



Greg Lein takes a shot at some doves coming into range while hunting on the Portland Landing Special Opportunity Area near Elm Bluff, Ala. At Portland Landing and other SOAs, sportsmen can apply to hunt designated game on specific days.

Photo by John N. Felsher

# Special places

*Smaller properties offer more public lands for hunting*

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

Looking for a place to hunt this fall? Many people without access to private land hunt on state wildlife management areas like the Upper Delta WMA near Stockton, Forever Wild properties, national wildlife refuges or other public tracts. However, the state offers some other special public hunting opportunities.

Just before the 2018-19 season, the state acquired the Portland Landing Special Opportunity Area in Dallas County about halfway between Selma and Camden on Highway 41. The public hunting property covers 8,744 acres in the famed Black Belt Region. The varied habitats support diverse wildlife species including whitetail deer, squirrels and turkeys.

"The property is right in the heart of some of the best deer hunting in the state," advises Chuck Sykes, the

Alabama Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries Division director. "Habitats include cedar glades, the traditional Black Belt prairie habitat, pine stands, upland hardwoods and mixed forests with sloughs and creeks. The property has some frontage on the Alabama River. This area has absolutely produced some big deer in the past. The genetics are there. The numbers are there and the habitat is there. I was fortunate enough to hunt this property some years ago when it was private. It's a special place."

During a January 2019 Adult Mentored Hunting Program deer hunt at Portland Landing SOA, all eight novice hunters, including two women, bagged eight deer and eight hogs. Each one harvested at least one animal.

"Looking at their exit interviews, to say they were all pleased would be a severe understatement," Sykes com-

mented. "Despite the horrible weather including tornadoes hitting the state that weekend, everyone took some meat home with them. I spent quite a bit of time with the group. It was a good experience for the hunters, but a great experience for my staff and me."

At Portland Landing and other SOAs, sportsmen can apply to hunt designated game on specific days. If selected for a deer hunt, that person and a guest gain sole access to hunt a section of the property for those designated days, all for the cost of an Alabama hunting license and a wildlife management area permit. The number of guests allowed could increase for some species-specific hunts.

"When people apply and are randomly selected to deer hunt on a Special Opportunity Area, that person

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