

Briarpatch Family Farms, located in Humphreys County, TN has been chosen unanimously by committee as the Tennessee 2015 Tree Farmer of the Year.

By John C. Burch

Briarpatch Family Farms, LLC has been a paradise for four generations of the Burch family. It was acquired in 1964 by our parents John and Frances Burch. They bought it as a getaway and as a place to hunt quail. At purchase the land was heavily wooded with vacant fields and early succession growth. Our parents built a small one bedroom house with a swimming pool, a magnet for grandchildren, in the center of the property. A 5 acre fishing lake was also built. In 1967, a professional forester was hired to develop a management plan. That same year the first deer was killed.

Over the years the Briarpatch has been a place where generations have sought solitude and entertained friends. The 4th generation is entering into these pleasures.

In 1973-74 our parents gifted the property to my brother Lucius and I and our children. A timber harvest was conducted on a shared basis in 1983 and the proceeds were reinvested in expanding the size of the house and building another lake. In 1983 we purchased 315 acres of an adjacent tract. This land contained 241 acres of forested land with pockets of good timber. In 1993 we purchased 304 acres of adjacent property of which 289 acres were fenced and contained 121 acres of forested land, the balance in pasture which contained 3 lakes, 3 - 3.5 acres each, and 4 smaller ponds. This land was leased to a local farmer for grazing cattle. The lakes and ponds are all fishable and are attractive to a resident flock of Canadian geese. We experience fish predation from river otter and bald eagle. Beaver are a serious problem and we are periodically forced to employ a trapper.

Over the years wildlife management shifted from quail to deer and turkey. Today we maintain a variety of food plots: 17 acres of milo, 6 acres of winter peas, summer pastures consisting of 23 acres of orchard grass and clover and winter pastures of rye and winter wheat, of which 12 acres are a dove field. We rotate the milo and winter peas into orchard grass and clover fields every 3 years. We fertilize and lime as required. Recent clear cuts and shelter wood cuts have proved very attractive to deer and turkey and provide an abundance of fresh forage and forbs as well as bedding areas and dusting sites. We are trophy deer oriented and have a rule on bucks that they must be a mature deer, 8 points or better, with a spread outside the ears (~15 inches).

We became seriously interested in developing our timber resource in 2012 when a storm blew down about a dozen white oaks. A neighbor had a logger doing some work and suggested I talk to him. In a brief telephone conversation I asked the logger to look at the trees and he said he would and send me a check if he could use them. About 6 weeks later I got a check that got my attention. I called the State Area Forester and we spent the better part of a day going over the property. Several months later he presented me with a management plan and told me we had done enough work to become a certified Tree Farm. The plan he presented to us called for some clearcuts, shelterwood cuts, and replanting in pine. After circulating the plan around the family we decided to execute it. This involved hiring a professional forester. We also discussed our goals: improved wildlife habitat and improved value of our timber stands. About this same time it became obvious that we needed a structure that made it easier to execute

contracts. This led to the formation of Briarpatch Family Farm, LLC, with me and my nephew Lucius as managers.

Since hiring a consulting forester to help execute the plan we have received a detailed timber inventory that broke the forested acres of the property into management units to help make better management decisions based on our goals & objectives. Some of the practices we have implemented since 2012 include; Clearcuts on 3 tracts totaling 30.44 acres and shelterwood cuts on 3 tracts totaling 64.5 acres, pine plantation, Timber Stand Improvement harvest on 24 acres, and Chemical stem injection on 28 acres. Along with these practices that address the timber resource, we continue to implement our food plot program, annual prescribed burns for the oak savannah habitat, and maintain trails and boundary lines. Today the Briarpatch consists of 1,373 acres, 1,020 of which are forested that is under a great management program that will enhance all the resources on the property for many generations in the future to enjoy.

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