

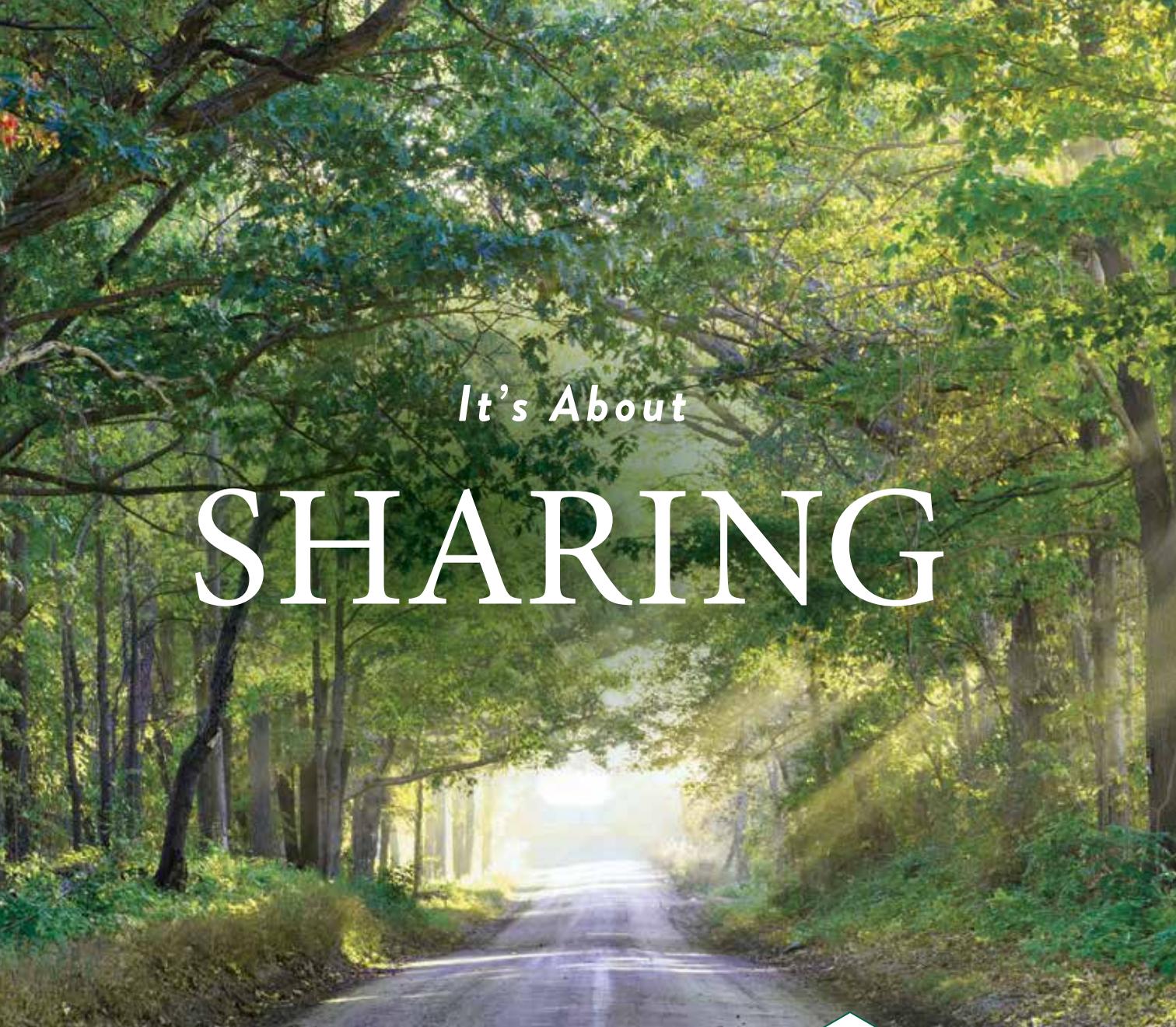


# Delta Wildlife

VOLUME XXX NO. 1

SPRING 2022





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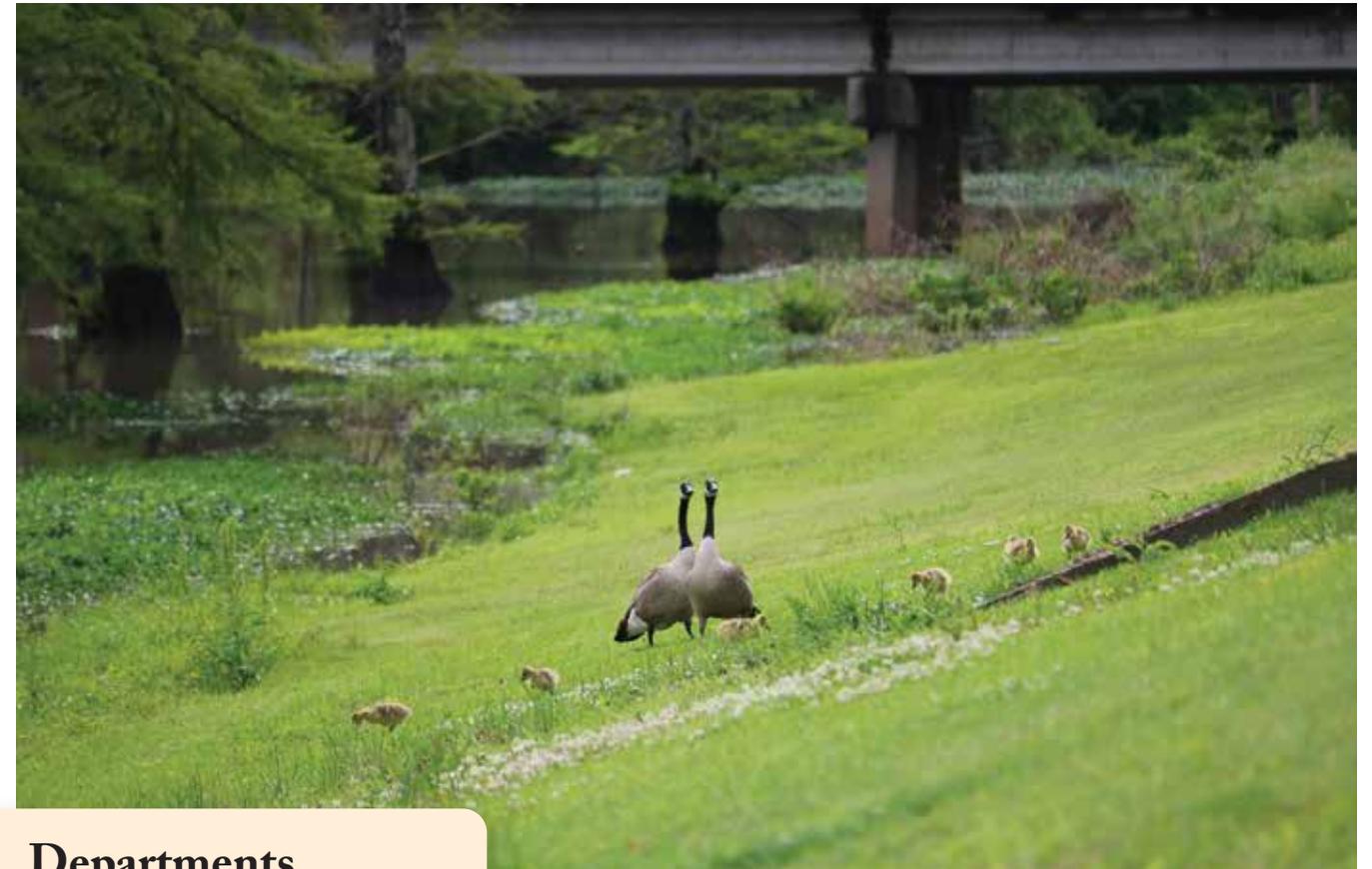
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Learn about Delta Waterfowl's Hen House program that helps boost nest success in areas with high duck production potential and a high nest failure rate. With over 30 years of research and refinement, this program has increased mallard production 60-80 percent.

**Correction**

Winter 2021 *Delta Wildlife Magazine*, Page 3 and Page 9: The bird in the cover image for the Winter 2021 *Delta Wildlife Magazine* was identified as a blue bird but should have been identified as a blue jay.

*Cover photo by Joe Mac Hudspeth*

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# Message from the Chairman

BY ALLAN GRITTMAN



Is anyone else happy duck season is over and we can look forward to next season? Farmers and hunters have a couple of things in common: simultaneous optimism and skepticism. Every year a farmer hopes for the best crops and prices, just as a hunter hopes for abundant game and the enjoyment of success. All the while, both plan for the potential of the worst. That's just good preparedness.

Overall, the 2021/2022 duck season was poor by most standards. If not the worst, it was definitely poor. Sure, some of you may be reading this thinking, "We had a great season." Consider yourself lucky because you are likely in the minority. Duck numbers across the Delta were down overall, and they were down in

neighboring states. Much of the prairie pothole region suffered poor habitat conditions that likely led to fewer than we hoped duck numbers. If habitat conditions in the prairies are more favorable this spring and summer, we should see an increase in the duck population. Another year of poor nesting success and habitat conditions will continue to impact numbers negatively, and hunter morale and success will also be affected negatively.

Spring is here, and it is a season of hope. There is hope that habitat conditions will improve, and duck numbers will increase. There is hope that 2022 will be great in so many ways, so we will continue to be optimistic.

We hope at Delta Wildlife that 2022 will be a great year. We have lots of great projects going, and as I was writing this, I noticed that today's word of the day, according to Merriam-Webster, is collaboration. The year 2022 will be a year of collaboration. We have so many great partners that help make Delta Wildlife successful. The collaboration between partners helps us deliver meaningful efforts to all corners of the Mississippi Delta. In 2022, we hope that our members will utilize our staff even more and collaborate on ways to improve their private lands all across the Delta and improve our organization.

Thank you for your support of Delta Wildlife.

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KID'S CORNER

**Colby Brooks, 14**  
Hunting with his dad, Nolan Brooks  
Harvested  
Nov. 7, 2021  
11 points, 190 lbs,  
14.25" wide  
20" & 21" main  
beams, 6" & 7"  
bases  
Carroll County



**Sophie Sullivan, 11**  
Daughter of Robert and Laura Sullivan of Leland  
First Deer!  
Carroll County

**Michael "Baker" Arnemann, Jr., 10**  
Son of Michael Arnemann  
8 point, 138 lbs  
Carroll County



KID'S CORNER



**Rodney Wells, 9**  
Hunting with his dad, Parker Wells  
Harvested Dec. 31, 2021. Monroe County  
First deer!



**Haze Whatley, 6**  
Son of Zeb and Haley Whatley. Hunting with his dad, Zeb, in the Mississippi Delta.  
8 point. Shot with .243 rifle. First deer!



**Zebedee Whatley, 9**  
Son of Zeb and Haley Whatley. Harvested in Mississippi Delta hunting with dad, Zeb.  
8 point. Shot with 7 mm 08.



**Kayne Blalack, 11**  
Son of Randy and Kelley Blalack. 100 lb mature doe. First deer on his first deer hunt with dad, Randy! He made a perfect 100-yard shot with his 6.5 Creedmore. Webster County



**Braxton Toten, 13**  
Son of Steven and Randi Toten. 13 point, 210 lbs  
Dec. 19, 2021. Taken with 7 mag  
Chicot County, Arkansas

**Karson Ingram, 7**  
Son of Kyle and Ashley Ingram  
Harvested  
Jan. 9, 2022  
While hunting with his Papa, Harold Redwine  
Carroll County  
First buck!



**Kyler Reynolds, 7**  
Son of Justin and Kelsey Reynolds  
8 point  
Dec. 12, 2021  
Tallahatchie County  
Kyler's biggest deer yet!

**Lawson Muirhead, 11**  
3 point, 140 lbs  
Dec. 28, 2021  
Harvested in  
Greenwood



**Hayes Lloyd, 11**  
Daughter of Ryan and Ann-Hamilton Lloyd of Brandon  
Pictured with her PePop, Bruce Pittman  
Nov. 26, 2021  
Shot with youth  
243  
Carroll County  
Biggest buck yet!

KID'S CORNER

KID'S CORNER

**Josie Ricotta, 12**  
Daughter of Henry and Ashlee Ricotta  
112 lb doe  
Taken with Ruger 350 Legend  
Harvested 2021 youth weekend  
Carroll County



**Reeves Young, 11**  
Son of Brad and Ashley Young  
Hunting with his dad and a "hand-me-down" .243 from his older cousins  
Nov. 6, 2021  
Tallahatchie County  
First deer!

**Audey Johnson, 9**  
Son of Roger and Savannah Johnson  
7 point  
Attala County



**Kinsey Prevost, 14**  
Daughter of Dan and Jessica Prevost  
7 point  
Taken with 6.5 Creedmore  
First buck hunting with brother, Jon Coner  
Hinds County



**Will Duncan Fratesi, 6**  
Son of Will and Kendall Fratesi  
140 lb doe harvested December 11, 2021  
Archer Island. 2nd deer of his career!



**Whit Fountain, 14**  
Son of Will and Portia Fountain. 11 point.  
Taken with a 7 mm 08. Dec. 22, 2021.  
Sunflower County



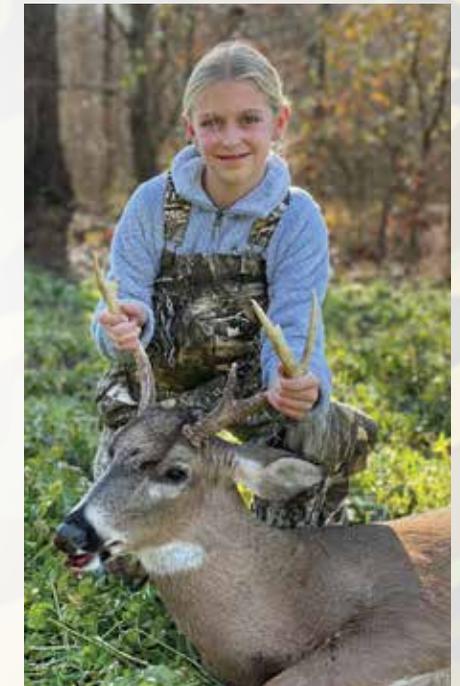
**Campbell Towels, 16**  
Son of Allen and Callie Towels  
138" 8 pt. Dec. 22, 2021. Jackson Point  
Hunting Club in Coahoma County



**Layne McIntire, 10**  
Son of Patrick McIntire and Ashley Ingram  
2021 Goose hunt in the Mississippi Delta



**John David Skelton, 7**  
December 19, 2021  
First rack buck



**Sarah Pace Mitchell, 9**  
Daughter of Larkin and Sarah Mitchell  
6 point buck. First buck! Sunflower County

**Amelia Sides, 5**  
Daughter of Jeff and Emily Sides  
Nov. 23, 2021  
Humphreys County  
Hunting with Dad  
First deer!



**Hunter Roberson, 13**  
Son of Glenn and Crystal Roberson  
10 point  
Harvested Nov. 13, 2021  
Washington County

**Hallie Bryant, 18**  
Daughter of Billy and Debbie Bryant  
5.5 year old main frame 8 point . 215 lbs, 5.5" bases, scored 133"  
Jan. 11, 2022  
Carroll County  
First solo hunt and biggest buck yet!



**Jon Coner Prevost, 11**  
Pictured with Stella  
Son of Dan and Jessica Prevost  
8 point  
Taken with 6.5 Creedmore  
Hinds County



## Delta Wildlife Staff Highlight

# Sam Franklin

Sam Franklin is a Senior Wildlife Biologist and Program Administrator for Delta Wildlife, where he has worked for nearly 17 years. His responsibilities include overseeing the wetland restoration projects throughout the Delta, the increasingly popular habitat seed program, along with several other ancillary programs like the native warm season grass and habitat projects, and general wildlife and habitat consultation.

Sam grew up just south of Greenville and graduated from Riverside High School in Avon. He then attended Mississippi Delta Community College for a short year before transferring to Mississippi State University to enroll in the Forestry and Wildlife Management Program. "Though I wasn't physically far from home, it felt like a world away from the wide-open fields of the Mississippi Delta," said Sam.

Upon graduating, Sam moved back home to work in his family's tax office until the spring of 2004 when he was fortunate enough to land a position with the Research Division of the U.S. Forest Service in Stoneville, under Dr. Emile Gardiner. After several years of working there, Sam was hired on with Delta Wildlife; he was the only employee other than the Executive Director. "It has been amazing to see the growth and impact Delta Wildlife has now compared to then, and most of that growth is attributed to the foresight and direction of our board," said Sam. "When I came on, Delta Wildlife was not as diverse as we are now. There's no possible way I or we could have envisioned all the different programs we currently have.



"If you would have told me 17 years ago that Delta Wildlife would have a feral swine program with an army of trappers, being the driving force with reclamation projects on the National Forest system and ultimately having a seat at the policy table not only for regional wildlife-related opportunities but nationwide as well, I don't know that I would have believed it," Sam continued.

When he's not working, Sam can be found one of two places — working around his home and sheep farm or traveling. "I absolutely love traveling to different countries to experience their cultures and watch others' day-to-day routines. I watch flight prices the way some people watch the stock market," Sam jokes. "If I catch a cheap flight somewhere, like a no-name town in Italy, France, etc.. and I have the vacation time, I'm gone! The virus outbreak of course has made it a little more difficult, but I'm still exploring options."

Sam and his wife Melinda reside in Tribbett along with their three daughters, ages nine, 12 and 13. "It's just far enough out of town to hear coyotes at night, but not too far to where it's a long trip to town, so it's perfect for us," said Sam. "And with lambs in the spring, there's no shortage of coyotes wanting an easy meal! There isn't much of a market here in the Delta, but there's a big demand in east Mississippi where we sell the majority of our lambs and ewes. My girls handle all

aspects of the operation except transportation. They buy the feed, and provide medical attention and general care, so they are tough little girls."

### A Lot of Different Hats

Delta Wildlife is a small organization with a tremendous footprint across the 19-county Delta region, so job responsibilities between the employees can vary from those mentioned previously. Sam notes that he really enjoys the business side of his job more than he ever imagined. "The handling of contractors and working with private landowners to make a positive impact on properties from one end of the Delta to the other is a serious but enjoyable responsibility. The toughest part of the job would definitely be tree planting. It's fun to get all bundled up and go hunt, then go home and warm up by the fire, but when it's 35 degrees out and the wind is cutting you in half, it makes staying out with the tree planters pretty tough," Sam said. "Once we are done planting trees and all the work is squared away for the upcoming summer, we focus our efforts on our Habitat Seed Program (HSP)."

The HSP is Delta Wildlife's largest in-house program. Seed companies donate a variety of seed (such as corn, soybean or wheat) to Delta Wildlife for members to purchase and plant for habitat and conservation purposes on their property. The seed companies in turn save on destruction cost of unutilized seed, members save on the cost of seed and the program helps support Delta Wildlife. The HSP has grown in both numbers of bags, acres planted and member utilization.

"When I took the program over, a couple hundred bags in the spring and fall were being sold," said Sam. "Now, we move two to three thousand bags in the spring and close to seven thousand in the fall. The program has experienced exponential growth, and it's great to see all of our clients at distribution time as well." If you or a friend may be interested in utilizing the HSP this spring, it's a simple process: Join Delta Wildlife (visit [www.deltawildlife.org](http://www.deltawildlife.org) or call 662-686-3370) and you'll receive an order form in the mail. Fill out your form and mail it back in. The program is a first come, first serve basis with a limited quantity of seed so it is imperative to return your order form as soon as you receive it.

"The staff at Delta Wildlife wear a lot of different hats, and I wouldn't have it any differently," said Sam. "On a random morning, I may be on a Wetland Reserve Easement project, then meeting with a state wildlife employee at lunch and back to the distribution point for the HSP that afternoon. That's the best part of our job, the diversity. So, if a member needs help designing a duck hole, crafting a warm and cool season food plot program to address season food shortages or an overall habitat management program, we can do it all. Give us a call and we can schedule a consultation or site visit and get you and your property where you want it to be."

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JAKE LATENDRESSE

## The Importance of our Greentree Reservoirs to Waterfowl

BY MATTHEW DZIAMANSKI  
Delta Wildlife Staff

Greentree reservoirs, known as GTRs, are bottomland hardwood forests that seasonally flood and provide vital habitat for migrating waterfowl. GTRs are surrounded by a levee system and typically have a pump system in order to flood the forest. This allows for land managers to choose when they start pumping water and also when they pull water off. What makes GTRs so important is that they provide a very unique habitat filled with hard mass for ducks to feed on.

The habitat that GTRs provide is filled with nutrient-rich red oak acorns from species such as willow (*Quercus phellos*), water (*Quercus nigra*), nuttall (*Quercus texana*) and cherry bark oaks (*Quercus pagoda*). All of these oak acorns are small and palatable for dabbling ducks such as mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Gadwall (*Mareca strepera*) and wood ducks (*Aix sponsa*).

Depending on the water management system, the time prior to duck season that pumping would begin varies, but in best interest for forest health, once the leaves have dropped is the best time. The leaves having dropped indicates that the trees are dormant, and the

water will likely not have a damaging effect on them, unless there has been annual long term flooding. This will be in late November-December and may mean you miss opening day, but fresh water pulls more ducks than any decoy or call. Draining the day after the season ends is also best for forest health. The timing is imperative because there are serious repercussions if water is started too early or left standing too late every year.

These red oak species are water tolerant but year after year of early flooding and late draining stresses the trees and will cause them to die. When the less water-tolerant oaks die then more water-tolerant oak species will take over, such as overcup oaks (*Quercus lyrata*). Overcup acorns are large and are not edible for any waterfowl, so they are not beneficial.

Greentree Reservoirs are a great resource for duck hunting, but also deer and squirrel hunting, so it is important that we do our part in ensuring their longevity. As a public land hunter, I know that MDWFP is doing their part in protecting our GTRs, and they will continue to do so. GTRs are vital, and I plan to be standing in one come November.

### Delta Wildlife Member Highlight

## Craig Rozier

BY AMY TAYLOR

“Like my dad has always reminded us, preserve what we have today so that we can enjoy it tomorrow. Delta Wildlife is a key player in his philosophy, which is being passed down through generations,” comments Craig Rozier, Delta businessman, outdoorsman, husband, father and Delta Wildlife member.

A native of Greenwood, Craig’s first hunting memories were duck hunting with his father and brother around the Delta at Leflore County Hunting & Fishing Association, the Scatters and Pin Oak Hunting Club. He attended Pillow Academy and Mississippi State University before coming home to the family business, Rozier Construction. He laughs, “I suppose construction is in my blood. I’m forty years old and tell people that I’ve been in the construction business for forty years!” While Craig began working from the ground up on bulldozers and excavators upon returning from college, he currently serves as Vice President of Mike Rozier Construction Co., Inc. and Vice President of RM Development Group, Inc.

“I’ve been an avid duck hunter since I was a child and about ten years ago, purchased a tract of land, Haney Brake, LLC, and put it into WRP.” Craig continues, “Because of the regulations that come with WRP, I realized I needed to join Delta Wildlife in order to take advantage of their resources and expertise. Sam (Franklin) was my go-to person there and offered me much support and guidance in the areas of WRP and land and waterfowl management.”

In addition to his membership in Delta Wildlife, Craig is a member of the Mississippi Economic Council, the Mississippi Economic Development Council, the Greenwood-Leflore County Chamber of Commerce, the Area Development Partnership of Greater Hattiesburg, Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl, Study Groups Construction Forum, the International Council of Shopping Centers, the American Institutes of Architects and ABC of Mississippi.

Members of the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Greenwood, Craig and his wife, Marcie, are the parents of two sons: Reed (age 9) and Parker (age 6), who also love to hunt with their dad on their family property, Mallard Rest. “It is important to instill in my boys the value of preserving the land and hunting. It teaches them responsibility, and if you want to enjoy something, you’ve got to work for it,” he adds.

Although Craig has had the opportunity to hunt around the globe — Red Stag in New Zealand, waterfowl in Canada, dove



Craig Rozier enjoys duck hunting with sons Reed (above, left) and Parker (left) at Mallard Rest. Parker found a deer shed the morning the trio were hunting.

in Argentina, moose and Dall sheep in Alaska, to name a few — he finds himself, most of all, enjoying duck hunting (and a little deer hunting) right here at home in the Delta. “We’re very fortunate and thankful to have this God-given land to enjoy. There’s just nothing better than the fellowship and camaraderie with family and friends, either hunting together or just relaxing around the firepit, taking in the beauty of nature and watching the ducks fly in.”

At the end of the day, family and friends gather around the table to share the fruits of their labor, such as this tried-and-true favorite: Roasted Wild Duck.

For Craig Rozier’s Roasted Wild Duck recipe, see page 14.



# Roasted Wild Duck

BY CRAIG ROZIER

## INGREDIENTS

- ☑ 4 small, wild ducks
- ☑ Lemon or orange wedges
- ☑ Salt
- ☑ 2 to 3 celery stalks
- ☑ Black Pepper

**TIP:** Specifically for small, wild ducks, bring meat to room temperature before roasting.

## DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 450 or 500 degrees. If the duck is reasonably fat, pierce the skin, taking care not to pierce the breast meat. Rub the bird with lemon and dust with salt. Stuff the bird with lemon or orange wedges.
2. Place a few celery stalks in an ovenproof pan (such as a cast iron skillet) to serve as a trivet, keeping the ducks from cooking in their own juices. Place the ducks on the celery and roast in oven 10 to 15 minutes for smaller ducks, or up to 25 minutes for larger ducks. The key is for the internal temperature to reach 140 to 145 degrees. Ideally, duck should be served medium to medium rare. Be careful not to overcook.
3. Remove from oven and allow to rest 5 minutes for smaller ducks and 10 minutes for larger ducks.
4. To make a simple sauce, remove celery from pan and stir in a couple of tablespoons of flour, cooking on the stove and stirring the roux until it is a dark brown color. Add a dash of Worcestershire, wine or brandy and the juice of a lemon. If the sauce is too thick, add a little stock or water. Whisk until smooth, take off heat and add a tablespoon of minced parsley and butter. Swirl to combine and serve over duck.

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# Dream Homes for Mallards

Delta Waterfowl Hen Houses add ducks to fall flights in every flyway, season after season

BY BILL MILLER

Staff Writer, Delta Waterfowl

**M**allards are North America's most populous duck. By the historical USFWS Waterfowl Population Status Reports, mallards number nearly twice as many as the next closest species. That carries over into harvest data as well, meaning the mallard is the most popular species with America's duck hunters.

That's one reason Delta Waterfowl focuses its duck production efforts on mallards. Since there are more mallards to begin with, the organization's efficiency in adding more ducks to the fall flight is greatest, because it takes lots of ducks to make lots of ducks. Also, mallards are the most adaptable species when it comes to nesting locations. They readily take to Delta's efforts to boost nest success.

## Delta's Mallard Makers

Hen Houses are nesting structures primarily used by mallards that Delta installs to boost nest success in areas with high duck production potential and a high nest failure rate.

As of the 2022 spring nesting season, Delta's fleet of Hen Houses

numbers nearly 10,000 and adds mallards to all four flyways, with installations in Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario. That tally does not include the many hundreds installed throughout North America by local Delta chapters.

Delta's duck production efforts focus on the prairie pothole region, because in any given year, as many as 70 percent of the newly-hatched ducks flying south for the first time are hatched there.

A Hen House is a tubular nesting structure placed on a pole in a wetland. Refined over many years by Delta Waterfowl, Hen Houses are attractive nest sites that position hen mallards out of the reach of common predators.

Each Hen House is constructed from a 3-by-7-foot piece of welded wire fencing — 14-gauge with 1-by-2-inch mesh. Flax straw is rolled in the wire as the exterior protective cover. Grass hay is placed inside this tunnel as desirable nest building material for hen mallards. The tunnel is supported several feet above the water by a welded steel pipe and cradle system to which the Hen House is secured.

Unlike wood duck boxes, which replicate natural wood duck nest



sites (tree cavities), nest structures placed above water are not a typical duck nest site. Most diving ducks nest at or near water level in woven nests, floating mats or on muskrat huts. Most puddle ducks, and some divers like the lesser scaup, typically nest in upland habitats adjacent to wetlands.

Mallards, however, are far more adaptable. Though predominately upland nesters, they've been known to select overwater sites and other alternative or unusual locations. It's this adaptability that helped make mallards the most common duck species worldwide. Though wood ducks, lesser scaup, redheads and the occasional canvasback nest have been found in Hen Houses, only mallards use them in significant numbers.

## Safe Houses

Through 30 years of research and refinement, Delta's Hen Houses have proven to be the most effective and cost-efficient tool available to increase mallard production on the prairie. Hen Houses consistently boost nest success to more than 60 percent and commonly to 80 percent. These rates are achieved in high-density nesting areas in which mallards typically achieve nest success of less than 10 percent and as low as 2 percent, which is nearly total failure. On average, a mallard using a Hen House is 12 times more likely to hatch her clutch than a mallard nesting in the upland grasses of the Canadian parklands. The result is tens of thousands more mallards headed to Mississippi and other points south in each fall flight.

Not only do Hen Houses increase nest success, they are also proven to boost hen survival. Hen Houses ensure mallards are safe from most mammalian predators, including foxes, which are notorious for killing nesting hens. Delta research shows that survival of hens nesting in Hen Houses is 20 percent higher than for those nesting in the uplands.

Delta biologists also suspect that survival of ducklings hatched in Hen Houses is higher. Ducklings hatched in ground nests spend up to 48 hours in the nest and must then follow the hen to a nearby



wetland, where they can more easily avoid predators and find food. A very dangerous time, their vocalizations during and just after hatch attract predators. Up to 18 percent of ducklings die before they ever reach water.

This isn't a problem in Hen Houses, as the safety of water is directly underneath the nest. A Delta student researcher found that survival of ducklings hatched in nest structures ranged from 42 to 73 percent — very strong relative to other studies of duckling survival.

## Hen House Supersites

Hen Houses are installed in wetlands in the late winter or early spring, often through ice covering the ponds and lakes. This is also when maintenance of existing structures is completed. Integrity of the tunnels, poles, and mounts are checked, and new hay is added to the nesting areas. If the tunnel has been damaged by flooding or shifting ice and cannot be repaired, it is replaced and frequently relocated to an area less susceptible to repeat damage.





While many Delta volunteers manage and maintain Hen Houses, the majority are overseen by Hen House delivery specialists whom Delta contracts for installation and maintenance services. Therefore the most cost-efficient way to deploy Hen Houses is in clusters, minimizing travel for the contractors. These clusters, now known as “Hen House Supersites,” significantly boost the number of mallards heading south each fall.

“A Hen House Supersite is 100 Hen Houses positioned in an area of highest breeding mallard densities,” said Delta Waterfowl’s chief conservation officer, Joel Brice. “A hundred is a quantity that justifies the work, but not so many that it will overwhelm a contractor. The contractor installs each Hen House, records its GPS coordinates, and returns at least once annually for maintenance. To enhance efficiency, Hen Houses are installed as closely together as possible without causing neighboring hens to become territorial.”

#### Location, Location, Location

Like all of Delta’s duck production work, the identification of potential Hen House Supersite locations is driven by science. Before he became Delta’s senior waterfowl programs and Delta Marsh property manager, Matt Chouinard worked on Delta research as a graduate student. His master’s research considered the proper blend of biology and economics in determining the quantity, location and density of Hen House placements.

Since breeding mallards are notoriously territorial and protective of their feeding wetlands, initial recommendations suggested only one Hen House per wetland. However, further nest structure studies showed that hens were not territorial to nest sites, and multiple Hen Houses were often used by mallards in the same wetland.

Empty Hen Houses equate to wasted duck dollars, so as a student researcher, Chouinard’s goal was to determine the most productive and cost-effective number of nesting structures per wetland. He selected 30 small wetlands of 1½ acres or less and 30 larger wetlands of 1½ to 4 acres near Minnedosa, Manitoba. He installed one, two or four Hen Houses in each of them.

Chouinard concluded that placing four Hen Houses on a wetland

wasn’t the optimal blend — though in some cases all four were used by mallards, plenty remained vacant. Instead, the numbers showed that two Hen Houses per wetland was the most economically efficient strategy. He also noted that wetland size did not affect usage rates of Hen Houses, and curiously, structures near roads were actually used at higher rates.

Today, Delta uses Chouinard’s research combined with data from many other Delta studies to carefully assess potential Hen House Supersite locations — the area’s density of nesting ducks, the cost-efficiency of the installations and the anticipated occupancy rates are prime considerations. Thanks to this formula, Chouinard says many of Delta’s Hen House Supersites boast usage rates of 60 to 80 percent — and on occasion, usage rates are in excess of 100 percent, with some structures being used two or even three times during a single nesting season. Occupancy rates tend to increase with the age of a Supersite.

It’s also been documented that when a hen nests successfully in a structure, she often returns the next year to the same location or nearby. It makes sense that this behavior is common among mallards that nest in Hen Houses, because their nest success is so high. With time, the mallards’ offspring and other pioneering hens also begin nesting in the structures.

#### Bottom Line

More ducks over the decoys of America’s hunters means more fun and great memories for all. It also means more new hunters will come on board to secure the future of duck hunting and waterfowl conservation.

Delta has refined the science of building, installing and maintaining Hen House nest structures for maximum effectiveness and cost efficiency. The locations in which Hen House Supersites will deliver greatest impact are determined by science.

Hen Houses are a key tool in forwarding the duck production mission of Delta Waterfowl — The Duck Hunters Organization — and its biologists continue to expand their efforts to increase the number of mallard-making Hen Houses on the PPR landscape.



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*Delta Wildlife Partner Q&A:*

# Alex Littlejohn

BY AMY TAYLOR

Alex Littlejohn is the State Director of the Nature Conservancy's Mississippi Chapter. He is a graduate of Mississippi State University, where he received both a bachelor's degree in Wildlife & Forest Management and a master's degree in Wetland Ecology.

As an undergrad, Alex was enrolled as an intern for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for four years. He gained firsthand experience in implementing wildlife and habitat management across the Corps' properties in north Mississippi. That experience strengthened his interest in wetland management and ecology, which led him to pursue a graduate degree that focused on the benefits and ecosystem services provided by constructed wetlands in large agricultural landscapes across the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley.

In 2012, Alex joined the Nature Conservancy's Mississippi Chapter as the Freshwater Program Director. During his time in that role, he focused on voluntary reforestation and wetland restoration opportunities with landowners across the Mississippi Delta. This resulted in the establishment of the region's first Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, a multimillion-dollar restoration effort supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Bill.

Under Littlejohn's leadership, the Mississippi Chapter has expanded its conservation work throughout the state, including the integral roles they have played in conserving nearly 40,000 additional acres of critical forested wetland habitat along the Pascagoula River, throughout the Delta and along the Mississippi River. The team has implemented a focused conservation vision that promotes partnerships with federal, state and private conservation partners, while also prioritizing opportunities to leverage resources to achieve the greatest impact towards the organization's Shared Conservation Agenda.

This has resulted in tangible conservation outcomes and nearly \$55 million secured toward conservation efforts across Mississippi. Those efforts include: completing large-scale floodplain restoration projects in partnership with U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee; establishing multiple stewardship agreements with the U.S. Forest Service to improve forest health and management across the national forests in Mississippi; implementing oyster reef restoration work along the Gulf Coast in partnership with the Department of Marine Resources, Secretary of State's office and NFWF's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund and 5-Star programs; advocating for state dedicated conservation funding and federal public policy, such as the Farm Bill, Land & Water Conservation Fund, Great American Outdoors Act and Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act.

In addition to overseeing the staff, budget and overall operations and management of the Mississippi Chapter, Alex also serves on the Conservancy's Southern Division Leadership Team and is an integral member of the organization's cross-border teams for the Mississippi River Basin, Gulf of Mexico and Longleaf Pine whole systems.



*DW: Please share a bit of your background that led to your motivation for land and wildlife conservation.*

*Littlejohn:* I'm just a kid who grew up in the hills, chased ducks in the Delta and caught a few fish out of the Tallahatchie and Coldwater rivers from time to time. Conservation has always been deeply rooted in these memories and experiences. Being from Oxford and going to school at Mississippi State offers its fair share of responses. My grandfather — maroon and white to his core — would often tell folks that “it just took Alex a little time to find the Lord.” And by that, he meant me finding my way to Mississippi State. But it was the natural path if you wanted to be in this line of work.

*DW: As State Director of the Nature Conservancy, what are your primary responsibilities?*

*Littlejohn:* This could take us down a lot of rabbit holes if we're not careful. As State Director, the main role is to make sure our efforts are having the greatest impact for conservation that we possibly can here in Mississippi, and that the Chapter remains financially sustainable to continue to carry that work into the future. With that comes setting out and executing a vision and plan for conservation, building meaningful relationships with our state, federal and pri-

vate partners, leveraging state and federal funds and managing a team of biologists, foresters, scientists and development professionals. Every day is different — anyone in this role will tell you that.

*DW: When did you become involved with Delta Wildlife? What are examples of specific projects on which you and DW have partnered?*

*Littlejohn:* That really started back during my time in graduate school at Mississippi State. I worked closely with Delta Wildlife and Delta Farm on some of the early Mississippi River Basin Initiative implementation work, mainly all the early monitoring required for some of those practices — tailwater recovery, on-farm storage, nutrient/sediment reductions, weirs & two stage ditches etc. From those efforts then — which seem like yesterday — to now where I'm working with that same Delta Wildlife staff on projects like Matthews Brake, or the CREP program, Yazoo Pumps and others, you can definitely see how things come full circle. But there again, it speaks to the importance of strong relationships and partnerships.

*DW: Regarding wildlife conservation, what efforts to benefit the outdoorsman are underway?*

*Littlejohn:* I think the greatest effort underway to help benefit our outdoors is the effort to establish an outdoor stewardship trust fund for Mississippi. This would be an annually dedicated set of funds that could be used toward helping leverage more money to Mississippi from the Farm Bill and other federal funding sources or helping provide more wildlife habitat on our WMAs and NWRs. Mississippi is one of two states in the Southeast that lacks such a trust fund for the outdoors, so getting that up and established will put us on a competitive level with our neighbors in Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, etc. It is the single greatest lever we can pull to benefit our hunting, fishing and outdoor culture here in Mississippi. Hands down.

*DW: Please comment on the value of your partnership with Delta Wildlife.*

*Littlejohn:* The uniqueness of Delta Wildlife being landowner based, landowner led and landowner driven is why we value them as such a great partner. But it's also the credibility, experience and relationships they bring to the table that make them such an effective and successful organization and partner.



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# Beekeeping Requires Planning, Patience

BY SUSAN M. COLLINS-SMITH  
MSU Extension Service

**P**eople interested in beekeeping should take time to answer some important questions and develop a plan before beginning this hobby.

One of the best ways people can learn about the hobby is to join a beekeeping group, said Jeff Harris, Mississippi State University Extension Service bee specialist.

“Local beekeeping clubs often have members with many years of experience, and clubs are a great way for you to learn about the hobby before you begin,” Harris said.

“They give great advice about any of the major issues new beekeepers may face, invite knowledgeable speakers to their meetings and often offer hands-on demonstrations with live beehives,” he said. “Many people learn more by being immersed in the hive with a skilled beekeeper helping them than they would ever learn just by watching a lecture.”

Beekeeping can be done in cities and rural areas, but Harris recommends checking local ordinances and laws before beginning, no matter the location, because rules vary. Some places may limit the number of hives a person can have, and some states may have laws regarding hive registration.

## Location of Hives

The next step is to think about the everyday logistics of beekeeping, including where the hives will be kept and when the hives will be worked.

“Even if there are no laws restricting beekeeping, all new beekeepers need to consider where they want to keep their bees,” Harris said. “The most problematic issues can be with neighbors in urban and suburban settings who fear your bees. Honeybees can be safely kept in these areas, but careful consideration about how best to protect your neighbors, and therefore, future problems with you, should be a priority.”

Keep hives in an area that is shielded from view, such as behind trees or shrubbery. Make sure they are kept away from pets and high traffic areas, such as where children play. Confined pets are especially susceptible to a swarm of upset, stinging bees.

Place hives near ample food supply and easy access to water. Bees forage for food within one to two miles of the hive. The best locations provide several acres of a wide variety of floral sources rather than just a single flower type. In these locations, bees will be healthier, have enough food to store for winter and can produce higher honey yields.

Provide water sources close to the hive, such as shallow pools or dishes filled with pea gravel and water. Consider installing a drip irrigation line to keep the water sources filled.

“Bees are lazy. If they can get water from sources close to the

hive, they are much less likely to venture to water features or swimming pools in your neighbor’s yard,” Harris said.

## The Hive

Buy gentle bee stock, and work bees during quiet periods when nearby neighbors are indoors and when pets and children are not rowdy.

“Honeybees can vary widely in their level of defensiveness or their tendency to sting in response to a perceived threat,” Harris said. “There are very gentle stocks of bees, and there are grumpy and easy-to-rile stocks of bees. Word of mouth among beekeepers is a good way to find the gentlest bees.”

Labor is not a huge concern for hobbyists with only a few hives. Hives are worked at least once every one to two weeks during the active, spring growing season, once a month during summer and winter, and again every one to two weeks in the autumn growing season. A typical hive inspection takes 10 to 30 minutes.

Cost is another factor to consider. Start-up costs can run between \$450 and \$550. People should expect to spend between \$300 and \$400 to purchase all the woodenware that houses the hive. A starter bee colony with one queen and 10,000 worker bees costs about \$150.

“The cost is substantial in the beginning, but the boxes can be used for seven to 10 years if they are painted, and beekeepers learn to propagate their own

stock,” Harris said. “So, as beekeepers learn, the cost goes down.”

## Learning Curve

Michael Scheel, a member of the Southwest Mississippi Beekeepers Association, who got into beekeeping after finding his late father-in-law’s equipment, said beginners should expect a learning curve.

“I read and researched methodically, but I still struggled in the beginning,” said Scheel, who now has 70 hives and plans to expand to a total of 150 by the end of 2022 to supplement his income in retirement. “But, I am very competitive and inquisitive, and I decided I was going to learn to keep my bees alive. I had a lot of bees die in the beginning, and I spent a lot of money in a short amount of time replenishing my bees.”

Scheel said experienced beekeepers make up the most important learning resource.

“Google is a nightmare for a beginning beekeeper because there is so much information out there and no way to know what is right and what is wrong,” he said. “The best thing to do is find a club and a mentor, or someone who is willing to answer your questions and show you how to do things.”

“Beekeeping is an art, and you’ve got to learn the skill set,” Scheel said. “It can be overwhelming for a beginner. But don’t get discouraged. You will have bees die, but that is part of learning.”

For more information about beekeeping for beginners, read Extension Publication 3594, “Beginning Beekeeping in Mississippi,” and visit the beekeeping page on the Extension website at <https://bit.ly/3FcYGBw>.

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# The Eastern Wild Turkey

BY STEELE HENDERSON

*Delta Wildlife Staff*

The Eastern Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*) is a highly sought-after ground nesting game bird. These birds almost met their demise pre-World War II due to very little conservation efforts, if any, to maintain a healthy population. Early colonization of the United States by European settlers almost led to the loss of these beautiful birds as deforestation destroyed their habitat, which includes hardwoods and mixed forest, along with over hunting. By the 1930s, the population of the wild turkey had almost diminished because they were seen as an unlimited resource. Following WW II, conservation efforts were put forth by private sector, state and federal agencies. These conservation efforts eventually led to the population of the eastern turkey returning to 38 different states in the United States along with two Canadian Provinces. This allowed us to reap the benefit of harvesting these birds today.

## Conservation efforts

Conservationists such as Teddy Roosevelt and George Bob Grinnell banded together in efforts to restore the population of the wild turkey, which had dwindled to an approximated 30,000 birds. To combat the declining numbers of the wild turkey, they created protected areas that were deemed safe zones for the birds. In addition to the protected areas, game laws were also created and enforced. Some hiccups developed along the way, for example, introduction of turkeys into new areas were largely reliant on hatcheries. Turkeys would be raised like livestock here and released into the wild. Conservationists learned quickly that this would not be very efficient as the birds had no knowledge of being wild. This led them to fall quickly to predators, weather, disease and hunters. Following this failure, it was understood that for these reintroduction programs to become successful, wild birds would have to be trapped and relocated into a suitable habitat. This was a success. Turkeys became visible in areas never populated. Without these conservation efforts we would not have the population of nearly 7 million turkeys that we have today.

## Biology

Conservation has helped wild turkey populations, but habitat management, including hunting, is a critical component. Hunting wild turkey is unlike anything else, it is amazing to hear a gobbler within 50 yards of

you on a cool spring morning. You can quite literally feel it hit you in the chest. Therefore, many hunters like me become addicted to hunting these gifts from God. To be successful in doing so, it is important that you understand the biology of the bird. This will not only allow you to become successful at bagging a bird, but will also permit you to become a more effective conservationist. For example, without having the knowledge of where turkeys lay their eggs, what turkey's predators are, how many eggs are laid, what is the mortality rate of a turkey's poults, what triggers the breeding behavior or when/how a turkey's reproductive cycle occurs, then how can you manage a population of turkeys?

It is no coincidence that turkey season in Mississippi begins on March 15 and continues through May 1. It is during this time that turkeys' courtship behavior is in full swing. This means that gobblers will be gobbling in hopes of attracting a hen to court. If the hen likes what she sees as the gobbler is strutting around, she will crouch, which signals that she is ready for copulation. Following copulation, the hens tend to become more secretive as they search for areas to lay their eggs. Hens will look for areas to lay with a semi dense understory. This will allow the hen to be able to see ground predators approaching but will also have protection from avian predators.

Turkey nest predators include snakes, skunks, crows, opossums, raccoons and coyotes. These are just a few of many. With such a wide variety of predators, it is crucial for the hen to find the perfect nesting place. It takes the hen around 2 weeks to lay a clutch of 10-12 eggs. During this time, the hen will cover her eggs with leaves until she is ready to incubate them. Incubation will begin once the last egg is laid. It will take the hen anywhere from 26 to 28 days to incubate and hatch her eggs. At this time, imprinting will begin between the hen and her poults. Imprinting is basically a crash course in the behavior of being a turkey. By the second day out of the shell, the poults are already performing most of the feeding characteristics and movement patterns. At the end of their first week, they are dusting with their mother, and by the second week they can fly short distances. At week three, they are able to roost in a tree allowing escape from ground predators. The most perilous time of a poult's life is during the first six weeks. If they have survived their first six weeks, the chances of making it to adulthood significantly increases.



# Chufa Plots for Turkeys – What, When, Where and How

BY PARKER FREW  
Delta Wildlife Staff

## What is Chufa?

Chufa is a warm season perennial sedge that offers high health values for all types of wildlife. This legume produces an underground nut similar to peanuts. The plant itself has an estimated value of 30 percent fiber, 10 percent protein and 15 percent carbohydrates. It also has very high levels of vitamin A and B. Wild turkeys utilize this plant by scratching the soil to find the tuber just under the surface. The tubers have a very high protein and fat content, which makes this perfect for turkey. While chufa is typically planted with turkeys in mind, it can also be an excellent food source for deer and ducks.

## When and where do you plant chufa?

Chufa plants grow very well throughout most of the southern half of the U.S. Chufa plants can grow in a variety of different soil types, but it tends to do best in well-drained soils such as a sandy loam. A lighter-textured soil not only provides the plant with proper growing conditions, but it also creates a great environment for animals to be able to scratch around and find the tubers. Heavy soils can almost trap the tuber and render it useless to wildlife. If you are faced with heavier soils, be sure to lightly turn the surface of the soil in the fall to expose these tubers. When it comes to a planting date, chufa plants are typically planted anywhere from mid-April to early July. Soil temperatures need to be above 65 degrees to allow for proper uniform germination. Once planted, you should expect to see the plant fully mature in about 120 days. Your main goal when picking a planting date is to ensure you have at least 120 consecutive frost-free days. Once matured, turkeys will begin to utilize this food source in the late parts of fall all the way into early spring.

## How do you plant Chufa?

Since chufa plants are a perennial sedge, they really need a weed free environment that will reduce the risk of competition with other plants. Small clearings of a ¼ acre or more can allow enough sunlight for chufa plants to grow, but they can also pose challenges with weeds.



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Begin by designating the focus planting area and apply a pre-emerge herbicide about 1 month before your optimal planting date. Something such as 1 quart per acre of Treflan or Prowl will work perfect for preplanting conditions. Be sure to apply a herbicide no more than once before planting. Next, you will need to adequately disk your soil to prepare a good seed bed. In most cases you will be broadcasting chufa seed. A round-about rate in which you will plant is 40 to 50 pounds per acre or 2-3 pounds per 1,000 sq feet. An optimum seeding depth is about 1½ inches. In order to get this when broadcasting, simply broadcast the seed, then incorporate the seed with more tillage. While chufa seed is a perennial, it is best to replant each year.

In a perfect world, turkeys will eat all of the tubers each year, which will make it hard for the plant to reestablish. Lastly, one thing to consider is rotating chufa plots. After 2 to 3 years, it is best to rotate these plots to other areas to reduce the risk of problems with soil pests. Good luck to all you turkey hunters out there this season, and as always, if you have any questions or we can help in anyway, give our office a call at 662-686-3370.

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# Muddy Water Bass Fishing

BY PARKER FREW  
*Delta Wildlife Staff*

It never fails, Monday through Friday the weather is absolutely beautiful and perfect for bass fishing — then comes the weekend. It seems like Mother Nature knows all of our work schedules better than we do. As fishermen, we prepare all day and night for the second we finally get to make that first cast. We anticipate perfect weather conditions that drive bass into a feeding frenzy. Unfortunately, more often than not, the conditions tend to be less than perfect. Historically, the Mississippi Delta receives over 75 percent of its rainfall during the late winter into early spring. With rain comes fluctuating temperatures, high winds and low light conditions. These all add up to create some of the worst conditions an angler can face on the water if they are not properly prepared. Imagine walking into a room and everything is dark and cold. Immediately you begin to rely on senses, some more than others. As fishermen, we need to think of a bass in this same situation.

## Sight

This sense is almost immediately reduced to zero when water becomes too turbid for light to penetrate. Bass rely heavily on their sense of sight to locate prey and food when the water clarity allows. When water clarity declines, they still use their sense of sight but in a slightly different way. Bass begin to focus on contrasting colors such as very dark colors or very bright colors. Natural colors such as green or brown become much harder for a bass to see as these colors become somewhat camouflaged. Colors that stand out or create somewhat of a silhouette image begin to excel in these conditions. Immediately, in my mind, I begin to think of the darkest colors possible, especially when I am throwing a slow moving bait such as a jig or a form of soft plastic. Colors such as black, dark blue or purple look the best. I also like to stick to more solid colors in this case. Generally, bass fishing baits are more of a mixed pattern with colors or glitters. Staying with solid colors helps keep the image together. In some cases, you may need to offer a much quicker presentation such as a moving bait. When it comes to moving baits, the color red can really shine in this condition and time of year. Baits such as a crankbait can be improved by adding these vibrant colors to allow a fish to track the target down.

## Feel

In addition to taste, smell, sight, hearing and touch, fish have a unique sensory structure, known as a lateral line, which enables them to sense vibrations in the water. This is truly a bass's sixth sense. When water clarity declines and becomes turbid, fish begin to rely heavily on this structure to help locate and track

down their prey. One would think baits such as a vibrating jig or a loud erratic bait like a crankbait would fit this condition perfectly, but I like to stay away from these baits. If you have ever seen a bass eat a lure or catch some type of prey, you know just how fast they are. Studies have shown that a largemouth bass can sustain short bursts of speed around 18 to 20 miles per hour. The bass species within itself is one of the top apex predators of its entire ecosystem. While bass usually rely on their speed and ability to camouflage themselves, adverse conditions can change this behavior in just a short amount of time. When heavy rainfall events hit the Mississippi Delta, they are generally accompanied by colder weather. When water temperatures begin to fall, fish become very lethargic. Not just the bass, all inhabitants of the system become affected by the drop in temperature. With that being said, sometimes it can really pay to slow your lure presentation down and allow a fish more time to react to the lure. In order to slow your presentation down and still utilize the ability for a fish to use their lateral line, aim for baits that “displace water” rather than baits that create vibration with speed. Baits with multiple appendages or ribs such as many soft plastics can allow you to achieve this affect while still having a slow presentation. Lighter weights generally shine in these conditions, too. You want the fish to feel the presence of the lure but also have the lure move slow enough that they can track it down in the dark conditions. You can also get this same affect by using larger more cupped blades on a spinnerbait. These blades move a lot of water but they do it silently and slowly.

Also remember that color plays heavily in these situations also. Utilize the dark colors and the bright colors.

## Sound

Lastly is the ability to hear sound. If you wake up in the dark room, one sense that can almost be impossible to ignore is the effect of sound. In my opinion when it comes to tough adverse conditions, not all sound is good sound, especially when the conditions have changed very quickly. When the environment for a fish changes in a short amount of time, they can almost go into survival mode. Things that can trigger them to feed can also trigger them to run and hide. In a natural environment, a fish is somewhat accustomed to quiet conditions. When a loud obnoxious sound enters their environment they can become alarmed or on edge. Finding a sound that fits the environment and the given conditions can separate one bait from another. In slick calm conditions, I steer more toward silent baits or lures that offer subtle clicks, ticks or rattles. When weather conditions become more intense, such as the presence of wind, this is when I will begin to lean more toward loud baits with internal rattles. Sound can travel a long distance in a given environment. A bait such as a lipless crankbait with internal rattles can fit this condition well.

When all of these conditions come into play and you take careful consideration of a bass's senses, this may be some of the most challenging conditions, but it can also be some of the best days on the water. Especially for big pre-spawn bass.

## 2022 Spring Turkey Hunting Seasons & Bag Limits

**YOUTH:** (Private and authorized state and federal public lands; youth 15 and under.)

**DATES:** March 8-14

**BAG LIMIT:**

**REGULAR SPRING TURKEY HUNTING:**

**DATES:** March 15-May 1

**BAG LIMIT:** One (1) adult gobbler or 1 gobbler with a 6-inch or longer beard per day, 3 per Spring season. Hunters 15 years of age and younger may harvest 1 gobbler of choice (any age) per day, 3 per spring season.

*Between March 15-28, all non-residents must be drawn before hunting public lands. See [www.mdwfp.com](http://www.mdwfp.com) for application dates and information.*

**REPORTING YOUR TURKEY HARVESTS**

By reporting your turkey harvests, you will aid the future of wild turkey conservation in Mississippi. Reporting through the MDWFP Game Check system is quick and easy, and it is **MANDATORY** for **ALL TURKEY HUNTERS**. The basics of Game Check are outlined below.

**Step 1. Before You Go Hunting**

Obtain a hunting license (unless exempt) and harvest record. Two types of harvest records are acceptable, a digital

record or a printed form. Digital record keeping may be done through the Game Check feature found within the free MDWFP app. Register in the app and it will be your official harvest record. If you prefer a printed form, the form below will suffice.

**Step 2. When You Harvest A Turkey**

The reporting process must begin BEFORE you move the turkey from its harvest location. Using the Game Check feature, click the REPORT TURKEY button and complete and submit an entry. If there is no cellular coverage where you hunt, the app will automatically upload your harvest when coverage resumes. Using the printed form method, notch the corresponding month bubbles.

**Step 3. After You Hunt**

Using the Game Check feature, you have no additional requirements. Using the printed form, you must report the harvest through the MDWFP website or by calling 1-800-BE-SMART before 10 p.m. on the day of harvest.

**There are Three Ways to Report:**

- MDWFP app
- Online at [mdwfp.com/gamecheck](http://mdwfp.com/gamecheck)
- Call 1-800-BE-SMART

Once you complete the harvest-reporting process, you will receive a confirmation number. This number must be documented on the harvest record.

## What Does Delta Wildlife Do?

- Comprehensive Wildlife Management Plans
- Comprehensive Habitat Management Plans
- Comprehensive Food Plot Plans
- GIS/Mapping
- Fisheries Management Plans
- Waterfowl Habitat Management Plans
- Wetland Restoration Plans and Assistance
- Quail Habitat Restoration Plans and Assistance
- Native Warm Season Grass and Legume Planting
- Conservation Easements
- Discount Food Plot Seed Sales
- Wood Duck Nesting Boxes
- Bluebird Nesting Boxes
- Turkey Habitat Management Assistance
- White-tailed Deer Management and Assistance

- Urban Forestry
- Backyard Habitat
- Conservation in the Classroom
- USDA Conservation Program Assistance
- USDA Conservation Program Implementation

- CRP
- WRE
- WHIP
- EQIP

- Waterfowl Surveys
- Research Assistance
- Non-Consumptive Wildlife Habitat Enhancement
- Quarterly Magazine
- Watershed Restoration

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# Shaved, Plucked or Sheared?

BY SAM FRANKLIN  
Delta Wildlife Staff

Since the beginning of civilization, animals and their hides have been part of society. From leather-trimmed chariots in Roman times, Native American Bison coats, to today's vehicle upholstery, tanned hides are used for nearly anything imaginable. In fact, in periods of recorded history, the possession of animals and their hides were a sign of wealth. From Biblical days to roughly the 1980s, people were seen as affluent if they owned a large herd of cattle or a mink stole.

Regardless of one's social status based upon their fur or leather attire, the tanning business was once considered a less than desirable industry from the 16th-19th centuries. Tanneries (the physical place where hides were prepped and finished) were located on the outskirts of most towns, due to the pungent processing odors. If you remember from your junior high social studies classes, the Hudson Bay Company (which is still in business) was an English trading company that built an empire of wealth all on the tanned hide industry. (Check out Frontier on Netflix that depicts the rise of the Hudson Bay Company.)

The process of tanning a hide is scientifically and biochemically complicated, but the name itself (tannin) refers to the natural process utilized by Native Americans as well as early Europeans and Africans. In Yemen and Egypt, hides were cured by soaking them in a bath containing the crushed leaves and bark of the Salam acacia. After the hide had been degreased, early tanners would use tannin (an acidic compound found in higher concentration in Red Oak Species of trees) as a preservative.

This tannin is the same natural chemical found in red wine infused from the barrels it is aged in. There are also substantially high tannin levels found in Hemlock trees. A tannery in Prattsville, New York, in the 1840s almost deforested the local Hemlock stands for bark for tanning hides. At the time it was the largest tannery in the world.

Flash forward to the late 1800s, and an alternative method was developed. The natural tanning process was commercially replaced with chrome tanning. Chromium salts were utilized and were most likely far more efficient. Just a tidbit of trivia — the term mad-



hatter (the character we are all familiar with from Alice in Wonderland) was a real thing. Beaver felt hats were a status symbol in the mid to late 1800s. Mercury was used in the beaver felt making process for the hats, and over time the exposure to the mercury in the hats would physically affect the hat makers and they would essentially appear insane.

After the hides are scraped, fleshed out and initially treated with a preservative of choice, they enter the delimiting and bating phase. This is the process of removing all the preservative and depending on what finish the end user wants, other chemicals are added once the pH of the collagen reaches a certain threshold.

As you can gather, the actual commercial tanning process involves a lot of biochemistry and chemicals. The use of potent chemicals is one of the biggest drawbacks to natural animal hide products and why there has been a large shift since the late 1980s toward faux

furs made of more natural fiber materials like cotton and hemp.

However, on a small scale, I would encourage any outdoorsman to try his or her hand at tanning a hide for their own enjoyment and use. There are supply houses that sell inexpensive kits to tan beaver, raccoon or even a full-size deer. It's a lot of work but very rewarding. If you're not eager to DIY your own hide, tanneries will accept your hides and prep them and have them made into anything you would like — Shaved, plucked or sheared beaver gloves, a muskrat blanket lined with coyote or an otter vest? You're only limited by your imagination! (I've personally used USAFOXX several times and have been very satisfied.)

Whether you want to tan a hide yourself or outsource it, I would encourage anyone to try it. Having that fur or hide on your wall, your shoulders or your bed, is a conversation piece and always tied to a memory.

# Turkey Season Firearm Preparation

BY JODY ACOSTA  
Delta Wildlife Staff

**W**ith warmer weather and turkey season quickly approaching, now is the time to get those turkey guns out of the safe and get them ready for the upcoming season. Have you changed shells, choke or added a new adjustable sight to your turkey gun? If so, you definitely do not want to skip a trip to the range before you go hunting. If you are changing anything major on your gun, you will want to shoot at different distances to know what size pattern you are working with, so grab an extra box of ammo if needed.

Personally, I like to do a deep clean of the shotguns I will use, then I always replace the battery in the red dot(s) on the guns a week or two before turkey season. Then, I will take a trip to the farm on a nice sunny day with little to no wind to confirm my zero and make sure everything is still “sighted in” with the shells I am going to be using. If I am not satisfied it’s perfect, I will make adjustments as needed. If your particular gun prefers a “clean barrel,” you can run a bore snake through it after your range trip. Since my gun likes a “dirty barrel,” I usually just do a light exterior and chamber cleaning, then it’s ready to go for opening morning.

I shoot a red dot type sight, and many people are swapping over to this on turkey guns. Below is a brief recap on how I adjust my optic to get my point of aim/point of impact where I want for turkey hunting. If you have a different type of adjustable sight, the process is similar, aside from the actual adjustment process of your sight. You will want to follow the manufacturer’s instruction on how to make those adjustments.



## Adjusting Your Optic

### THINGS YOU WILL NEED:

- ☑ Low brass ammunition (dove loads)
- ☑ Turkey loads you intend to shoot
- ☑ Lead sled or sandbags
- ☑ Roll of craft paper or a big poster board
- ☑ Eye and ear protection
- ☑ A friend (optional)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Use a large sheet of paper or poster board and draw a 3" black dot in the center with a magic marker. Stake it out a measured 10 yards away from a shooting bench.
2. With your gun securely rested on the shooting bench using either a lead sled or sandbags, shoot 1 time at the black dot using a low brass shell.
3. Go to the paper and mark another black dot in the center of the pattern you just shot.
4. This is where a friend comes in handy. Reset your gun on the rest and aim at the original mark and holding your gun as still as you can, look through the sight and have someone adjust the dot using



the elevation and windage turrets on the optic, moving the red dot so that it now covers the new black dot.

5. Repeat as needed until the shot is covering the new dot. Depending on how far off the optic is, it could take a couple shots. When I feel it is good, I like to shoot a couple additional shots to confirm there was no pulling or anything on the shot.

6. Replace the old paper with a new piece of paper with a new 3" black dot in the middle of it, move it 40 yards away (or your desired “sight in distance”) from your shooting bench and shoot it with the dove shot again. Make sure the center of the pattern is the same as the

black dot. The pattern will likely be pretty spread out but you should be able to tell if there was any drastic changes in point of impact.

7. Replace the paper with a new sheet with a 3" black dot and shoot it at 40 yards (or your desired sight in distance) using the same shell that you intend to hunt with. If needed, adjust the point of impact the same way you adjusted in the previous steps.

# The Mississippi Black Bear

BY WILL PREVOST  
Delta Wildlife Staff

**B**lack bears once roamed the state in plentiful numbers and provided food for Native Americans and settlers. When hunting for sport became popular in the late 1800s, Mississippi was known nationwide for its black bear population. Some of America’s most famous sportsmen made their way to Mississippi to hunt the vast bottomland hardwood forests and dense canebrakes of the Delta. The most notable instance is Theodore Roosevelt’s hunt near Onward that nearly everyone in the state is familiar with. Unfortunately, due to overhunting and deforestation, Mississippi’s black bear population experienced a sharp decline in the early 1900s and were nearly erased from the landscape. Through the efforts of state agencies and private landowners, black bears are

now making a noticeable comeback.

Black bears are the largest native carnivore in the southeastern United States. They are 3-6 ft long from nose to tail and can weigh more than 500 lbs. An average adult male weighs between 300-400 lbs and a female averages 100-250 lbs. They have poor eyesight, but a phenomenal sense of smell. Their home range can be 5,000 to 20,000 acres, though this varies depending on habitat quality and availability. Their preferred habitat consists of large remote tracts of land that offer dense cover, diverse food resources, water and suitable denning areas. Black bears will eat whatever is readily available. Their diet varies from season to season and can include naturally occurring vegetation, berries, insects and nuts, as well as agricultural crops



*A black bear wandered into a Sharkey County residential yard after the flood of 2019.*

and some mammals. Females are capable of reproducing around 2-3 years of age with an average litter size of two, although litters of three to five cubs have been documented. Black bears in Mississippi do not truly hibernate, but go through more of a torpor state, which is a period of inactivity that allows the bear to survive food shortages and adverse winter weather conditions. During this time, a bear's body temperature drops, metabolism decreases and heart rate is reduced. Denning is not required for all bears in a warmer climate, with the exception of pregnant females who must den in order to give birth.

**Though their habitat is a scant remnant of what it once was, Mississippi now has a small, sustainable population of black bears. It is our role as conservationists to protect what bears we have and preserve their habitat.**

In the early 1900s, bear numbers began to decline rapidly. This is due primarily to two factors: the bears had been overhunted for years and their habitat was simultaneously disappearing. As humans continued to settle areas in the state and clear forests for agricultural use and manufacturing of wood products, the once vast forests became smaller and fragmented, with very few large tracts of forest left. Large remote tracts of land with minimal human pressure are vital to black bear habitat, and, with a lack thereof, black bears were nearly completely removed from the state. When the black bear was given statewide protection in 1932, the population in Mississippi was estimated to be less than 12. Though there were some restocking attempts, habitat continued to decline through the 1900s and was estimated in 1980 to be only 20 percent of historic habitat levels. The black bear was classified as a state endangered species in 1984.

**Numbers Improving**

Since the turn of the century, the black bear has made an appreciable comeback. Estimated population numbers range from 150-200 bears in the state, a major improvement over the 2002 estimation of 40 individuals. These estimations are made based on sighting reports and research by state agencies and universities that utilize GPS tracking collars, cub tagging and den checks. State agency conservation efforts have emphasized habitat restoration and continued species protection. Some credit for increased bear numbers can be attributed to private land habitat restoration programs, such as Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). These programs have not only stopped the net loss of forested lands in the Lower Mississippi River Alluvial Valley but have also resulted in significant habitat gains. Public land management has also greatly improved bear habitat, providing large tracts of forested land that bears need to thrive. In addition, black bears remain protected by state laws that currently do not allow hunting or trapping.

The increase in black bear numbers offers a visual result of successful conservation efforts. Bear sightings have become a much more common occurrence than in the past. Most of the bear sightings and known resident bears in Mississippi are in the Delta, southwest and

southeast portions of the state. As our bear population increases and expands, there will inevitably be an increase in human-bear encounters. Many people are excited at the prospect of seeing a bear, though it is unnerving to others. Thankfully, black bears are shy and not aggressive to humans. I have been fortunate enough to hunt some land near Lake Chotard where bear sightings were common. I even witnessed a cub attempt to climb the ladder stand I was hunting in. The bears never acted aggressively in any way and their presence never felt threatening. In fact, a neighbor described their demeanor as similar to a "giant raccoon." I have also had some close encounters with bears near Fidler and Indianola and in each instance the bears were skittish and seemingly annoyed by my presence rather than aggressive.

This increase in human interaction does, however, pose an additional threat to the bear. Over the past 20 years there have been a few instances of bears living near towns and adapting to human presence. As a recent example of this, a bear was documented feeding from a gas station dumpster near a town in Hinds County for several weeks before being hit by a car on the adjacent interstate. Though situations like this are rare and unlikely, it does bring to light the challenges of a relatively densely populated state managing a species that thrives in very remote areas.

Though their habitat is a scant remnant of what it once was, Mississippi now has a small, sustainable population of black bears. It is our role as conservationists to protect what bears we have and preserve their habitat, especially when you consider the fact that human-introduced causes of mortality nearly erased the species from our state. If you would like more information on black bear ecology or preservation, MDWFP has a great resource that can be found at <https://www.mdwfp.com/wildlife-hunting/black-bear-program/>.



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# Mississippi Timber Price Report

## 4TH QUARTER 2021

The Mississippi Timber Price Report provides a picture of timber market activity showing regional and statewide stumpage prices for common forest products. This report should only be used as a guide to help individuals monitor timber market trends. The average price should not be applied as fair market value for a specific timber sale because many variables influence actual prices each landowner will receive. This report and historical timber prices are available by contacting your local county Extension office or at [www.extension.msstate.edu/forestry/forest-economics/timber-prices](http://www.extension.msstate.edu/forestry/forest-economics/timber-prices).

How are prices obtained? This report used data from 94 timber sales conducted and reported across Mississippi during 4th quarter 2021. Reporters include forest product companies, logging contractors, consulting foresters, landowners and other natural resource professionals.

Are you interested in reporting timber prices or do you want more information about the Mississippi Timber Price Report? Please contact Marc Measells at [mkm2@msstate.edu](mailto:mkm2@msstate.edu) or at 662-325-3550 for more information.

## PRICE TRENDS

► The majority of Mississippi saw below normal rainfall during most of the quarter, with local areas receiving higher than normal amounts in October. Steady demand for wood products and supply constraints across the region factored

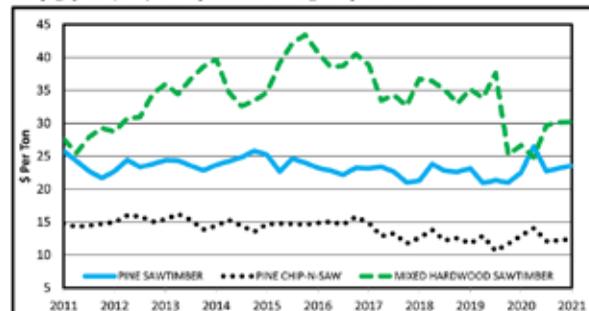
into price increases this quarter. Housing starts decreased from June to October but increased in November. The unemployment rate has continued declining. As unemployment rates and the overall economy continue to improve, timber markets should recover. However, increasing inflation rates are expected to last well into 2022. Prices during the 1st quarter should see increases due to the normal wetter weather and as new mill expansions and openings start accepting deliveries. These new mills and mill expansions will provide more competition for our standing trees. However, Mississippi still has an overabundant supply of standing timber.

► The 4th quarter statewide stumpage prices for pine products are in Table 1 and hardwood products are in Table 2. Figures reflect 10-year statewide average price trends. Compared to the 3rd quarter, statewide average prices changed (-12.9% to 22.6%) during the 4th quarter with pine poles and pine pulpwood stumpage prices declining. Prices varied for some product classes across regions. Some regions had much larger price changes due to weather conditions. Prices for dimensional lumber increased this quarter. However, the oversupply of standing timber across Mississippi continues to depress stumpage prices. The good news, companies continue to make progress on expansion and new mill construction projects. Many will begin production during 2022. This added production capacity will benefit many landowners within the procurement radius of those mills.

Mississippi Timber Price Report Regions



Figure 1: Average Mississippi pine sawtimber, pine chip-n-saw, and mixed hardwood sawtimber stumpage prices (\$/ton) for 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2011 through 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2021.\*



\*Prices from 2011-2017 are from Timber Mart-South. 2018-current prices are from Mississippi State University Extension.

Figure 2: Average Mississippi pine and hardwood pulpwood stumpage prices (\$/ton) for 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2011 through 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2021.\*



\*Prices from 2011-2017 are from Timber Mart-South. 2018-current prices are from Mississippi State University Extension.

\*Timber Mart South (TMS), Inc. has more detailed data available by subscription that contains values for other timber products not included in this report. TMS is compiled and produced at the Center for Forest Business, Warnell School of Forest Resources, University of Georgia, under contract with the Frank W. Harris Foundation, a non-profit corporation serving the forest products industry. See <http://WWW.TMARTHSOUTH.COM> for information on subscription.

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