.

HKS: I see.

JJL: We don't have the labor here. Most of our labor was black at that time, and it was plentiful back in the '30s and '40s. After World War II the labor supply began to dwindle some.

HKS: And there was more legislation about fringe benefits and employment rights.

JJL: Right.

HKS: But unions have never been a problem yet, in this part of the South I guess.

JJL: Not in naval stores, no.

HKS: Not in naval stores. It's still an agricultural program in terms of the legislation?

JJL: Right.

HKS: As opposed to the industrial. I guess there are different rules for industries as opposed to agriculture, compensation requirements.

JJL: Right.

HKS: Okay. Now Langdale Woodlands where we're sitting.

JJL: No, that's woodlands division.

HKS: Woodlands division.

JJL: Langdale Company.

HKS: Okay. I see, and you're vice-president of woodlands.

JJL: Yes sir.

HKS: Alright.

JJL: I'm vice president of Langdale Woodlands, J. W. Langdale Company and the Langdale Company.

HKS: And you trained in forestry. How many foresters work for you?

JJL: We, at the present time we have only four.

HKS: Only four, you mean you had more before?

JJL: I think that's about the maximum. We have two in this woodlands division, of course Harley's one, Harley's a good one. And then we have Franklin Staten. The Langdale Company only has two foresters, myself and Jim Barrett who are professional foresters.

HKS: Do you hire technicians, two year program types to...

JJL: That's about all of our crew. We have a group that have been with us for twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five years we brought up from just high school graduates you see.

HKS: Is the silviculture you practice today much different from it was when you started?

JJL: We're clearcutting and planning more. We have more plantations than we had.

HKS: Because you bought land with standing timber?

JJL: Right.

HKS: You logged that off. And of course without naval stores, your silviculture changes when you're no longer in naval stores.

JJL: Right.

HKS: How much of your land was in naval stores production?

JJL: Probably about 40 percent of it was, our uplands.

HKS: And the main difference in silviculture is you always want to regenerate slash pine or longleaf, but on your land that produces lumber you go for loblolly pine, right?

JJL: No, no we like the slash or longleaf pine. Your loblolly produces good pulpwood, fast growing.

HKS: Okay. I don't know much about southern pine...

JJL: Your slash and longleaf are the best quality.

HKS: All I remember from my silviculture classes in the 1950s is longleaf pine is very difficult to reproduce.

JJL: Right.

HKS: Is it still difficult or do you know more about it now?

JJL: We've had good luck with our planting of bare root trees, some of the what we call seedlings or containerized trees, we've had good luck with that, I imagine we have probably six or seven hundred acres of longleaf that we planted, which is a very small percentage of our whole.

HKS: Now this afternoon you might show me some burning, some two-year-old longleaf.

JJL: I hope to, yes.

HKS: Why are you burning that, to reduce competition?

JJL: Yes. We can't tell exactly. In one place we don't know how many seedlings we have, it's so rough we don't know how many seedlings we have to survive. So we go in there and burn this first area, and the second area we're just going to burn it to maybe try to release some other trees that might be coming along. These trees are about ten years old, eight or ten years old. The other one is about six years old, and we just want to burn it off and get some of the hardwood out of the way.

HKS: Longleaf seedlings will withstand the fire?

JJL: Yes sir.

HKS: I remember something about fire and longleaf. Refresh my memory, loblolly and slash withstand fire too?

JJL: Slash withstands it pretty good and loblolly, it withstands it pretty fair. The reason the longleaf, when it gets up to be a, say an eight or ten foot tree, it's not any more immune to fire than any other tree, any other pine. When it's in the grass stage, that's when you can burn through it without hurting it see. The reason for that is you have this spray of needles that comes out, and they burn away and protect the bud.

HKS: It all sounds familiar.

JJL: But if you get the trunk of that tree hot, it's just as susceptible to damage as slash or loblolly.

HKS: Are the growth rates about the same? Is it just difference in wood quality?

JJL: The growth rate on loblolly is greater than the slash or longleaf. It's more shade resistant, it can grow in fairly shady conditions, and grow through hardwood. Your slash, I guess, and longleaf, they're about the same. Longleaf may stay in the grass stage ten or fifteen years, but when it comes out it'll shoot on up pretty fast. It's got the root system and everything. Sometimes you have to burn through it to make it respond.

HKS: So you planted longleaf seedlings, but you don't know what the survival is?

JJL: On one spot we don't know exactly what the survival is, it's a small area, just probably about twenty acres. We've got pretty good survival but we want to make sure that we have enough to live with, 50 percent or more.

HKS: Are there any permits that you have to get these days to burn?

JJL: We have to call into the Georgia Forestry Commission, and they give us a permit and a number.

HKS: But there are no air pollution requirements.

JJL: No, not that I know of.

HKS: It's getting to be a problem in western Oregon. But you don't...

JJL: What happens is, the Georgia Forestry Commission, they're supposed to have all this information and they give us a permit and they take in all these considerations about humidity and wind directions, and the rate that the smoke will leave there, you know. And if the wind is fairly calm and high humidity, they'll give you a permit.

HKS: What's the ideal. It's relatively cold, must be about 40 degrees outside now, windy, very clear. Is this a good day to burn with the wind?

JJL: Right. You want a temperature, a low about 60 degrees and you want good wind, you want something about five or ten miles an hour, you want humidity around 35 percent, so this is just about right for that.

HKS: Okay. That map behind you on the wall, maybe a quarter of the land is owned by Langdale. Is the other land also forest land managed by other companies?

JJL: No, this is all managed by this office here.

HKS: No, I mean the land that's not owned by you.

JJL: This is a block of two hundred and twenty thousand acres owned by Superior Pine Products Company.

HKS: Right.

JJL: I guess Harley might have told you that.

HKS: I saw the video tape that the Oettmeier's did. Are they going to be burning today too?

JJL: They're doing some burning on clearcuts. I talked to the man a while ago who usually runs the helicopter, Mr. Register, from Lakeland, and he's burning off clearcuts, you know, where they go in and clearcut it and then chop it and bed it and plant it.

HKS: So you're burning for site preparation, not for fire, not for fuel reduction.

JJL: That's what we're doing out here, Kinderlou, we're reducing the fuel out Kinderlou on two spots, and on the one spot we want to find out whether we have a good survival or not.

HKS: I don't know if you still use drip torches or lasers to ignite. What do you use?

JJL: [laughter] Well we use an old gallon can with a copper hose coming out of it, and gasoline and diesel fuel mix, kind of a drip thing. Now these helicopters, have you seen those?

HKS: I've seen them only in film.

JJL: They have two different methods. They drip this Napalm, they have this little ball like that, I don't know exactly how that works.

HKS: You've been operating as a professional forester through some very interesting times. Some of the national issues like wilderness haven't effected you but...

JJL: No.

HKS: I guess for you the biggest changes, you see an improvement in state fire protection.

JJL: Right. When I got out of school we didn't have any fire protection other than we had the turpentine labor, and we had the backpack pumps, and our area down there was not under protection, we had to drill ourselves. At that time we did a lot of control burning. We wouldn't have anything over about three years rough. That helped us a lot in controlling fire. When we would burn for turpentine, we were going to put up for turpentine, we would burn every year, before we installed these cups on trees. About three or four years later we'd go there and rake the debris around those trees and burn it again, get the rough down.

HKS: You use the term rough, that's just brush, grass...

JJL: Brush, yeah.

HKS: Are you distinguishing between prescribed burning and control burning? It means the same thing?

JJL: Same thing, yeah.

HKS: Same thing. In the West the two terms are used differently. One is silvicultural, that's prescribed burning. Control burning was fire prevention. But you don't distinguish here.

JJL: No, I think about a control burn, you have control of it. [laughter] Sometimes you prescribe burn....

HKS: What have you done over the years to keep current. How do you know about new technology. You read the Journal of Forestry. When I was a forester, aerial photographs were state of the art, go out with a stereoscope, try to locate yourself in the field. Probably easier in an old growth forest where the trees are distinctive. But now you have these little hand-held things that pick signals from satellites. You're the head forester right.

JJL: Right.

HKS: So you have to sign off on the new gadgets. The young guys probably always want to get the new gadget, they use it in school.

JJL: Right. We've been slow to change here. We've got some of the same, old ways we had. Now we have established a continuous forest inventory plots for our land, and we use some little electronic gadgets for measuring that, you know, something you can take out in the field and plug it in and plug it into your calculator when you get back.

HKS: But that's only for recording data, that doesn't actually measure anything.

JJL: Right. No fancy gadgets here, we've still got the old methods.

HKS: You know your land so well. It's two hundred thousand acres, that's still a lot of acres, but you must have been on every acre.

JJL: Right. I probably know more about it, except maybe Harley knows quite a bit, but then I probably know more about it than anybody else around here other than Harley.

HKS: In terms of management responsibilities, you have the regular responsibilities of finding enough wood to keep the company going and fire protection. What other issues were there, what were the problems in the '50s? You weren't dealing with federal problems. Out West it's what the Forest Service does that's so important, but here you don't care what the Forest Service does. Except maybe on their inventory every ten years.

JJL: We get these reports. They have plots on our lands. We get reports, what's thin, what's taking its place, how much has been cut, and how much is growing and all that. We were naval stores oriented until about ten years ago, maybe twelve years ago. That kind of dictated our forestry practices. Everything we did was for naval stores. But since then we have changed, and we didn't have any clearcuts at all or planting like that. We depended on natural regeneration. When we took the trees from the top we didn't do any thinning underneath. We didn't have any market for pulpwood when I first came out, so we've had pulpwood come in and we've been able to take out some of our cull trees for that. We've eliminated our naval stores which was probably cutting our growth 50 percent. Our loss from insects is probably 10 percent each year. I feel like we are growing more timber, and we have more available now than we had before.

HKS: Nationally the battles were for wilderness and Multiple Use Act. Those weren't your issues. When we get into the '70s, we started having federal EPA, water quality. Is it that time that you plugged in more with the national issues?

JJL: That's right.

HKS: In the '50s and '60s, you ran your business, you got your wood and sent it to the mill and...

JJL: There wasn't any problem back then, just regular selling your product to people.

HKS: But labor was getting more scarce was an issue.

JJL: That was mainly for turpentine. The labor was scarce and the quality was; some of the older people were dying off and nobody replaced them.

HKS: How about mechanization? That's one way to compensate for labor problems.

JJL: They tried to mechanize the process of working those trees in the woods, they never could. They had automatic hacks, which is something they streak with you know...

HKS: Yes.

JJL: About the only thing that revolutionized the naval stores business back in the, let's see the '50s, was the use of acid, sulphuric acid, and that helped some. Of course that killed more trees. We had a lot more damage from insects from using that.

HKS: Is that right?

JJL: It put a strain on the tree that kept the wound open, you see, and let it hit. And you had a more superior insect type.

HKS: You had pine bark beetle? Is that the...

JJL: Right. The turpentine beetle would strike it but what he would do is weaken the tree and then your Ips and pine bark would come in.

HKS: How about mechanization on the land for pulpwood and lumber? Mechanical planting, right?

JJL: Right.

HKS: Is there a bunch of your land that you can't get a tractor over to plant?

JJL: We prepare it. What we do is clear all the trees off and then we chop it with the chopper, drum chopper, and then we burn the debris and then we go in and bed it, put beds in.

HKS: But you don't do much hand planting?

JJL: No. Everything is mechanical planting now.

HKS: Mechanical harvesting?

JJL: Everything is mechanical harvested.

HKS: When Hugo went through a few years ago, through South Carolina, they tell me that one of the biggest problems they had with clean up, nobody knew how to use chain saws anymore.

JJL: That's right.

HKS: If that's true here, if you had a hurricane here....

JJL: Your workman's comp laws are such that you have to mechanize now. You can't afford to use a chain saw. Because they're too expensive to insure.

HKS: That's interesting.

JJL: We had a man just a while back went into the pulpwood business, he had a chainsaw and a truck like we used to do, he just couldn't make it.

HKS: So you don't use a chainsaw to buck or anything, buck the logs.

JJL: They'll thin the tops off of them, the limbs off of them. Most of that is just one man out there. When we bring a log in he'll chop the top off of it.

HKS: SAF met in New Orleans ten years ago, maybe you were there, but we went up to Mississippi, and I saw a mechanical device that pulled trees out roots and all. That was experimental. It looked like bombs had dropped, there were holes everywhere. Why did they want it, the taproot?

JJL: Just stumps or whole tree?

HKS: Pulled the whole tree out. It didn't catch on?

JJL: No. Hercules has a machine that will pull stumps. What they do is grab on to it and just kind of vibrate and vibrate. The loose stumps don't have any green roots. But I never have seen an operation like that with the entire tree...

HKS: Probably just made one of them.[laughter]

JJL: That stump, I guess they could use it for fuel or something like that. If it's pine you'd probably recover some turpentine and rosin out of it.

HKS: During the '40s, in reaction to the federal Forest Service effort to get legislation to regulate private land practices, most of the states in the country adopted a forest practices act, so you'd have state regulation. Georgia doesn't have a forest practices act; how did Georgia avoid that?

JJL: I really don't know, never had it.

HKS: So you want to operate on your land. What is required? Do you have to get a permit from anyone?

JJL: No.

HKS: How about water quality? You're operating, there's moving water on your property...

JJL: We hear more about that, and we have restricted our harvesting near streams. We went in with our backhoe and we dug some ditches connecting these, what we call ponds. We didn't drain it completely, but we lowered the level on it. It would support the pine and timber.

HKS: The ponds were natural, just depressed areas.

JJL: They had pines trees, anything that had pine in it. We'd go there and lower the level. Slash pine will grow in fairly wet conditions. Through those efforts we have increased our slash pine production on our lands.

HKS: And that's the sort of manipulations, if you want to use that word, that the wetlands advocates are saying is wrong?

JJL: Yes.

HKS: The Bush administration is going to make a final ruling on the definition of wetlands.

JJL: Right.

HKS: What do you anticipate? Are there any rumors about how it's going to go?

JJL: I've heard everything. These areas that we drained, they'd be considered wetlands now. And then your slash pines might be a wetland species, so I don't know. I think we're going to have problems. I think we've done all the damage we want to do or whatever you want to call it, but draining some of these areas, because we anticipated this. I don't feel like we have damaged the wet areas or wetlands by doing this. There wasn't any running streams through those things, just little depressions out there and we connected them up and took them to a stream.

HKS: If you wanted to, for whatever reason, convert forest land to agricultural land, do you need to get permission to do that?

JJL: Not right now.

HKS: You can build homes? They just don't have the regulations?

JJL: The only thing would be restricted, probably the county may have some regulations on that.

HKS: That's the only...

JJL: Zoning regulations.

HKS: You have to have proper perk for your septic tanks and those usual sort of things.

JJL: Right, but other than that we don't know of anything that would restrict us from doing it.

HKS: How many states don't have a forest practices act in this area? You may not know the answer to that, but is Georgia typical or unusual?

JJL: I think it's typical. We have some regulations that were brought about by the Georgia Forestry Association, and they're voluntary, you see, all are voluntary. They're not enforced by anybody. But they have a watchdog to see if they are being complied with.

HKS: There's a state agency, a state division of forestry, whatever it's called. The state hires foresters, is that mainly a fire fighting organization now?

JJL: Yes, it has been, that's mostly what it's concerned with, is fire suppression.

HKS: Who operates nurseries? Is that all tied...

JJL: They operate nurseries too, but I understand they're trying to take that away from the state, trying to get it back in private hands.

HKS: Where do you buy your seedlings?

JJL: We buy them from the state.

HKS: Do you supply seed?

JJL: No, they furnish seed and everything, and we just pick them up. We order so many, and they...

HKS: You don't have the genetic variation that you worry about supplying your own seed off your own land, like...

JJL: No, they have these seed orchards, and they've been going on for thirty, thirty-five, forty years. We feel like they've got some good trees. Good seed source. They started this program years ago and back in the '40s with the building of a seed orchard, for the cutting of their seed trees.

HKS: It strikes me it must have been interesting, very interesting for you during these years as new manufacturing technology and new markets opened up like the OSB plant I'm going to see this afternoon. It made hardwoods valuable, it changed the way you practiced silviculture.

JJL: Right, right.

HKS: International markets. Johnny was telling me this morning, he mentioned shipping all the poles to Bangladesh. Twenty years ago you didn't do that. All those poles come off your own land or do you buy...?

JJL: No, only about 15 percent of the come off our own land.

HKS: Why is that?

JJL: That's about all we can furnish for the production they have here. That's about the way we saw timber, about 15 percent comes off our property and the rest of it is bought from surrounding land owners.

HKS: So two hundred thousand acres provides only 30 percent of your wood then.

JJL: Right.

HKS: That this company manufactures into something.

JJL: Right.

HKS: Do you ever get nervous about not controlling the supply? And that's one of the reasons you bought the land to begin with, the family acquired the land...

JJL: We have this reserve, and when conditions get bad on the outside, we can't buy it and it's not available, we can get it on our land.

HKS: I see.

JJL: That's one way we've been managing our lands, for the production for the sawmill here, pole operations.

HKS: So it's a pretty big mill. I think Harley said you saw eighty million feet of lumber a year?

JJL: Yes. We handle probably a hundred, I don't know exactly what it is, over a hundred million feet of pole and lumber goes through here.

HKS: What about environmental...

JJL: So we can only furnish about fifteen million, you see.

HKS: Yes. Do you ever buy it from Superior Pine? I watched the video tape yesterday.

JJL: You see what they have mostly now, when they had logs we did, now they got pulpwood, we don't have...

HKS: Okay.

JJL: Mostly what they're producing now is pulpwood. They've got about a twenty-two year rotation or twenty-five, and we could use some of it, but most of it goes into the pulp mill. We could use some of the chip and saw stock, but most of that goes in the pulp mill.

HKS: I don't know how accurate the video tape is; the company reviewed it and said this is fine for public distribution. It sounded like there is a certain dissatisfaction with that contract now with that sixty-year lease with Champion because there is no longer a Champion pulpmill. St. Regis mill was in Jacksonville then.

JJL: Right. They don't have a mill...

HKS: So they have to sell the pulp, their chips to somebody else.

JJL: Yes.

HKS: And so that really cuts into the profitability.

JJL: Right.

HKS: And you sell chips to a paper mill, how far from here?

JJL: It's only about ten miles, ten or twelve miles down here.

HKS: Is that what I smell?

JJL: Right. What is it, Paper Corporation of America, PCA? That thing has changed hands I don't know how many times.

HKS: Sounds like the paper business is a tough business to be in.

JJL: Yes.

HKS: I see logs coming through town, are they heading to this mill here? I can't tell a saw log from a pulp log except for labels.

JJL: If they're going route 84, they're going to our board plant over there, Langboard plant. If it's pine logs, they're coming here.

HKS: Those are pretty good size logs I saw going in the mill right down the road here.

JJL: Yes.

HKS: What were those, twenty inches diameter?

JJL: Some of them, yeah, twenty inches.

HKS: Isn't a pole or a piling more valuable than lumber?

JJL: Right.

HKS: So those had too many knots or what?

JJL: They wouldn't have the size to make a pole, you have to have a certain butt dimension and a certain top dimension to make a pole.

HKS: Okay.

JJL: Right. Those trees are just too large to make any kind of a pole. You can make piling out of some of those, but your utility poles have certain specifications they wouldn't meet. We will get most of our poles, I'd say a lot of them out of Alabama right now, a lot of them, tall poles.

HKS: In terms of preservation processing of poles and posts, what competitors do you have, who else does that in this area? Are you pretty much it?

JJL: Right now, I'd say we're the major producer of treated products, treated lumber, and poles.

HKS: You ship them by rail then to Jacksonville? How do you get them to Bangladesh from here?

JJL: The last we shipped was over at Fernandina. They had a little ship come in there, and we transported them by truck.

HKS: That's on the Atlantic coast.

JJL: Right.

HKS: People here don't think of the Gulf. On a map, the Gulf is just as close.

JJL: You see there's no really deep ports on the Gulf close to us. You take Pensacola and Tampa, and we ship some out of Brunswick over here, and we shipped the last out of Fernandina.

HKS: You don't identify with Tallahassee, either, you look north.

JJL: That's right.

HKS: Looking on the map I thought Tallahassee looks like the closest big town.

JJL: It's only about an hour and a half from here. [laughter] Macon's only two hours, two and a half, something like that. Jacksonville, I guess is about the most attractive place here, you can get there in about an hour and half, two hours.

HKS: About the same time as driving to Tallahassee.

JJL: Right.

HKS: Better highway I guess.

JJL: If you take the interstate it takes a little longer. What we do is we go right through here and go out through our little homeplace there...

HKS: In Fargo. Foresters were told in school how we see the long term. You think in rotations a lot like wheat growers, next year's crop. And you're planting stuff today based upon anticipation of what's going to happen thirty-five years from now. Do you think you'll have a pretty clear view of that or is the world so confusing now that you're just doing the best you can?

JJL: I guess we're doing the best we can. We feel like that sooner or later our better lands we can probably grow some chip'n saw in twenty-five years, and that's about what's going to happen in the surrounding areas too.

HKS: Chip'n saw is where you saw the butt log and chip the rest. Is that about it?

JJL: Right, you get your 2 by 4 or 2 by 6s out of that butt portion, chip the rest of it. And that's about what your sawmills will be gearing up to, you see, small mills, your smaller logs.

HKS: Do go through the calculations that we had to in forestry school of compound interest and projecting the economic rate of return and all. I mean do you really do that when you manage your lands?

JJL: We don't, we don't do it here. As a matter of fact...

HKS: Does anyone really do that?

JJL: No, I don't know of anybody who goes through that process.

HKS: First of all the rotations are so much shorter than we studied in school.

JJL: Right. You're talking about thirty-five, forty years. The main use for wood when I was going to school was fuel. Major use throughout the world was fuel.

HKS: Hardwood. What's been the biggest change in silviculture other than...

JJL: Until this plant was built over here we sold very little hardwood. We could sell some of the big gum, or something like that and they'd be very selective about what logs they took.

HKS: And you sent that to a furniture plant?

JJL: Right, or they would take it to a box plant, maybe a vegetable box plant. We'd go and get the better logs.

HKS: Do you have furniture quality hardwoods in this area?

JJL: No, no furniture quality. Most of our hardwood would be black gum and that type of stuff. We don't have the hickories or oaks, you know, that would be a good furniture....

HKS: So somebody like Tommy Thompson in Milledgeville; he's about as far south as you can be and get furniture quality.

JJL: I would think so. That was why we had to ship it up there.

HKS: Is it because it grows too fast here? Why isn't it furniture quality, what's the problem with it?

JJL: We don't have the deep swamps, the deep areas where you can grow hardwood or the well-drained slopes that are moist. We just don't have the land to grow hardwood.

HKS: Where I live in Durham, there's a lot of hardwood, oak and hickory and so forth, but it's not valuable for furniture. You go west seventy-five or a hundred miles to High Point, something's changed in the ecosystem there that they're growing furniture quality hardwood. And to my inexperienced western Douglas-fir eye, I don't see what the difference is.

JJL: We took a survey of our hardwoods when we had this continuous forest inventory program going on and about 15 percent of our trees were cull, our hardwood trees, because of a rot, heart rot. We don't really have much land to grow cypress or hardwood, you know, quality hardwood. Most of our hardwood is black gum that grows in these areas that we're talking about draining, some of these little flat areas there, depressions.

HKS: A couple of years ago they logged next door to me in Durham. Two different operators came in, one came and took the pine, someone else came in and took the hardwood. That's the first time I had ever seen hardwood harvested, there's an awful lot left on the ground. It strikes me as a fire hazard problem, a different problem managing hardwoods. Is that one reason? Do you feel comfortable managing hardwoods, do you think you know enough about it?

JJL: We know nothing about hardwood. What we know is that the best way to manage hardwood is to clearcut it and let it come back again.

HKS: Of course its merchantability is different when you have the strand board plant over here.

JJL: We haven't really done any clearcutting until three years or four years ago. We haven't cut our hardwoods, it's just been sitting there. The only hardwoods we sold is when some fellow came through here wanting to buy some hickory for some ax handles. [laughter] We had a few of those trees. Then we have these people with box plants, vegetable box plants and baskets.

HKS: That's not very much wood.

JJL: No, they don't use much. Just two or three loads a day would suit them.

HKS: Sure.

JJL: So we really didn't have a market. But this OSB plant I guess satisfies our needs better than anything we ever had, because we can use anything we can grow out there in the way of hardwoods. We can utilize everything. Our hardwood harvesting doesn't produce as much waste as you feel like you probably saw.

HKS: I assumed it was low grade or something.

JJL: We can't utilize stuff like that over there, but we can utilize just about everything down to three or four inches now.

HKS: Do you supply all the hardwood for your own plant off your own lands?

JJL: No, we supply most of it now, but in the future we won't be able to.

HKS: Are you actually managing for hardwood, favoring hardwood?

JJL: I guess the only species we're probably favoring now would be sweet gum, and it's coming in in our plantations. We feel like if we keep fire out of our plantations, we'll probably have a sweet gum that's about the size of our pines when we want to harvest it.

HKS: Sweet gum is Liquidambar?

JJL: Right.

HKS: Okay. On your resume you've listed three professional organizations. The SAF, Georgia Forestry Association, and Forest Farmers. Which of the three really meets the needs of a landowner. They all claim that they do.

JJL: I guess Forest Farmers is probably the most widely known and recognized. They do quite a bit. Most of them are just places to go once a year and meet your friends. The Georgia Forestry Association, they do quite a bit of help.

HKS: You pay your dues and so forth. Is it in the lobbying they do?

JJL: Right, lobbying of the legislation.

HKS: It's not the papers you hear, the speeches you hear when you go to the meetings.

JJL: No, no.

HKS: You already know that stuff.

JJL: Right. The lobbying and all they do as far as having these wetland issues and taxes and stuff like that.

HKS: So if you see that you have a problem you might call the people at Forest Farmers in Atlanta and say look I've got this problem, can you help me out on it?

JJL: Right.

HKS: They give you advice over the phone?

JJL: Right, and they send out newsletters every once in a while on the progress of certain bills in the legislature and the Congress, stuff like that.

HKS: But there's not much legislation at the state level that they're concerned about.

JJL: No, not really.

HKS: Except maybe tax laws.

JJL: Tax, yeah. We've had the tax laws passed year before last that we want. You know about the standing timber? You only tax the land?

HKS: Ad valorem and the severance tax and...

JJL: Like a severance tax, when you cut the timber and sell it you have to pay 100 percent on it. Whereas you pay on 40 percent of your land value. Which is okay.

HKS: And the local assessor determines that land value?

JJL: Right. He has to send his figures to the state.

HKS: You operate in different counties. Are the assessors pretty much the same?

JJL: No, there's quite a bit of difference in the assessments. Most of them are pretty well the same, but I'd say that over in Glenn County we've probably got maybe six or seven dollars an acre over there, and Brooks county, probably about four, three to four, and Loundes County is three and four, four dollars an acre, I'm talking about the taxes on timberland.

HKS: Why do you think there's a difference?

JJL: They just need that money to operate the county [laughter].

HKS: Sure. Some counties have less of an urban area too.

JJL: Right. Over in Glenn County, through there, they're growing pretty well over there. People expect more, you know, and they spend a lot more money over there in Glenn County than they do in Loundes County.

HKS: If it gets too much out of line, do you have a state commissioner you can complain to?

JJL: Yes, but you only can do is compare to the rest of the county.

HKS: That's right.

JJL: Cannot say everybody's being treated fairly, you know, or what they say is fair.

HKS: So it's not comparing county to county, it's within the county.

JJL: That's right, you can't go with...

HKS: You look and see what kind of car your assessor drives, I guess. [laughter]

JJL: Most of them are, you know, are fairly reasonable with it, I'd say.

HKS: They live in the county and they're elected locally.

JJL: Right.

HKS: But say they decide to build a new school, well that money comes out of the land base.

JJL: That's right, sure does. And Glenn County I guess is about the worst county we have. Of course we feel like that land's worth more or will be in the future than this land here will be.

HKS: It's more productive or just...

JJL: It's more productive and its location, you know. Maybe a ways down the road, but it will be worth more in the long run.

HKS: Are you still actively acquiring land?

JJL: We acquire land when we feel like it. We're not speculating, but when it's reasonable we'll look at it, buy it.

HKS: Probably certain areas are more appealing to you because you own a lot of land already there and would like to block it up.

JJL: Yes. If we see something for sale in between some of our tracts, we go out of our normal operations to buy it.

HKS: During the '60s and '70s when the big companies are coming into the South like Weyerhaeuser and IP and buying up companies like yours, did you ever go out on your land with foresters from other companies and show them what you had?

JJL: They would visit us, yes, years ago.

HKS: How did you feel about that? Is that good, you'd be proud.

JJL: We felt like we'd learn something from them. I know they were trying to learn something from us too, you know.

HKS: But you saw what was happening about the Dierks in Arkansas and McGowins in Alabama.

JJL: Wasn't really any big companies in this region like you're talking about out there. I guess Langdale Company was about the largest back then, probably they had about one hundred and fifty thousand acres at that time. And when those other people were coming in, you know, buying out after the war, most of them would begin with a lease.

HKS: Like St. Regis got with Superior Pine.

JJL: Surrounding that tract down there [pointing to map], this area was leased. And this area up here was leased, and they had a lease over here. But we never were interested in a lease or anything like that. Some of it's still in a lease here, and we had bought some of this. Champion, we bought some land from them that was under lease. We paid them for the timber and paid the person who leased the land to them, we paid them for the land.

HKS: In terms of management responsibilities for land, rural land, is trespass an issue?

JJL: It used to be. Now we have all of our lands leased to clubs, like recreational clubs, and we have probably one hundred forty or fifty of those. Most of our land has locks on the gates, and the club members are the only ones who have access. Trespassing is not really a problem with us now like it used to be.

HKS: Arson?

JJL: Arson used to be when we had our woods open. People would drive back in there and start a fire, some of it not intentional, but now we don't have that problem. We've got these people who have recreational leases, and they're in the woods all the time just about. We have most of our fires when we have frost, you know, and it kills the grass off. But they're in the woods there, and if something does happen they notify us pretty soon. I think we're in good shape as far as trespassing now.

HKS: How about if you decide to harvest timber in an area where you have a recreational lease? That's all part of the understanding but, do they have an ownership after a while, this is their land and you're...

JJL: Well, they try to tell us [laughter]. They say they don't like what we're doing. But you know it's in our lease that we can harvest. But most of them understand, and we try to work with them as much as possible. Right now we don't have much harvesting on our land at all, we have most of it on timber leases, because it's dry weather and they are trying to get all the timber off their leases rather than on our land.

HKS: Are these leases a source of income or is it largely a way to accommodate the realities that people are going to hunt on your land anyway, and you can regulate this way and everyone benefits?

JJL: It's some of both. We feel like we'll be able to make it pay our ad valorem taxes. In some tracts we're paying ad valorem taxes with that lease. And we feel like maybe it'll come to that later on. It's going to be a good source of income. Our real concern now is that they'll probably start taxing the leases. [laughter]

HKS: Income taxes?

JJL: That ad valorem I guess you might say.

HKS: Adds to the value.

JJL: Yes.

HKS: Those tax guys are busier than...

JJL: Land is so much, your timber is so much, and then your lease is worth so much, so that might come on here before too long, pay taxes plus the income tax.

HKS: And hunting is primarily deer? Or birds?

JJL: Deer, deer mostly. Deer and hog, wild hogs.

HKS: Are they as dangerous as public television makes them out to be with the big tusks...

JJL: We don't have those big hogs like we used to. I remember when I was coming up we'd have these, maybe three hundred pound boars, and they would have long tusks. We wouldn't

see too many of them, though, just something that was in the woods. We had a few of them. We'd go out and catch these wild hogs and sell them back in the '40s, '30s and '40s and '50s, we had what we called hog trap pens around that area there and we would go out and catch hogs and bring them up here to market. We wouldn't get much for them, ten or fifteen cents a pound.

HKS: Billy was telling me about the notching of the ears.

JJL: We'd mark them. Our mark was two under bits and a split. [laughter]

HKS: And the hog calling and all that.

JJL: We had about sixty trap pens, and we would go down on Monday morning and start baiting those pens up, had a little trap door. Had the door hinged up here [gesture], and we'd have to put corn there, we he come in there and walked into the pen he would, through that trap door. It would close on him and then we would go around about Wednesday and push him to the back and set it again. Then on Saturday we'd go around and pick the hogs up that we'd caught. The ones we wanted to keep we'd turn loose.

HKS: Historically the importance of the hog is the screw worm didn't effect the hog like it did the cattle and the deer?

JJL: That's right. When the ticks were real bad, now, he would have a problem like a screw worm, they were infected, but not like a deer. The deer, when they were born in the spring screw worms would get in their naval, and that's where a lot of them died, right there.

HKS: Are there any bear or any predators left?

JJL: Right. This area here [points to map] is the only place in Florida where you're allowed to hunt bear, Columbia County, and this is the only place you can hunt bear in Florida. The Osceola National Forest is located right here, Okefenokee Swamp is right here, and what they want to do now is create a corridor so that the bear can go back from the Okefenokee to the Osceola, into the swamp. The Forest Service is right in here now, they moved up to right there. So we are neighbors to the Forest Service now.

HKS: This is the land acquisition, they've been buying land.

JJL: Right. And this national, what is it conservancy group?

HKS: Nature Conservancy.

JJL: Nature Conservancy, they bought the land and donated it to the Forest Service or sold it to them.

HKS: To establish that corridor.

JJL: As part of the corridor. They're trying to establish that corridor now.

HKS: It's on that national forest from the Forest Service point of view. I've been interviewing Max Peterson now, and he mentioned the phosphate mining, the slime pits, I don't remember

the whole story now. Is that one reason that there's no market for phosphates on your own land? You must have phosphates on your land.

JJL: We have some, but it's overburdened so great that it wouldn't be feasible. I think about eighty feet, so that would be a little too deep.

HKS: Sure. Getting back to the predators, the bear, no large cats?

JJL: Oh, no. The bobcat is about the largest cat we have. Of course they'll kill a deer, you know, kill a hog. Big bobcat killers.

HKS: Alligators are not considered predators?

JJL: No, not for livestock or anything. They mostly feed on fish and turtles and stuff like that. We have had them catch dogs, you know, when they cross the stream or something like that.

HKS: I think it was in the Saturday Evening Post article. Judge Harley was commenting on how he liked to make ponds, and every pond should have an alligator until it got too big and could take a dog, and that's when you got rid of the alligator.

JJL: Right, yeah. [laughter]

HKS: Are they still endangered, the alligator?

JJL: They're still protected in Florida. They have an open season in Florida, and in Georgia it's illegal to kill one anytime.

HKS: Do you have much alligator on your land? Much swamp land, wherever they live?

JJL: We have a good many, yes sir, we have a good many.

HKS: In the management plan you take that into consideration to safeguard their habitat, or is that not an issue when you're away from the Swamp and so forth?

JJL: The alligator we have are mostly around these open water areas. Occasionally we see them traveling from one place to another; when it gets real wet or real dry they'll start traveling. We protect them as far as we don't allow anybody to kill them or hunt.

HKS: But you had mentioned before that you used a backhoe to lower the water levels of ponds. If there's an alligator there you would...

JJL: He would have to move to a deeper place. But very few of those ponds would have an alligator, these are just small depressions that would go dry. And he has a cave, he'd build a cave in deep water. Of course these larger places where he had a cave would go dry a lot of times. But he'd have a home in a deeper place than what we'd been draining. These are small round cypress ponds that we'd drain. Lower the level. We would, I guess, preserve some of those alligators. But most of what we have are in these creeks that run through the property or either deep swamps. Sort of like ditches that we have where we've built fills across of a pond or swamp. I think we help the habitat there because that particular swamp has been dry for three or

four years now, hasn't run any water and we have water in the ditches, and I feel like we helped them there.

HKS: Do beavers cause many problems for you?

JJL: Not an awful lot, we have some problems with beaver.

HKS: I'm just trying to think of looking ahead, what the issues are going to be and what's the natural ecosystem in an area that's been cut over and farmed and abandoned and reclaimed. I don't know what the natural ecosystem is here anymore. Beaver, deer have been hunted out, the screw worm got rid of them and deer are back, or never were here and so you certainly don't have any pristine environment anywhere except maybe the Okefenokee.

JJL: That's right.

HKS: But the wetlands legislation is going to define what wetlands is and what a wetlands species is.

JJL: Right.

HKS: Even if it's in its third rotation, conceivably the wetlands legislation will freeze that in time, that this is now a wetlands area and slash pine or alligators or whatever is going to be an indicator of wetlands. Then you'll no longer be able to manage that, at least the way you are managing it.

JJL: Right.

HKS: Do you anticipate the wetland will be off limits completely, or just reduce your options?

JJL: I think eventually they'll be off limits completely.

HKS: That will affect the tax value, supposedly. That's very modest compensation, I realize, that your property taxes go down on lands that you can no longer manage. You can't sell it, there'll be no market for wetlands except for areas that the Conservancy likes.

JJL: So there needs to be some compensation there. [laughter]

HKS: The fifth amendment of the constitution talks about the taking issue, and I wonder when you go to these associations if people on both sides of the issue are very concerned about how this turns out. Is there talk now about compensation?

JJL: I really haven't heard anything that is widespread, but you know, just among us, these meetings or something like that, you start talking, especially in Florida, they're talking about it now down there. They feel like eventually it's going to be restricted just to the uplands where you harvest timber. Some of these counties now require permits to cut any kind of tree, like Tallahassee, Leon County, Florida. I understand that to log down there you have to get a permit to cut pulpwood or logs, saw logs or anything.

HKS: So there's a county forester who supervises silvicultural practices. I suppose one of the things they are worried about is land conversion from timber to residential without proper permit.

JJL: Right.

HKS: In a worse-case scenario, a worse possible definition of wetlands from your point of view, how much of your two hundred thousand acre land base would be effected?

JJL: Right now we say about 30 percent of that would be, sixty thousand acres.

HKS: Very significant.

JJL: That we feel like is wetlands, what we classify as wetlands.

HKS: Oh my goodness. [laughter]

JJL: It may be one hundred thousand acres. That will include these little ponds we've drained and all that. We did not really drain them but we lowered the level on them for them to support slash pine. I'd say fifteen thousand acres, maybe, would be the most damage there, if you call it damage.

HKS: Just by looking at a map, some of the Superior Pine land near the swamp would be considered critical to people who are concerned about wetlands and natural systems.

JJL: That's right. They have a corner of theirs in a swamp, but we have about two thousand acres right here in the Okefenokee Swamp, right here. And this one right here borders right on the boundary there with the swamp, that corner there.

HKS: That was acquired back in the old days when land was...

JJL: About 1915. Of course they want to buy that land there but they don't really want to pay anything for it. I know when my mother died we tried to settle the estate taxes, and they sent some people down here to appraise it. They said one hundred and fifty dollars an acre for estate tax purposes, and the Department of Interior offers fifteen dollars an acre to buy the same land.

HKS: Quite a difference.

JJL: It sure was. [laughter]

HKS: The Forest Service has an acquisition budget. Does the Park Service have anything like that, do you know, is it special appropriations?

JJL: They have people who are going around that are contacting people, trying to buy land. Occasionally they'll buy it. They don't want any mining going on near it, you know. We're harvesting timber. We don't have to right now but we have been and we probably will be in the future.

HKS: And you wait until the dry season, it's okay, you can get in there with a tractor?

JJL: Right.

HKS: In the old days in Louisiana when they used the pull boats and dug the canals, have you seen those photographs?

JJL: Yeah, I've seen those.

HKS: But you don't need anything like that, you can get in...

JJL: No, you couldn't. This is a mass of underbrush and black gum and cypress, and you cut those stumps down low enough that you can go, you know, drag that over.

HKS: It strikes me that the mosquitos would be rather ornery to work with.

JJL: Yeah, this last year they were terrible. After all this rain we had, we had problems with mosquitos.

HKS: Do you get mosquitos around Valdosta?

JJL: They're bad here during the wet season.

HKS: Don't know why they don't seem to be bad in North Carolina.

JJL: I don't know why it is. During this last summer, it was real bad, boy, had a lot of rain. In the first part of the year we had about seventy inches of rain.

HKS: That's the difference I guess, it's a lot more than we get.

JJL: Yeah, and they just proliferated. We had troubles with them.

HKS: I've gone through everything on my list. Are there some other issues or topics or things you would like to...

JJL: I guess one of the worse things about managing this forest is about every ten or fifteen years we have a severe fire problem. Since I've been managing the land, we've had, well since I can remember, back in 1943 was a bad year, and the '50s, '55, '54, '55, '56 was terrible. And then around the edge of the swamp back in 1990 we had problems there.

HKS: What about hurricanes? Every twenty years you get a lot of blow down, or...

JJL: No, we don't have much problem with those.

HKS: They either go up the Gulf to Mississippi or they go up...

JJL: When they get in as far as our property they're down to a tropical storm. We have problems with lightning strikes starting fires, in dry years. Insect problems.

HKS: You have the same bark beetle problem here as we do in North Carolina, right?

JJL: Yeah, we don't have the southern pine beetle, here.

HKS: Is that right?

JJL: No, we have what we call the turpentine beetle, and then we have the Ips, they get started sometimes. That's the worse beetle we have.

HKS: The turpentine beetle, that's a Dendroctonyus, it's the same species as the bark beetle?

JJL: Right, right, it's just a little larger beetle, and he's black. He'll go in the tree, but he doesn't usually kill the tree, he just weakens the tree where the other insects come in, like the Ips will come in on it. We had an outbreak of Ips in '89, here, it was pretty severe.

HKS: There still is no control for bark beetles except silviculture, right?

JJL: Right. We use to...

HKS: No systemics that you spray on and kills them inside.

JJL: You know when we started, when we were turpentineing, when we had this naval stores operation and all, we would take this BHC benzenehexachloride mixture, and when we saw those bark beetles, those turpentine beetles, see evidence of them we'd go out and spray the area then, and we could control that pretty well. Maybe two applications would keep it in that one place. Most of the time it would occur in some of these areas, these low, these depressions I told you about we drained. Of course they were not drained at that time, but they would get dry and cause the tree to be weakened and attract these beetles.

HKS: Thank you for an interesting interview.