


The



Beginning

RECOLLECTIONS AND COMMENTS

BY RAY M. CONARRO

**BIENVILLE NATIONAL FOREST
DELTA NATIONAL FOREST
DESOTO NATIONAL FOREST
HOMOCHITTO NATIONAL FOREST
HOLLY SPRINGS NATIONAL FOREST**



Editor's Note:

Ray Conarro was the first Supervisor of the National Forests in Mississippi. He served in this capacity from 1933 until 1940.

Mr Conarro was responsible for acquiring most of the National Forest land in Mississippi. He supervised the operation of 25 Civilian Conservation Corps Camps, reforested hundreds of thousands of acres of cut-over land, and made many initial capital improvements to protect and manage the National Forests. After retiring, he returned to Mississippi and was a prominent conservationist assisting the State Foresters and others in managing the state's forest resources.

While reviewing the Forest's historical records, we found this narrative on the acquisition of the National Forests in Mississippi. Where possible, we have added photographs to illustrate his text.



RAY M. CONARRO

FOREST SUPERVISOR

NATIONAL FORESTS IN MISSISSIPPI

AUGUST 1, 1933-JUNE 30, 1940

LAND ACQUISITION

The Clarke-McNary Amendment to the 1911 Weeks Law made possible for the first time the purchase of land for growing timber and watershed protection. Previously, the Weeks Law confined purchase of land for National Forests to the headwaters of navigable streams. The Clarke-McNary Act opened the door to purchase land in the Deep South for timber growing and incidental stream protection.

Soon after the Clarke-McNary Act became Law, the Chief of the Forest Service caused an intensive survey to be made for possible sites to establish National Forest Purchase Units.

As a result of this survey, new purchase units were established in North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and the Homochitto in Mississippi. However, land purchases were made only on units established in North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Tennessee and on three purchase units in Louisiana. Proposals were taken on land on the Homochitto. Some land was examined and title search was made, but because funds were lacking no purchases were made.

After Franklin Roosevelt was elected President in 1932, he let it be known that he favored expanding the National Forests in the eastern part of the United States. As a result of this knowledge, W B Greeley, then Chief of the Forest Service, ordered a more specific survey to be made in North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.

Mr C E Beaumont, a Forest Examiner and Forest Service employee since 1912, was detailed to make these surveys and to determine the exterior boundaries of recommended purchase units.

Prior to Mr Roosevelt's inauguration, two gentlemen from Laurel, Mississippi, Mr Fred Skaggs and Mr Frank Wisner, traveled to Washington to enlist the services of Senator Pat Harrison in interceding with the President to make available more funds for land purchases. Senator Harrison, Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, was a powerful figure. Their efforts were successful, and soon after the inauguration, Mr Roosevelt set aside 30 million dollars for land purchases. He later increased this sum by the addition of 20 million more.

During the interval between Roosevelt's election and inauguration, I was assigned the task of making a survey of the Tennessee River Basin downstream from Knoxville to the Ohio River. This survey, which showed on state maps the agriculture and forest land of the Basin together with the apparent capacity of the soil to produce annual agricultural crops, was used as data in the establishment of the Tennessee Valley Authority. This assignment proved to be good training for the tremendous task of Mississippi land purchases I was soon to assume.

Shortly after land purchase funds were made available, I was informed of my promotion to Forest Supervisor of the then Homochitto Purchase Unit which had been approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission on May 5, 1930. Incidentally, Mississippi has been honored by having one of the two Congressman memberships on this Commission since the late 20's. First Congressman, Wall Doxey, served as a member until about 1940 when he was elected to the Senate. Congressman Colmer, appointed to succeed Doxey by President Roosevelt, has served to the present, July 1971, and apparently he will continue to serve for a few more years.

I arrived with my family, wife and three children, in Brookhaven, Mississippi, late in the afternoon of July 31, 1933. Our household furniture was on its way from Athens, Tennessee, so our first job was to find a house in which to live. We were fortunate to rent the old Butterfield home owned by a Mrs Dodd. Our furniture arrived the next morning and by nightfall, August 1, we were at home where we continued to live until January 1935, when our office was moved to Jackson.

On August 1, Regional Forester Kircher arrived in Brookhaven and he and I reviewed Mr Beaumont's recommended boundaries and land ownership data for additional purchase units. This review resulted in some boundary changes on the Chickasawhay and Biloxi units. These two, plus the Leaf River Unit and Holly Springs Purchase Unit, were submitted to the National Forest Reservation Commission and approved on August 30, 1933.

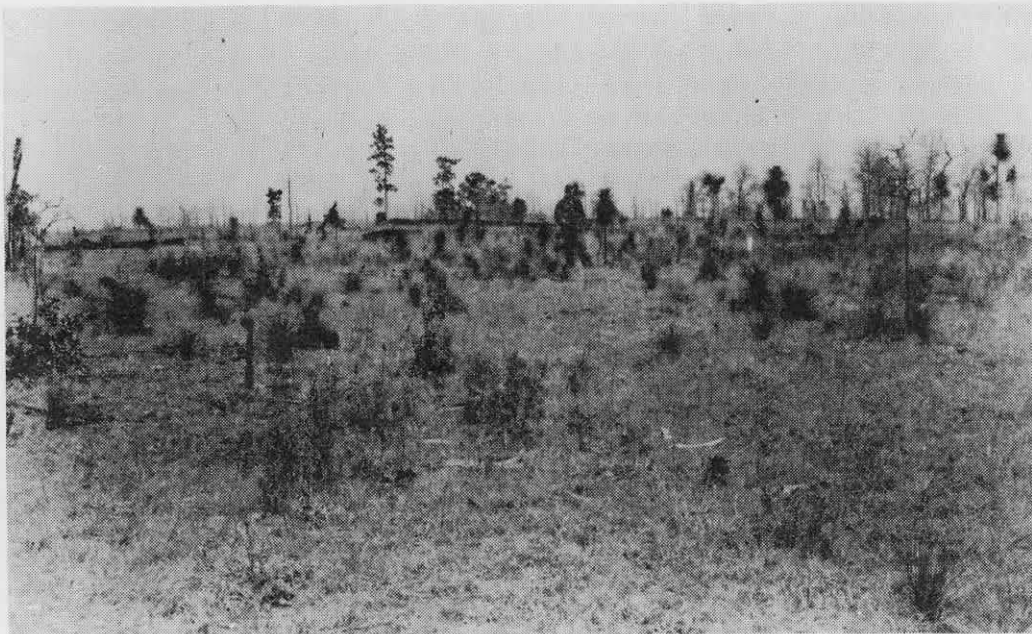
Land examination was in progress when I arrived in Mississippi. Four two-man crews were examining land, but appraisals and reports of the examined land had not been made. Mr Kircher detailed E J Schlatter from his office to supervise the appraisals and report preparation. Additional acquisition crews were added in September 1933, and by June 30, 1932, eleven months after I arrived in Mississippi, we had examined, and the National Forest Reservation Commission had approved, land purchases in excess of 600,000 acres. This was and still is, the largest area ever purchased, or under purchase agreement, by any one Forest in such a short period of time.

In September 1933, Mr Sam Biechler was placed in charge of all acquisition examination and appraisal work under my supervision. He proved to be most effective.

The Enabling Act which permitted land to be purchased in Mississippi was passed by the Mississippi Legislature and signed into law March 6, 1926. This Act carried a stipulation that all land purchases for National Forest purposes must be approved by the State Forestry Commission. To facilitate purchases, the Forestry Commission was requested to approve, in advance, purchases of land lying within the exterior boundaries of the Purchase Units by approving each Purchase Unit. The Commission agreed to this, but with a requirement that the County Boards of Supervisors agree on stipulating the acreage they would authorize for

purchase. The Commission approved the boundaries of the Homochitto, Biloxi, Leaf River, Chickasawhay, and Holly Springs Unit at its August and September 1933 meetings. Following this approval, the next step was to contact the many Boards of Supervisors during their monthly meetings. I made all of these contacts and secured from all of the Boards, except George and Pontotoc Counties, sufficient authorization to meet our purchase needs. Authorization was later secured from the George County Board, but because of the agriculture potential of the area in Pontotoc County, no further efforts were made in this area.

During his August 1933 trip in Mississippi, Mr Kircher issued an order that our land examination on large tracts should be made on the basis of "once through a section." He assumed that with the topography and the sparse cover it would be possible to view an entire section in this manner. He also emphasized the fact that most of the land would appraise for less than three dollars per acre. Later, when it became apparent that land boundary surveys were needed, a request was made of the Regional Office to have this done by the Public Land Office. This suggestion was not acceptable to Mr Kircher because he believed that the survey cost would exceed the cost of the land. I then recommended that we make the surveys and mark the boundaries with crews made up with a surveyor and CCC boys for his assistants. This recommendation was turned down on the basis that the Forest Service had no authority to survey or resurvey public land surveyed boundaries. This decision left us out on a limb and caused untold expense and many disputes in later years. We did survey boundaries that followed roads, streams or other land designations other than public land surveys.



TYPICAL CONDITION OF THE NEWLY ACQUIRED LAND

Having been born and raised in the oil and gas field section of Pennsylvania and employed in this same area the first six years of my Forest Service career, I became fully convinced that the oil and gas interests were not conducive to good forest management. When I left the Allegheny National Forest in 1927, the area acquired and under purchase agreement was in the neighborhood of 300,000 acres. In this acreage only 134 acres were owned, or would be owned outright (fee simple) by the Government. Some individuals and companies owned both oil and gas rights. Oil rights were owned by an individual or company, and others owned the gas rights.

Having this knowledge, I was determined to exercise better control of mineral rights on land purchased in Mississippi. I, therefore, prepared a mineral reservation clause for our options which provided a ten year term form with a privilege of renewal of 40 acres around each producing well. This clause was approved by the Regional Forester with slight modifications, and is responsible for a present annual income of over two million dollars. None of the purchase units produced either oil or gas prior to the expiration of the ten year expiration dates of mineral rights on over 800,000 acres of land owned by the Government. Suddenly, the Forest Service was in the oil and gas leasing business. When this business struck in full force, the Forest Service adopted a policy which provided:

- a. When an application for a prospecting permit was received, the right to drill for oil or gas was advertised for a 30-day period on an area of varying size, usually a section.
- b. This right was then sold to the highest bidder plus any annual rental charge and a 1/8 royalty.

The highest bid that I recall was made by the Texas Company for drilling rights on one section on the Chickasawhay unit for over \$700,000 plus the 1/8 royalty and a 25 cents per acre annual rental. A well was drilled, no production found, and the right to drill abandoned after two years.

Until about 1947, the Forest Service handled all minerals on land purchased under the Weeks Law and Clarke-McNary Act. This policy of advertising and granting permits continued until Lyle Watts became Chief of the Forest Service and Clinton Anderson became Secretary of Agriculture. During their terms in their respective positions, they turned the mineral responsibility over to the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management. Mr Watts stated in some correspondence that the Forest Service was a forestry organization, not a mineral managing organization. The managing of underground minerals is, of course, land management, as present day Forest Officers well know. The decision of these two men caused a Mississippi loss of revenue of millions of dollars each year, and made it possible for oil and gas interests to obtain drilling rights simply by applying for such rights.

Land title work was under the supervision of the Solicitor of the Department of Agriculture as it had been since the passage of the Weeks Law in 1911. The heavy title workload that developed in 1933 swamped this office, and even though a large number of attorneys were added, title examination was extremely slow. Another factor in slowing this type of work was the Department of Justice insistence on precise clearance of all possible flaws of deed conditions before approving the titles for payment. One such deed condition, that I recall, was an ownership on the Leaf River Unit where the abstractors found that a former owner had sold by deed, turpentine rights. This deed gave the holder the right to turpentine virgin timber until it was cut. The virgin timber had been cut years previously, the man holding the deed had died leaving no will or no know heirs. After several exchanges of letters the property was thrown into condemnation which is a long and costly process.

In 1937, the Chief of the Forest Service brought about, through the Secretary of Agriculture, the transfer of title work to his Bureau. Along with this transfer, the Regional Forester instructed his Supervisors to assist in any way possible to clear those title conditions that were subject to clearance by affidavit or quit claim deed.

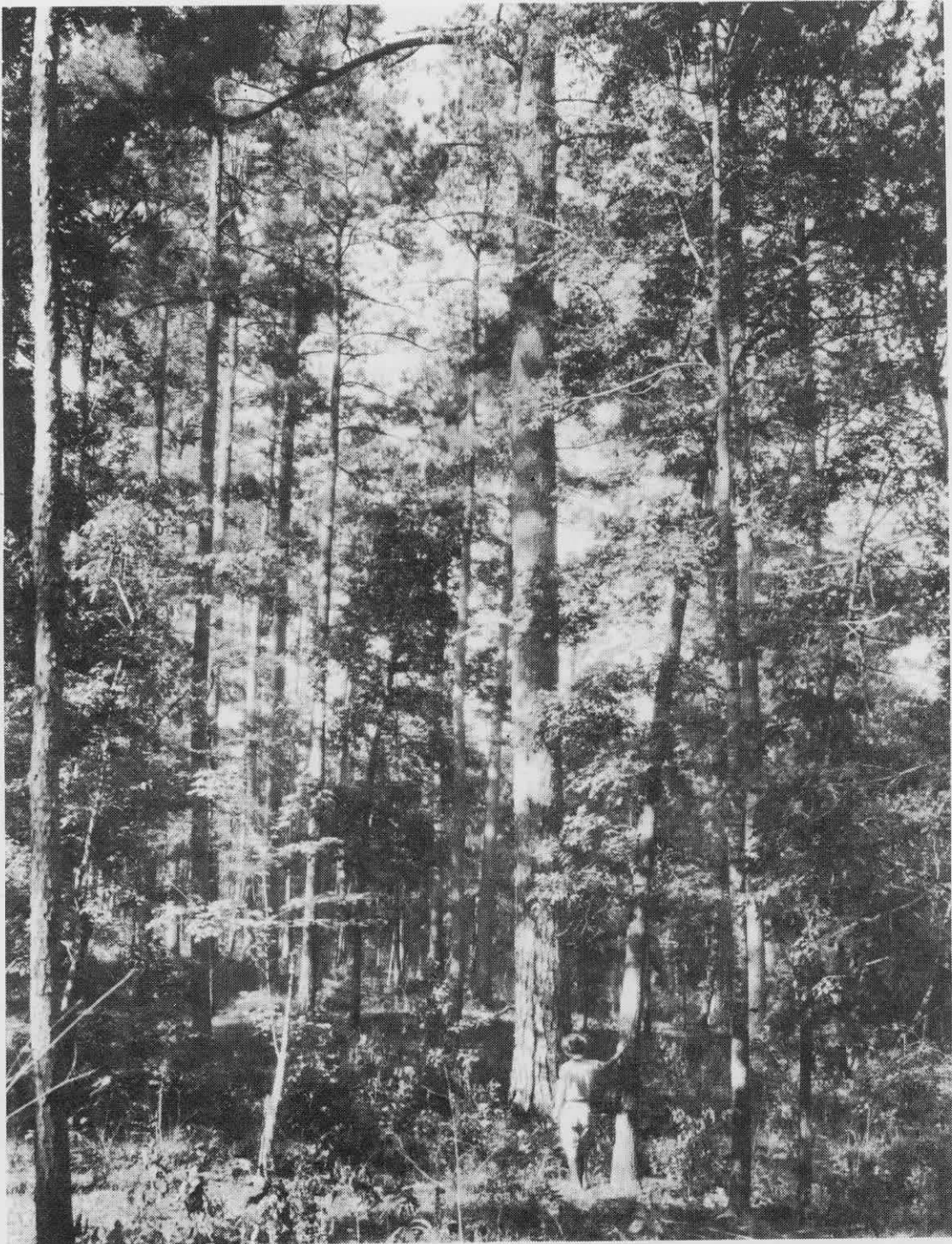
BIENVILLE PURCHASE UNIT

Following the completion of his survey in the state of Texas, Mr Beaumont was assigned to scout out areas in other parts of Mississippi. He located three areas where large owners held the major portion of the forest land. One of these areas was located in Clark, Lauderdale, Newton, and Jasper Counties. This Unit was designated the Quitman Unit. The Long Bell Lumber Company was one of the principal landowners. Another Unit, designated the DeKalb Unit, was located in Kemper and Neshoba Counties. The Sumpter Lumber Company was the principal landowner. The third Unit, located in Scott, Newton, Smith, and Jasper Counties was designated Bienville Unit. After Beaumont reported on these three areas, Mr Kircher informed me that I could choose one of the three. I personally made an on the ground survey of each, and after considering all phases of land acquisition, timber growing quality, stream protection and wildlife potential, I chose the Bienville Unit. This Unit was approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission on March 26, 1934. The Unit embraced 328,820 acres and by June 30, 1934, over 120,000 acres were under option. The large landowners were Adams-Edgar Lumber Company, Bienville Lumber Company, Eastman Gardner Lumber Company, and the Marathon Lumber Company. These four lumber companies owned approximately 112,693 acres.

It may be of some interest to Bienville Forest Officers to know that the name Bienville was chosen for this Unit, not because of the lumber company by that name, but for a French-Canadian soldier and colonist, Jean Baptiste Bienville, who founded Mobile in 1702, and Natchez in 1716, and New Orleans in 1718.

In 1938, a large addition was made to the Bienville Purchase Unit boundary. This addition included land in Scott, Madison, Rankin, and Leake Counties. The principal landowner was the Pearl River Lumber Company with a mill at Canton. The Mississippi Forestry Commission approved this addition as did the Boards of Supervisors, except Rankin County. Further efforts to enlarge the Bienville were dropped. A considerable amount of the acreage in this proposed addition is now under water in the Barnett Reservoir.

Another interesting aspect of Bienville Purchase Unit was the plan of the Bienville Lumber Company to donate twenty acres of land which supported virgin timber to the city of Forest for a city park. The city in the midst of the depression had no funds for improvements so refused the offer, or rather asked for the offer to be delayed. Upon hearing of this, I requested the company to include the twenty acres in their proposal and I would have some picnic improvements placed in the areas. This was done, tables and grills were placed, water and sanitary facilities were provided.



THIS PHOTO IS LABELED "AS THE FORESTS IN MISSISSIPPI ONCE WERE."

BILOXI PURCHASE UNIT

The Biloxi Purchase Unit was approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission on August 30, 1933. The Unit embraced 409,600 acres and was located in Harrison, Stone, and Jackson Counties. The largest landowners were the Dantzler Lumber Company, The Wilbe Lumber Company, Batson and Hatton Lumber Company, and the Newton Naval Stores Company. Dantzler alone owned 90,500 acres inside the Unit and about 125,000 acres outside. By January 11, 1934 the 90,500 acres were approved for purchase together with other small acreage. By the end of June 1935 the approved acreage totaled 126,061 acres.

In one of the purchase unit prescriptions that C E Beaumont was required to follow in determining unit boundaries, it stated that parts of several counties must be included in each unit. This requirement was largely based on the removal of land purchased by the United States from taxation and thus jeopardizing the county finances.

Mr Beaumont was in charge of the examination of the Dantzler land which was in progress previous to my arrival on the Unit. On my arrival, I found that Beaumont was using one of Dantzler's field offices for his headquarters and leaving his examination maps and appraisal data exposed on either a drafting table or desk to the view of any person curious enough to look at them. This office was the headquarters of Mr Posey Howell, a forty year employee of the Dantzler Company, who had been Dantzler's land manager for many years. He was also the man who convinced company officials to leave seed trees. (Usually these trees were spike top or so crooked that very little lumber could be cut from them. These were called by Mr Howell "Mother Trees" and so tagged by him with a 2"x3" tag which read "This is a Mother Tree. DO NOT CUT.")

I required Beaumont to move to Gulfport the same day. However, the Dantzlars knew enough appraisal data to make it impossible for me to negotiate with them except at the top valuation.

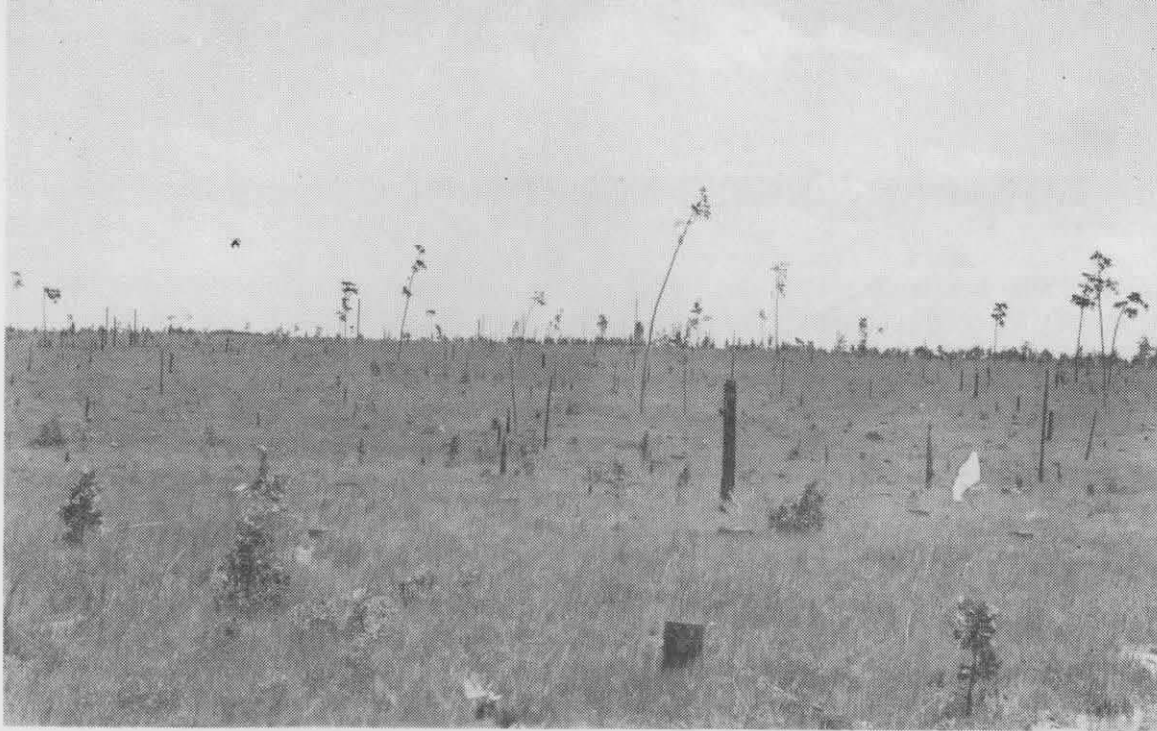
At the Board of Supervisors meeting in September 1933, I was able to get purchase approval in excess of the available Harrison County land within the purchase unit boundary. In July 1935, I caused a reconnaissance to be made of Townships 4, 5, 6, Range 12 and 13 West, for a possible addition to the Biloxi Unit. The Hines Lumber Company and other lumber companies were the large owners in this area. The land was badly denuded and was often burned two times a year by sheep and cattle owners. The Hines Company had left seed trees in their cuttings. Some few years after cutting was completed, taxing authorities filed a back tax suit claiming the land still supported timber and should be so taxed. Mr Hines ordered all seed trees to be cut and left where they fell. He won the suit but the land suffered from lack of cover.

This extension failed largely because of the Hines Company wanting more money than we could pay them. This land required condemnation for title clearance. When it was determined that we could not acquire the Hines land, this company's land became less attractive. At the condemnation proceedings I was able to convince the jury that they should award a higher price for the land, which they did. This action also negated the executed purchase agreement. The west boundary of the purchase unit is about the same as the original boundary.

An interesting sidelight on the acquisition of lands for National Forest purposes occurred on the Biloxi Unit. The Wilbe Lumber Company lands, some 14,000 acres, were tax delinquent for a number of years. The County Clerk had intentionally withheld reporting this fact to the State Land Commissioner. The company had other holdings and needed to clear up this tax claim which was ten cents less than we had agreed to pay for the land. The County Clerk had violated his sworn duty but by so doing, he provided Stone County with approximately \$21,000 in taxes and penalties.

At about 10:30 PM on the night of December 31, 1933, my doorbell rang and upon answering it I found P N (Posey) Howell and one of the younger generation of Dantzlars. I, of course, invited them in and after pleasantries, and, admittedly on my part, surprise were expressed, Mr Howell presented me with an executed deed to all of the 90,000 acres, more or less, contained in the option and purchase agreement. I explained to the gentlemen that it would be of no value to either the Government or the Dantzlars if I accepted the deed since the Government had to assure itself first that title to the land must be pure. Of course, the deed had to be a matter of record to avoid 1934 tax levies.

The purpose of the Dantzlars in delivering the deed to me at such a late hour was to avoid paying 1934 taxes. Their thinking would have been sound in a sale to an individual or company, but not to the United States. I expressed my regret and about midnight they departed for home, about a 140 mile trip, and I returned to bed.



MUCH OF SOUTH MISSISSIPPI WAS BARREN AFTER THE LOGGING COMPANIES HAD CUT OUT AND LEFT. ANNUAL FIRES INSURED THAT THE AREA WOULD STAY THAT WAY.



EARLY EFFORTS TO REACH THE PUBLIC WITH THE FIRE PREVENTION MESSAGE.

BILOXI McNIEL AREA

About 1923 the Department of Agriculture leased for a ten-year period a parcel of land in Pearl River County for the prime purpose of experimenting in cattle grazing on woodland range. Mr Green of the Bureau of Animal Husbandry in cooperation with the Southern Forest Experiment Station was in charge of this experiment.

In 1933 with the lease about to expire, the landowner refused to renew the lease but offered to sell the property to the Forest Service. The people at the Experiment Station placed a value on the land of \$12.00 to \$15.00 and the National Forest Reservation Commission approved it on the basis of the Experiment Station's recommendation. Action of the Commission's meetings were at that time open to the public and news releases usually followed. The owners of this tract would not consider any price other than the top figure. The land was purchased at that price.

The Director of the Experiment Station insisted that the acquisition of this property was urgent and must be acquired before the ten-year lease expired. He based his opinion on the experimental work which was not completed and the need of new experimental approaches to the woodland range grazing. He also insisted, after the land was acquired, that usable roads be constructed and a complex of buildings be erected. Consequently, a dwelling, a fifty-man barracks, a warehouse, a shop, and a small garage were erected and a deep water well was drilled and fitted with a pressure pump. Appropriate signs were erected, some seedlings planted and some T.S.I. was accomplished. The Bureau of Animal Husbandry decided at the end of the ten-year period not to continue its part in the experiments. About 1944, the Experiment Station Directors changed and the area was not considered important by the new Director and was then transferred to the Forest Supervisor for administering as a part of the Biloxi Ranger District of the DeSoto National Forest.

The research findings as reported in a U S Department of Agriculture bulletin written by Mr Green became quite controversial among foresters, especially state fire protection agencies. In his bulletin Mr Green advocated the use of fire to reduce the "rough" and improve the range. His records quoted in this bulletin indicated that more beef could be obtained by use of fire, properly applied without damage to the standing timber, post size and up. He stated emphatically that both fire and grazing should be prohibited on any woodland area until the growing stock reached post size. At the time the bulletin was written, (1931), use of fire in woodland for any reason was taboo. By 1936 some foresters were advocating the use of fire as a silvicultural practice and in 1941 at its annual meeting, the Society of American Foresters accepted the fact that fire could be beneficial in the Coastal Plain area.



NOTE WITH THIS PHOTOGRAPH TOLD THE VIEWER TO COMPARE THE REPRODUCTION BEYOND THE FENCE IN THE BACKGROUND, WITH THE POORLY STOCKED GRAZED AREA IN FOREGROUND.

CHICKASAWHAY PURCHASE UNIT

This Unit embraced a total of 192,000 acres located in Jones, Perry, Greene, and Wayne Counties. It was approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission August 30, 1933. The area was largely drained by the Chickasawhay River tributaries, hence its name. The river got its name from a small band of Chickasaw Indians which broke off from the main tribe and apparently subsisted on some type of tubers. The word "Chickasawhay" means the Indian who eats the bog potatoes.

Large landowners on this Unit were Robinson Land and Lumber Company, Kalmia Realty and Insurance Company, John W Blodgett, et al, Bently and Pope, and the Alabama Land and Development Company, a subsidiary of the Gulf Mobile and Ohio Railroad. These five companies held in excess of 100,000 acres in the Unit.

I was accompanied on my first trip on this Unit by Fred Skaggs and Mr Wisner, both of whom had an interest in the Kalmia Realty and Insurance Company. Near the end of our trip I told these two gentlemen I had never viewed an area so large with so much devastation. Nearly 100% of the area I saw that day had been burned over in recent months.



1937, GAVIN PLANTATION-CHICKASAWHAY DISTRICT

Later, checking some old virgin timber records, I learned that the peak stands of long leaf pine in Mississippi were located on a strip averaging twenty miles in width. This Unit centered on a line running east and west from Overt, Mississippi. North and south of the strip long leaf stands tapered off in diameter, height growth and number of stems per acre.

Since Mr Skaggs and Mr Wisner had played an important part in securing for the Forest Service funds for land acquisition, I had the examining crews start examination work on the Kalmia tract first. As I recall, this tract appraised at \$1.30 per acre and was optioned at \$1.20 per acre.

After the Kalmia tract examination was completed, examination work proceeded to other tracts. By June 30, 1935, the acreage under purchase agreement totaled approximately 134,000.

One of the amusing incidents that I recall during this acquisition came at the time I secured the signatures on the option covering the Kalmia lands. This company was deeply indebted to the First National Bank of Laurel. Mr Wisner was President of the bank and his son-in-law, a Mr Chisholm, was the Cashier. Because of the indebtedness by mortgage, it was necessary to secure the signature of the Executive Officer of the bank on the option along with that of the Kalmia officials. When Mr Chisholm handed me the option after signing it, he stated, "Here is the option, sucker." This statement became more amusing a few years later after it became known that the Texas Company had paid the Government a sum in excess of \$700,000 for the right to drill on one of the sections (640 acres) acquired in the Kalmia sale. This \$700,000 was about 29 times more than the Government paid for the total Kalmia tract.

When this right to drill payment became known, the First National Bank and Kalmia officers decided to contest the sale claiming they were defrauded by me, the Chief of the Forest Service, and the Secretary of Agriculture. All three of us were made a party to a suit they filed in Federal Court to void the sale, recover title to the land, to be given all monies which had been paid the Government for oil and gas rights, plus any other money which had been received by the Government for sale of any product or rent for any land.

The right to drill for oil and gas was awarded some years after I was transferred to the Regional Office and the suit was filed about 1945-46, the exact date and year has slipped my mind. After the suit was filed, I was called into consultation with attorneys from the Department of Justice which later resulted in a pretrial conference. I was kept out of sight, supposedly to be a surprise witness when the suit was tried. Two other such conferences were held always with me close by but out of sight. Finally, the suit was tried in Meridian. The petitioners' witnesses were heard and then, for the first time, I was called to testify as the only Government witness. The Judge stopped the trial while I was still testifying and ruled before leaving the bench in favor of the Government. This ended a case, which if it had been won by the

petitioners would have opened the flood gates to all Government land in Mississippi.

Another extremely important factor in connection with this case was the fact that all of my official diaries had been included in a wartime paper salvage drive just prior to the filing of this suit. Memory, personal papers, proposed and option dates and other important records had to be searched and screened to build a solid defense in this suit. All of this was assigned to me even though I had left the Forest some five or six years previous. When I asked the Administrative Assistant why my diaries had been disposed of in such a manner, he replied casually he "needed the space." I then pointed out to him the cardboard boxes in which my diaries had been stored were still occupying space and were empty, he just shrugged his shoulders and did not reply.

The destruction of official records should be considered carefully, always with this thought in mind, "Will this record ever be needed in future transactions?"

Soon after the Chickasawhay Purchase Unit was established, the Resettlement Administration (Mr Rex Tugwell, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, favorite organization) purchased considerable acreage west and south of the Chickasawhay boundary for resettlement purposes. The land on this purchase was poor and many adjoining farms had been abandoned because of the soil's poor quality. Regardless of this fact some ten or twelve farms of forty acres were laid out and dwellings, barns and other out-buildings were constructed. The project, however, was doomed for failure. As a few of the homes were abandoned and Mr Tugwell, for other reasons, no doubt, lost his job, his successors approached the Chief of the Forest Service to take over the project and also an area west of the boundary in Greene County. These two areas would, if approved, about double the gross Chickasawhay area. These areas were reported on and approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission. Shortly thereafter, other action was taken by the Resettlement Administration and no land purchases were made in either area.



ENTRANCE TO CHICKASAW CCC CAMP NUMBER EIGHT. THE CAMP WAS LOCATED IN WAYNE COUNTY T6N, R9W, SEC. 24. ITS GATES WERE OPEN FROM 1933 TO 1943.

LEAF RIVER PURCHASE UNIT

The Leaf River Purchase Unit was approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission on August 30, 1933. Land in Forrest, Perry, Greene, and George Counties were included within the exterior boundaries. In 1935 additions were made to the boundary in Lamar, Forrest, and Marion Counties which made this Unit the largest in Mississippi with a total area of 624,000 acres.

The large landowners on this Unit were J J Newman Lumber Company, Batson and Hatten Lumber Company, Ralph L Jackson, Perry Land Company, and Robert Newton.

Land examination and appraisal started on the Unit August 1, 1933, and by the end of 1935 the total area reported on and approved for purchase was 203,766 acres. Some of the lands had recovered from the early logging, but it was noted that sheep and hog grazing on the open range had caused considerable damage to young longleaf seedlings during their first year of height growth. It was apparent this damage occurred every year as the young pines struggled to put on height growth. The damage by sheep was confined to nipping the terminal bud and by hogs stripping bark from the roots.

The property owned by Ralph Jackson was formerly owned by the Government and used as a military installation known as Camp Shelby during World War I. Jackson had plans to subdivide the property into small holdings, but the 1929 depression created a vacuum in real estate and he was left with expensive property and heavy tax load. In 1935, pursuant to a special Act of Congress, the Secretary of Agriculture sold to the State of Mississippi for use of the National Guard, about 5500 acres. In 1940, as a part of the military buildup, the Congress again authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to transfer about 64,000 acres of National Forest land (Leaf River Unit) in Forrest and Perry Counties. These two transactions together with about 15,000 acres of State and privately owned land became known again as Camp Shelby. In 1946, the National Forest land title was returned to the Forest Service. The first transfer of 5500 acres plus some acres purchased by the State of Mississippi is still owned and used by the Mississippi National Guard.

E J Schlatter, working as an inspector in the Regional Office Division of Lands, came to me in October 1933 and stated that he was going to recommend that some 60,000 acres on the Leaf River Purchase Unit be eliminated from purchase consideration. The area involved was slightly east of the central part of the Unit. His reason for this position was his determination that the area was completely denuded and that there was no evidence of restocking. Naturally, I was opposed from an administrative standpoint to such an idea. Nev-

ertheless, he was on his way back to the Regional Office and was determined to make his recommendation to the Regional Forester, even though I was protesting such action.

After thoughtful consideration of about five minutes duration, I dispatched a telegram (we were not allowed to use the phone) to the Regional Forester. I requested him not to take action on any recommendation Schlatter would submit concerning purchase boundaries on the Leaf River Unit until he heard further from me. As soon as the wire was dispatched, I left Brookhaven (Supervisor's headquarters at that time) for the Leaf River Unit. I contacted Ed Haff who was in charge of the acquisition crew, and he and I traveled to the area. The crew, going once through a section, was not inspecting the area close enough and was missing millions of longleaf pine seedlings still in the grass. To carefully determine the extent of this reproduction it was necessary to stoop low and move the grass around. Haff and I traveled over about 25% of the area. I was convinced that Schlatter had not investigated the acquisition crew members' work and had made up his mind on the basis of crew reports. Following my findings, I sent a telegram to the Regional Forester giving details of my findings and requesting an on-the-ground review by his office if he was not satisfied.

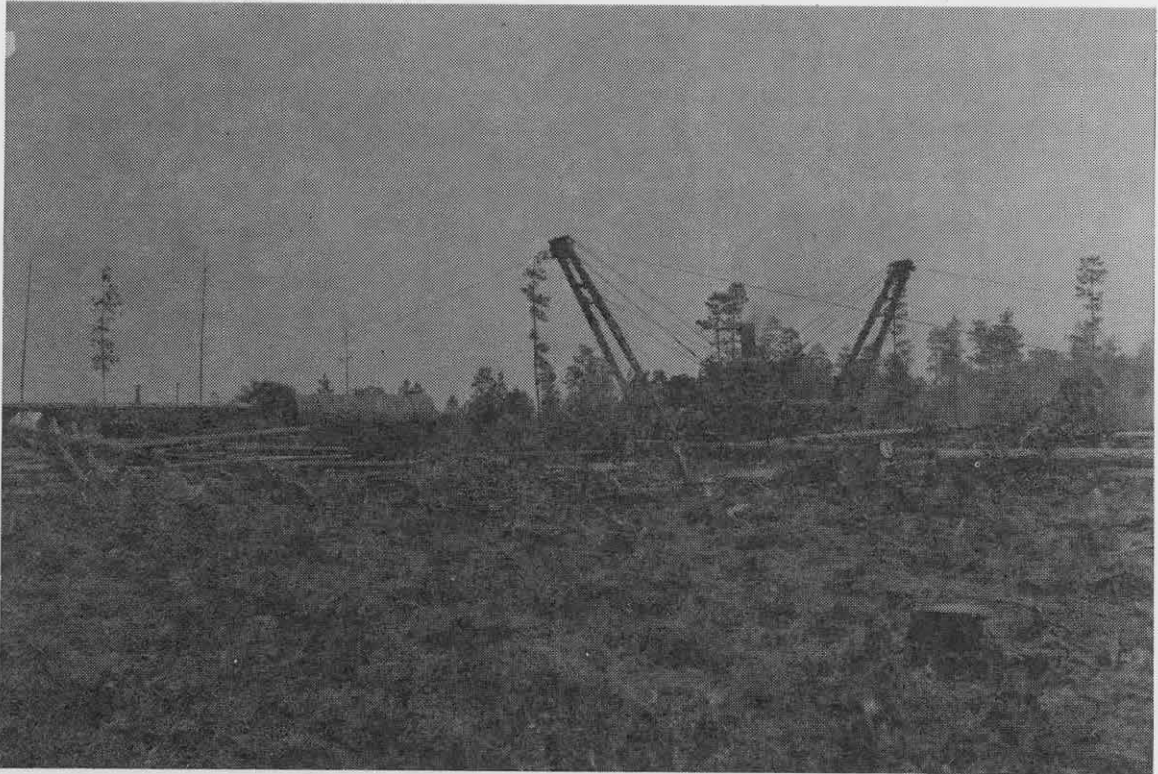
As a result of the telegram, Mr Ira Yarnell, Chief of the Regional Lands Division, came to Mississippi to make a personal investigation. Mr Yarnell spent two days on the disputed area with me accompanying him. I had devised a system to remove any semblance of bias from his review. This system entailed my being in the lead with Yarnell directing me to go ahead, turn left, turn right, etc., and stop. At each stop we laid out a small acre plot and counted the pine seedlings which averaged three or more per plot. After a day of this type of study, plus Mr Yarnell's selecting the sections we studied, he decided I was right and Schlatter's recommendation was not based on fact. A short time thereafter the Regional Forester found another job for Schlatter.

Following the above occurrence, acquisition work proceeded under my direction without interference by Regional personnel, not only on the Leaf River Unit, but on all Purchase Units in Mississippi.

The area involved in Schlatter's recommendation included all of Townships 1 and 2, Range 9 West, and the eastern half of Townships 1 and 2, Range 10 West, for a total of about 66,000 acres of purchasable land.

By 1935 inquiries from large landowners of land west of Highway 49 caused me to have a general examination of those parts of Lamar, Pearl River, Forrest, and Mation Counties and to ascertain the sentiment of the Board of Supervisors in each of these counties. It was determined that about 140,000 acres of land were available for pur-

chase from large owners. Great Southern Lumber Company, White Lumber Company, and another non-operating company, represented by the Price Law Firm of Magnolia, Mississippi, were the large owners. This addition appeared to merit serious consideration so a more detailed survey was made from which a report was prepared for the Regional Forester's consideration. All four Boards of Supervisors favored Federal purchases.



MUCH OF THE LAND WHICH LATER BECAME PART OF THE NATIONAL FORESTS IN MISSISSIPPI WAS LOGGED BY RAIL. HERE A SKIDDER IS YARDING LOGS.

About the time the Leaf River extension report was received by the Regional Forester the Forest Service began to lose favor with President Franklin Roosevelt and the acquisition funds became scarce. The Regional Forester decided wisely that more attention should be given to consolidating our holdings rather than expanding into new territory. However, in 1938 a revision of the Leaf River Purchase Unit was approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission. This included only the area west of Highway 49 in Forrest County about the same as it is today.

Some 5,000 acres owned by a company controlled by one of the Meridian banks had been offered for sale by the bank and approved for purchase by the National Forest Reservation Commission. A purchase agreement had been executed and title search made, when the bank decided they had received a better offer. Since the purchase agreement had been executed, it was the bank's obligation to proceed with the sale, which they refused to do. After some weeks of negotiations, the National Forest Reservation Commission, on the recommendation of the Chief, voided the agreement. The land was sold to some speculators who cleared the land and planted a tung orchard. This land is located mostly in the southern part of Township 1 South, Range 11 West. It could be of interest to learn how successful this tung venture was or is.



THE DAYS OF THE CROSS CUT SAW.

DELTA PURCHASE UNIT

At the annual Supervisor's meeting in October 1934, the Regional Forester informed us that he was interested in a bottomland hardwood purchase unit, primarily for a demonstration forest, designed to promote bottomland hardwood management. He asked each of us to investigate the possibility of such a unit in Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, South and North Carolina. Upon returning to Mississippi from the meetings, I began an extensive survey of Mississippi's Delta region and found a large block of land in the Big and Little Sunflower River drainage areas. A search of county records also revealed that several large owner-ships held the major portion of an area containing approximately 300,000 acres. Checking further with these owners, I learned that most of them were willing to dispose of their holdings.

About the middle of November 1934, I reported my findings to the Regional Forester. He was impressed with my report and ordered me to do a more intensive survey, establish boundaries and accept proposals of sale from landowners.

I assigned a small crew of men to the task which had to be accomplished before the end of the year. By early February we submitted a Delta Purchase Unit report to the Regional Forester together with a number of proposals from landowners to sell land. The Delta Purchase Unit, containing 323,840 acres, was approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission on March 7, 1935.

Large ownerships were Houston Brothers, Frank Houston Estate, Belgrade Lumber Company, W W Cary Lumber Company, McLean Hardwood Lumber Company, Gammill Investment Company, B L Mallory, and George McSwain.

One of the interesting ownerships was that of Mr Cary. He was in charge of a large block of virgin hardwood owned by the Singer Sewing Machine Company. As Mr Cary cut over a section he would report that fact to the company who would in turn execute a deed for the land to Mr Cary. Needless to say, the land was in good shape, and still contained valuable timber.

Houston Brothers owned approximately 14,000 acres of virgin timber and about 46,000 acres of land upon which the redgum and other high-grade species had been removed. The company had a sawmill at Spanish Fort which had been shut down for some months. Houston Brothers were in financial difficulties, owing large sums to the Planter's State Bank of Memphis, First National Bank of Vicksburg, and Whitney National Bank of New Orleans. There was danger that the bank would foreclose on the property, so we gave high priority to buying the 14,000 acre virgin timber tract.



THESE PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE HOUSTON BROTHERS TRACT (DELTA 1A, T12N, R5W, SEC 1), WERE TAKEN BETWEEN 1938 AND 1940.



Late in September, Mr Horace Houston called and informed me that the bank (Planter's State Bank represented the other two banks) had given notice they would foreclose at the end of thirty days. Our examination report for this tract had been approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission, but the title work had not been completed. I decided to go to Memphis and confer with Planter's State officials. As a result of this trip I secured a sixty-day delay in the foreclosure proceedings which proved to be ample time to complete the purchase and the banks to receive their money.

In our examination work we headquartered our men at Holly Bluff where they were well received. Since no hotel or restaurant was available in Holly Bluff, the good people of this small community made rooms available in their homes. The local doctor moved all of his furniture out of his living room and built a long table and benches and provided meals for the group, averaging twelve men. These kind acts were greatly appreciated and helped immensely in facilitating the examination work.

We paid \$55.00 per acre for the virgin lumber tract and marked one section, approximately 43% of the stand, for sale. Our sale advertising, contract and other paper work were complete prior to the date of the deed. The same day the deed was recorded the sale was advertised. At the end of the advertised period we had received three bids, the highest awarded paid the Government \$115.00 per acre for only 43% of the stand on one section. Soon after this sale was consummated, land purchase money became scarce. In 1937 we had worked up a tripartite exchange of timber for land on the 46,000 acre tract of Houston Brothers. In late January 1938, I was in the Chief's office on detail when the Chief called me into his office and informed me that he was afraid the National Forest Reservation Commission would not approve the exchange unless we had a statement from the Sharkey Board of Supervisors agreeing to the supposed loss of revenue from the funds that would be used for the acquisition of the Houston Brothers tract. He suggested I go before the Board at the earliest opportunity. Since the Board would meet on the first Monday in February he suggested I leave Washington in time to attend the meeting. I traveled back to Jackson by train, then by car to Rolling Fork. I met with the Board on Monday and promised them \$10,000 would be paid into National Forest receipts fund from which they could receive \$2500.00. The Board placed an order on their records approving the exchange on the terms I suggested, and gave me a copy. I returned to Jackson by car, then to Washington by train. The National Forest Reservation Commission approved the exchange on Thursday, the morning I returned to Washington.

Land examination was limited to a few summer months when the overflowing rivers were within their banks. This period is when poison ivy is at its height. One forester had to be hospitalized in Jackson. His eyes were swollen shut and his face did not resemble that of a human being.

The property of the Frank Houston Estate had been willed by Mr Houston to a charitable institution in Iowa, and an executor in Chicago was in charge of the Estate. The executor was most anxious, it seemed, to close out the Estate holdings in Mississippi. He offered the timberland to the Forest Service. We examined and appraised the tract, prepared an option for his signature, but he never signed the option. About four or five times a year he would call at the office and want clarification on certain wordings of the option. Getting the needed clarification, he would promise to sign the option and mail it to me as soon as he returned to his office. About three months later he would call again for more clarification. That became a regular routine. He never questioned the price we had decided to pay for the property, it was always some other small detail. I came to the conclusion he wanted to hold on to his executor job and did not really want to clear out the Estate and turn the cash over to the owner, the charitable institution. I suppose if he is still living he is still the Estate executor. The tract contained 16,178 acres of low grade hardwood.

In 1940 the Purchase Unit boundary was reduced to 220,238 acres largely because of our failure to purchase the Frank Houston Estate property and also because purchase money was not being appropriated due to the military buildup.

HOLLY SPRINGS PURCHASE UNIT

The Holly Springs Purchase Unit was approved on August 30 at the insistence of Congressman Wall Doxey; in fact, the Chief of the Forest Service, Mr Silcox, did not intend to present it to the Commission, as he did not believe it had National Forest character. Upon hearing this, Congressman Doxey obtained the Holly Springs report and presented it to the Commission and insisted on its approval. I personally believe that this Unit meets all of the Weeks Law and the Clarke-McNary Amendment requirements as well or better than any other Purchase Unit.

In late November 1933, I received a personal letter from Regional Forester Kircher giving the date of the next meeting of the National Forest Reservation Commission, and requesting that I have some Holly Springs options to present to the Commission. He stated that Congressman Doxey was insistent on getting started on the Holly Springs Unit and was expecting action on Holly Springs purchases. I wrote Mr Kircher that I had ten men examining land on the Unit and that some options would be in his hands in time for the Commission's consideration at its January meeting. To make good on this promise I took two girls from my office to Holly Springs, had Biechler start his men preparing appraisals and writing reports. As the reports were written, the girls typed the reports and options for each tract and Biechler and I secured the owner's signature to the options. All of the tracts for which options were prepared were for dollar amounts within my authorization. Some twenty-five options were submitted and approved at the January meeting. Congressman Doxey was pleased, Mr Kircher was satisfied, and Mr Silcox had a change of heart and became more interested in the Holly Springs Unit.

The Holly Springs Unit was named after the town of Holly Springs which received its name from a large ever-flowing spring surrounded by a few holly trees. This spring is located close to what is now the business district of Holly Springs and still produces a good sized stream.

Land parcels on the Holly Springs Unit were small. Seldom was it possible to find a parcel in excess of 100 acres available for purchase. The available land was mostly abandoned and badly eroded farm land. It was apparent that prior to the Civil War almost all of the land on the Unit had been farmed. That portion which was abandoned prior to and immediately after the war because of labor shortage and soil erosion was growing a good crop of shortleaf pine except on the land heavily grazed. I personally made a study of these pine stands, many of which still had evidence of row farming, and decided that pine was the tree to use in erosion control work instead of black locust which was in common use.

In the beginning of purchase work on this Unit, we took proposals on land located anywhere within the Purchase Unit except in Pontotoc County.



A C C C CREW PLANTING SHORLEAF PINE IN TYPICALLY ERODED SECTION, MARSHALL COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI.



C C C CAMP AT POTTS CAMP. THIS CAMP WAS OPEN FROM 1933 UNTIL 1943

That portion of the Unit appearing to be primarily agricultural was not badly eroded and only a small scattered acreage was available for purchase. By mid 1935, it became apparent that acquisition lands were less plentiful and the wise thing to do was to start consolidating our holdings. After thorough study I drew a new purchase boundary within the Unit boundary and issued orders that only land on the inside of this purchase boundary be considered for purchase. This decision had the desired consolidation effect, for when I left the Forest in 1940 some 110,000 acres had been purchased within an approximate gross area of 320,000 acres.

During 1937 it became apparent that the evaluation tables which were standard for Region 8 were not adequate for the Holly Springs Purchase Unit. Soil values, as applied by these standard tables, were determined by the number of seedlings of merchantable species found in the sample plots. Since most of the area available for purchase on this Unit were abandoned farms with heavy soil erosion, tree seedlings were rather scarce. Upon presenting a strong case with recommendations for a different system of evaluation I was instructed to make an evaluation study based on soil values for annual crop production.

I assigned J D (Red) Strange and secured the services of a Soil Scientist from the Soil Conservation Service to make the soil value study. These men finally recommended, after several months of study, a valuation system which raised the soil values from 20 to 50 percent. When this system was approved, land purchase picked up. The system is largely responsible for the major portion of land purchased to date on the Holly Springs Unit.

HOMOCHITTO PURCHASE UNIT

The Homochitto Purchase Unit was one of the areas most highly recommended by the Knieppy-Ashe group following their reconnaissance of possible southern sites for National Forests. It was approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission on May 17, 1930, with a gross area of 325,000 acres. This gross area was increased to 360,860 acres in 1934, and to 371,860 acres in 1935, and again in 1936 to 373,460 acres. Each of the latter two increases carried boundary adjustments, eliminating considerable agricultural land and adding desirable timbered lands. The large landowners, as the Unit boundary was finally established in 1936, were the Homochitto Lumber Company, Central Lumber Company, Southern Forest Land Company, Gloster Lumber Company, and the Foster Creek Lumber Company.



ON THE LEFT IS THE HOMOCHITTO LUMBER COMPANY WHICH CLOSED IN 1936. THE BUDE LUMBER, COMPANY ON THE RIGHT, WAS STILL OPERATING BUT, AT ONE FIFTH OF ITS FORMER PRODUCTION.

The land examination and appraisal work was the responsibility of C E Beaumont who reported to Mr Charles Plymale, Supervisor of the Kisatchie National Forest. Beaumont's crew started examination work during the fall of 1929 on lands owned and offered for sale by the Homochitto

Lumber Company. (Incidentally, it might be of interest to know the Indian meaning of Homochitto which was and is "Big Red River"). Examination of these lands, some 63,000 acres, continued through 1930. The National Forest Reservation Commission approved the Homochitto Lumber Company tract at its February 25, 1931 meeting. However, soon after this action President Hoover froze all acquisition funds and not until mid 1933 were funds made available to complete the purchase. Following the availability of acquisition funds, purchase work on this Unit progressed at a rapid rate. By the end of FY 1936 a total of 190,000 acres had been approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission.

The Homochitto Lumber Company, Central Lumber Company, and the Gloster Lumber Company were all operating in 1933 and continued to operate for several years. The Foster Creek Lumber Company had ceased operations early in the 1929 depression. The Southern Forest Land Company was a land investment company without any milling operations.

In 1934, the Homochitto Lumber Company offered for sale some 11,000 more acres. The company retained title to timber on some of this additional offer for a period of five years releasing the land as it was cut over.

The Central Lumber Company also held a five-year timber reservation on some of its land. In 1935, the vice-president of this company inquired whether the Forest Service would be interested in purchasing the reserved timber. He claimed that too large a percentage of the timber from these lands was producing only #2 common lumber for which the market price was \$27.50 per thousand board feet. It was costing the company more than \$27.50 to produce the #2 common lumber which was manufactured in the company mill at Quentin, Mississippi. This mill was a double band mill, and the logging was by rail on company-owned tracks. Complete recovery from the 1929 depression was still many years away, and I reasoned a large number of men would be thrown out of work if the mill and logging shut down. I suggested that the company shut down one of its band saws and cut potential #2 logs into two-inch widths, then resaw the 2" board into 1" width and tie the two boards together. Wood paneling was becoming popular, and the two boards side by side would make a pleasing pattern. This suggestion was accepted by the company, no one was laid off, and the price of #2 common lumber became \$62.50. The company and workers were grateful for the suggestion. The mill continued to operate in this manner until about 1944, at which time all of the reserved timber and other timber holdings outside of the purchase unit were cut over.

The Foster Creek Lumber Company, as stated previously, ceased operation about 1930 due to financial conditions. The company was deeply in debt to the banks and even though they possessed over 60,000 acres of heavily stocked timber of merchantable size, they could not raise operating capital. Upon learning of this condition, I asked for and received permission from company officials to negotiate for the purchase of this property. My negotiations with the banks indicated

that the property could be purchased at an extremely reasonable price providing the mill and the town of Stephenson (now Crosby) was included. Reporting this information to the Regional Forester, after considerable more correspondence and data was supplied him, he decided against the proposition. All of this took place in 1934, and about 1935 Mr L O Crosby, a lumber man of considerable reputation, acquired the property on somewhat the same basis as I had suggested. About 55,000 acres of this property was outside the established purchase unit and this was one factor in the Regional Forester deciding against the proposal. However, one of the company officials secured title to the company land inside the purchase unit boundary, and this land was purchased from him in 1935.

The land inside the Homochitto Purchase Unit was found to be in a much better condition than those lands in other purchase units. The different types of logging, the years that had elapsed from the logging dates, the richness of the soil, and the timber types were the principal reasons for this condition.



SKIDDING PINE LOGS TO THE LOG DECK, USING TWO TEAMS OF OXEN. THIS IS ON THE ANDERSON TULLY SALE IN A 40 YEAR OLD OLD-FIELD PINE STAND NEAR KNOXVILLE, MISSISSIPPI.

All of us in the business world have heard the expression, "If you want something done, go to the top." The following is an example of this old saying.

We had agreed to purchase a man's land upon which he and his family lived. The land was too poor for him to make a living, in fact, only a few acres were cultivated and the man depended upon outside employment for his living. We had adopted a policy that any owner living on land under contract of purchase to the United States could remain on the property until it was paid for or to the end of the crop year, whichever came last. This seller had a daughter who had finished the third grade and apparently she had overheard her father mention that they would have to move. This statement inspired this little girl to "go to the top." She wrote and mailed a letter addressed to Mr President Franklin Roosevelt, Washington, DC. The letter was routed without comment as follows: (1) from the White House to the Secretary of Agriculture, (2) from the Secretary Agriculture to the Chief of the Forest Service, (3) from the Chief to the Regional Forester, (4) from the Regional Forester to the Forest Supervisor. I answered the letter, which I am sure pleased the little girl, sending a copy of both the little girl's letter and my letter to the Ranger, instructing him to call on the family and explain our policy and to secure the necessary data for a special use permit if it appeared necessary and desired.

The little girl's letter to the President opened as follows: "Here comes the same little girl what wrote you before." She then described fairly well the situation she thought the family was in and asked for the President's help. Of course, he never saw the letter, but I have often wondered how loud he would have laughed if he had. Now, you who read this, decide for yourself if it always pays to "go to the top" or is it possible to take some short cuts as it would have been in this situation. All of the decisions, other than passing the little girl's letter down the chain of command, were made by the Ranger or me at the two lowest steps in the Establishment Ladder.