

2014 TREE FARMERS OF THE YEAR

Phillip & Debra Beech of Humphreys County

Nominated By: Stephen Peairs, Formerly with TN Division of Forestry

The Beech Family Trust – TN Tree Farmers of the Year 2014



Philip and Debra Beech are 5th generation land owners who have lived on and manage their own forests. Mrs. Beech's grandfather owned a sizable pine forest in South Alabama and Mr. Beech's grandfather ran his turpentine crews when the turpentine industry flourished in the early 1900's. It seemed only natural that these two would end up owning forest land somewhere! In 2005 an investment property that they owned in New Orleans was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. The disaster was a blessing in disguise: it left them with the means to finally purchase their forest.

They located an old Westvaco tract in Humphreys and Houston Counties, and Philip decided that it the perfect diverse piece of land for them. Phil & Debbie Beech have been active land managers in Tennessee since purchasing that 1,837 acre property in 2006. They added land to the tree farm in 2010, enlarging their tree farm to a 2,000 acre tract. Since purchasing the property, they have worked closely with their TN area forester and NRCS to improve their forest.

After taking care of their immediate need for shelter, Phil went to work creating many supplemental wildlife food plots which were planted in clover and other winter plants, and made several permanent wildlife openings. Debbie walked the perimeter of the property after it was surveyed and painted boundary marking on trees. Overgrown fields which were used as pastureland by the previous owner was strip cut into habitat for quail. They

put fire lines around pine tree stands and began conducting prescribed burns on a rotational basis. This has really helped wildlife habitat and promotes pine stand development on their approximately 367 acres of pine. Many of the pines received their first thinning in 2010. Today, fire lines encircle their entire tract and divide the larger hardwood stands into several sections to prevent fire from spreading to adjoining areas. In 2011 a 67 acre clear cut piece of their property which "looked like nuclear winter" when they purchased it was replanted with pine seedlings. In the winter of 2012 Mr. Beech cleared a previous clear-cut field of stumps and they put a chestnut tree orchard on the approximately 4 acre tract. In 2013 a stream bank stabilization project along White Oak Creek to minimize soil erosion was completed and is maintained with the help and direction of NRCS.

Portions of the upland hardwood stands which were mismanaged in the past received patch clear-cut harvests in 2014 to regenerate the areas in desirable hardwoods and create early successional habitat. A sizeable portion of this area also houses a University of Tennessee hardwood research project. Timber stand improvement in the form of crop tree release was also executed on a select portion of the tracts.

The Beeches have hosted two field days for the Houston/Humphreys County Forestry Association as well. "Mr. & Mrs. Beech have been one of the most pleasurable landowners I have had the privilege to work with during my tenure as an Area Forester. They have a devout love for wildlife, recreation and forestry that is apparent both on the ground through their blood, sweat and tears as well as in the words they speak! Hands down, the most deserving of this recognition." said Stephen Peairs, former Area Forester for the Tennessee Division of Forestry.

But it is not all work on this woodland tract by any means! Phil loves playing host to both of their families for annual turkey hunts, sometimes even welcoming their state forester to take a bird or two!

They look forward to the fall when the farm becomes a place to invite their friends and family to stay for the deer hunts that have become a tradition in the years which they have allowed hunting on the property. Several times each year a horse club is welcomed for rides on the numerous trails throughout the woods. Vacation time on their farm calls their kids, their brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews to come and spend time on the creek; fishing, swimming and really getting away from it all! Both of the Beeches feel that the only way to truly enjoy your land is to share it with people you care about. It is their hope that perhaps one day one or more of their grandchildren will share this love of the land enough to take over the management of this family forest, carrying on the heritage of "working in the woods" that abounds in this family.

