



Westervelt Forest

A WORKING FOREST & WILDLIFE DEMONSTRATION AREA

COMES TO LIFE

| Tim L. Gothard, AWF Executive Director

On May 12th, 2020, the first on-the-ground action took place to bring *Westervelt Forest* to life at Lanark – home of AWF and our Alabama Nature Center facility. The story behind this new and exciting addition began with a simple conversation over two years ago.

In the fall of 2017, Kevin McKinstry and I were visiting at Lanark to talk about how AWF and The Westervelt Company could further expand our mutually beneficial relationship. Being involved with AWF, Kevin had watched the growth of our programs and visitors at the Alabama Nature Center. As we toured the Alabama Nature Center, Kevin asked if we had any land management work on the property, such as prescribed burning, tree planting, etc., that Westervelt could assist with or help fund. At the time, we did not, but we walked over to the big property map on the wall and I showed Kevin a piece of property that joined Lanark on the north side. I noted to Kevin that if we ever acquired that 100+ acres, it would be a great property for converting back to longleaf pine. Almost before I completed the story about that property, another adjoining piece of property that I knew we needed to acquire came to mind. I shared with Kevin that the 100+ acres that I mentioned was not a critical

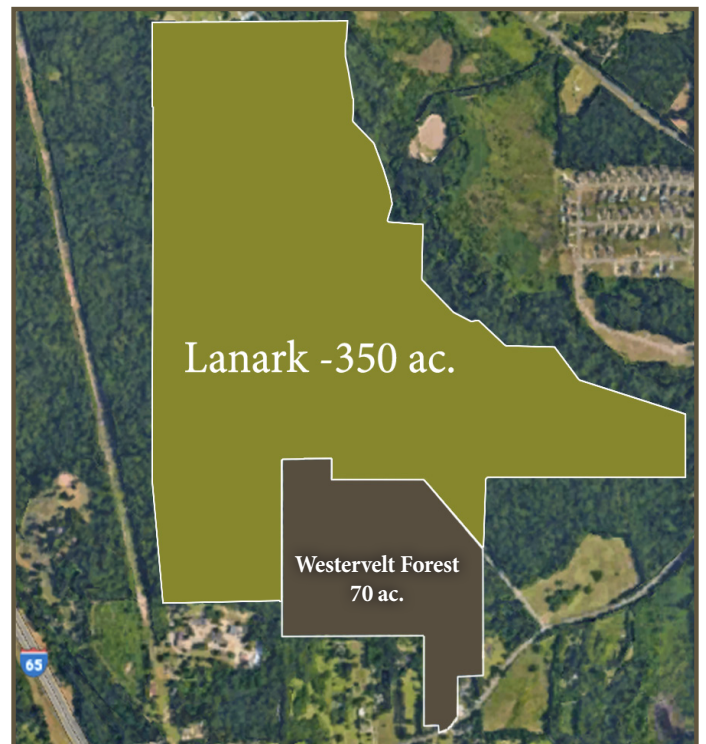
purchase but the 70 acres on the road leading into Lanark would one day come up for sale and would be a critical purchase. The owner was nearing his 90's and we expected that the family would most likely liquidate the property whenever that time arrived. Although we did not know for sure, our good relationship with the family and their excitement for what we were doing at Lanark led us to anticipate that they would give us first opportunity to purchase the property. At least a portion of that property would be a critical purchase need for AWF so that we could protect the viewshed leading into Lanark. If we were capable of purchasing the entire 70 acres, it would provide maximum protection of the viewshed and make a great place to develop a working forest and wildlife demonstration area – one that would allow us to show how private landowners manage their properties for those joint benefits and how our Land Stewardship Assistance Program assists them day-in and day-out. It was an interesting concept to both of us, but the timeline on when that property might be available and at what cost was a total unknown. We left the meeting that day simply committed to continuing to think about ways to further expand the AWF and Westervelt relationship.

About three months later, in December of 2017, it happened. The

Future View of
Westervelt Forest.

FEAT AT LANARK

landowner who owned the 70 acres passed and shortly thereafter the family called to inform us that they would be liquidating the property and wanted to talk with us first before putting the property on the market. Quickly, two things were put into motion: 1) AWF immediately began assessing the potential cost of the property, both the 10-12 acres minimum we would need to protect the viewshed along Lanark Road and the potential cost of the entire 70 acres; and 2) Kevin and I began more serious discussions about the Working Forest and Wildlife Demonstration Area concept and the potential interest of Westervelt and others in the forest and wildlife management arena. For AWF, we knew we could generate the funds to purchase the 10-12 acres and that was a must. Generating the donor support to purchase 70 acres at residential development prices per acre was an unknown. We tested with the family the idea of purchasing a portion of the property rather than the full 70 acres. As we expected and understood, they wanted to sell the entire property at one time rather than split it up into multiple sales – and time was of the essence. AWF made a quick decision – rather than miss the opportunity to be in control of which acres we were able to acquire and how the remaining acres might be used, we made the decision



to borrow the funds to purchase the entire property. From there we knew we would have two options: 1) carve out the critical acres we needed and sell the remainder if necessary or 2) secure the funds to cover the cost of the entire 70 acres and establish the Working Forest and Wildlife Demonstration Area. Most importantly, either way, we would have our hands on the steering wheel.

During this discussion and decision phase, thanks to the efforts of Kevin McKinstry and Jonathan Lowery with Westervelt, and AWF Sr. Biologist Claude Jenkins, we spent considerable time talking through and strategizing what we would need to do to rehabilitate the property and re-establish functional forest stands, manage existing stands, and incorporate wildlife openings and management practices on the property. In its prior use, the property was a small cattle operation. As the owner aged, the number of cattle were reduced and eliminated over time and the ungrazed and unmanaged pastures reverted back to forest. The BIG problem - they reverted to Chinese tallow tree forests with a speckling of natural pine from poor quality, old-field pines. None-the-less, we devised a plan to rehabilitate the property in a manner that could be used to share a wide variety of forest and wildlife management practices and principles, both with landowners and land managers and with the 50,000 visitors per year who travel Lanark Road on their way to AWF and our Alabama Nature Center facility.

The plan and costs were shared with the AWF Board. We confirmed our desire to obtain a loan to purchase the entire 70 acres, and associated with that purchase, we would give ourselves twelve months to seek investors in the Working Forest and Wildlife Demonstration Area concept. If we secured enough commitments to cover the purchase of the entire 70 acres plus the cost of installing the management practices, we would keep the entire property. If we did not have success in that arena, we would keep the 10-12 acres needed to protect the viewshed and sell the remainder to recoup funds and retire the loan. On September 18, 2018, we closed on the 70-acre property. Within a few months we had our first donor commitment, then another, and the ball was rolling. Well before the one-year mark we knew we had the necessary interest for the Working Forest and Wildlife Demonstration Area to be viable.

Throughout this journey, employees with The Westervelt

Company encouraged and assisted AWF with crafting the plan for the Working Forest and Wildlife Demonstration Area concept. From conceptual ideas to on-the-ground evaluations of the property, they stepped up at every occasion. Along the way, they shared the vision with others in the company, felt it would be a project the company would like to be associated with, and encouraged us to make a formal request. We did so and the ultimate viability of the project was solidified when The Westervelt Company shared with AWF that they would make a multi-year commitment at the Forest Naming level for the project. Success!!!!

With that great news, AWF immediately made plans to start bringing *Westervelt Forest* to life. The Westervelt Forest Advisory Committee, composed of Kevin McKinstry, Jonathan Lowery, Claude Jenkins, and the AWF Executive Director, had already put together a game-plan that we could start executing. We put the plan in motion.

“The Westervelt Company and AWF share the same balanced perspective on use, management, and protection of our natural resources. Teaming up to develop *Westervelt Forest* is something we are proud of and excited to help bring to life.”

- Brian Luoma, President and CEO, The Westervelt Company

Phase I - Mulching

With the highly abundant invasive plant species load, headlined by Chinese tallow tree, and the size of the stems present, mulching the areas targeted for rehabilitation was the first step. On May 12th, mulching began on 35 acres of former pastureland and about 5 acres of understory beneath a stand of large pines we now refer to as “The Quail Woods.” The former pastures that were mulched will be established to stands of longleaf pine, loblolly pine, and hardwoods along wet weather drains.

Phase II – Herbicide Application

Due to both the abundance of invasive exotic plant species and introduced pasture grasses from the cattle operation era, herbicide



Chinese tallow tree and old field pines or poor quality colonized the pastures after cattle operations ceased.



Mulching was utilized as the initial site prep treatment.



Approximately 40 acres were mulched to provide opportunity to establish longleaf and loblolly pine, hardwoods, and for native warm season grass management.



Regrowth after mulching facilitated effective uptake of back-pack applied herbicides.



After herbicide uptake and brownout, the mulched sites were ready for burning.

treatment is a must. On September 3rd, back-pack herbicide applications were applied to all of the mulched areas. This initial application primarily targeted the woody competition, such as the Chinese tallow tree, and provided important brown-up in order to carry fire. A second round of herbicide applications will take place later this year to target woody vegetation sprout-back and focused attention on the introduced pasture grasses.

Phase III - Site Prep Burn

On November 25th, most of the mulched and herbicide treated acres were burned to reduce debris and improve planting conditions.

Phase IV –Tree Planting

In late January/early February, the first trees will be planted. Only the loblolly pines will be planted this planting season since the herbicides for the second application targeting the resprouting and introduced pasture grasses can be applied without damage to the planted loblolly. Planting of the longleaf (13 acres), hardwoods (5 acres), and native warm season grasses (6 acres), will occur next planting season as they cannot withstand the second herbicide application. Loblolly will be planted on approximately 14 acres utilizing containerized seedlings provided by The Westervelt Company.

In addition to the areas that were mulched and will be replanted, there are four other distinct forest stands on the property that we will manage on *Westervelt Forest*.

Natural Pine

Approximately 5 acres of old pasture seeded in naturally from good loblolly seed sources. Chinese tallow tree is present in this stand as well but to a lesser extent. Our approach will be to use TSI (Timber Stand Improvement) treatments including hand crews to spray the Chinese tallow trees and we will begin a prescribed burning program once the trees reach adequate size for burning in loblolly. After the herbicide application and first burn, we will assess the benefit, or lack thereof, for a pre-commercial thin.

Mixed Pine-Hardwood

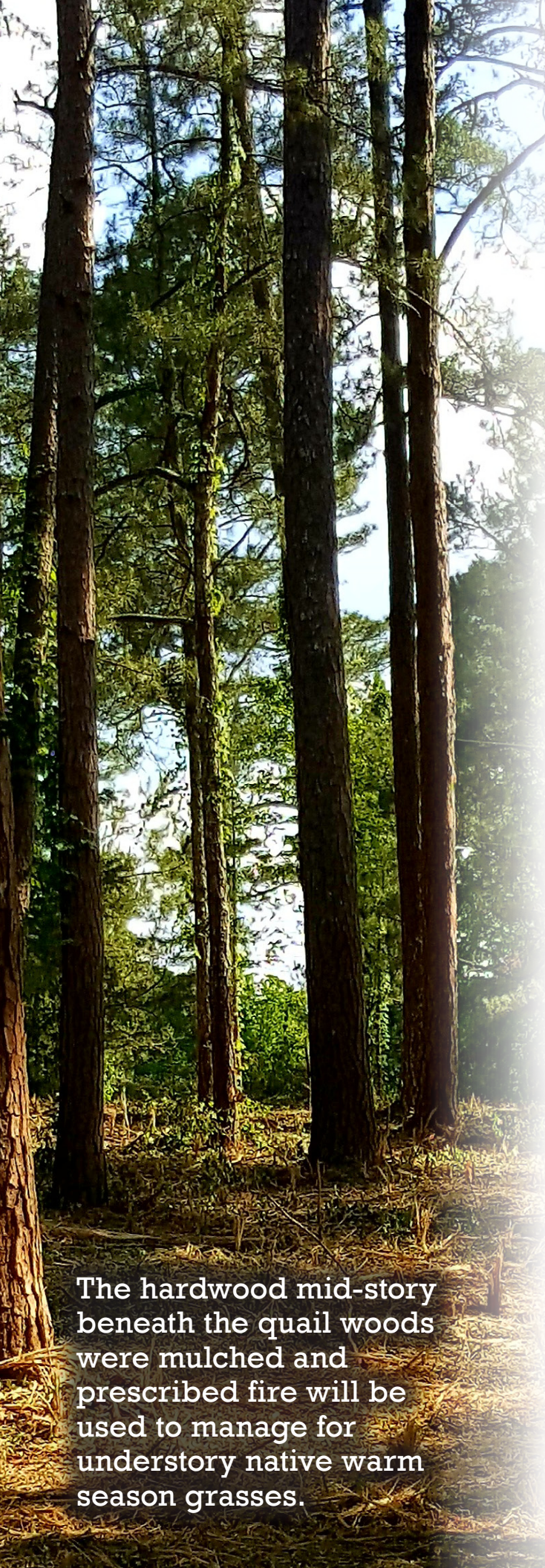
Approximately 17 acres contains mixed pine-hardwoods with a heavier complement of pine. Again, Chinese tallow tree is abundant and of more advanced size than in the old pasture areas. Much like the natural pine area, we will use TSI techniques including herbicide application by hand crews, prescribed burning, and pre-commercial thinning if warranted.

“The professional resource management demonstration and education opportunities that *Westervelt Forest* will provide are unlimited. We look forward to working with AWF to share it with landowners, land managers and the general public.”

- Jim King, Vice President and General Manager, Forest Resources



Site Prep Burn



Older and larger Chinese tallow trees in the Pine-Hardwood area will be addressed with hand crews and individual tree control techniques.

The Quail Woods

The previous owner had a small area of about 5 acres of older loblolly pines (50-60 years old), with a longleaf or two mixed-in, that he kept because he liked the way it looked. We like the way it looks as well and will use it to show how to manage understory with fire and promote native warm season grasses in forest settings that are beneficial to quail and other species that benefit from early successional habitats.

The Hardwoods

Below the small pond located on the property, about 5 acres of larger hardwoods butt-up to the larger Lanark property and a creek bottom on our western border. Our primary objective for this area is to maintain the stand for hard and soft mast production and aesthetics. Privet is well established along drainages in this area and we will utilize hand application of herbicides and other hand techniques to manage the privet. In addition to this established hardwood area, we will be planting hardwoods along a wet-weather drain and another low depression within the mulched area. Combined, these two areas will equal 3 acres.

Early Successional Openings

Throughout the property we will incorporate openings with native warm season grasses beneficial to a variety of early successional wildlife species. As we layout the forest stands, we will incorporate these openings in strategic locations to provide both linear habitat, aesthetic appeal, and management demonstration advantages.

Demonstration and Education Opportunities

Westervelt Forest will provide a wide variety of forest and wildlife management demonstration and educational opportunities. Conveniently located just off of I-65 in Millbrook with ample facilities at Lanark, the site will be perfect for hosting landowner meetings and tours covering a broad spectrum of on-the-ground management activities. In addition, *Westervelt Forest* will allow us to expand educational opportunities at our Alabama Nature Center facility and provide convenient access to a real-world, active-management landscape. At the same time, it provides a tool to show other landowners and the general public how natural resource professionals manage these important resources. Even further, it shows exactly what AWF's Resource Stewardship Biologists do on a daily basis when we work with private landowners to help them management advise on their properties.

The demonstration and education opportunities on *Westervelt Forest* will only be limited by our imagination. AWF owes tremendous thanks to The Westervelt Company and all of our donors for investing in AWF and helping make this project a reality. Stay tuned for regular updates in *Alabama Wildlife* as *Westervelt Forest* continues to come alive!

The hardwood mid-story beneath the quail woods were mulched and prescribed fire will be used to manage for understory native warm season grasses.