

MFA People – Julian Watson

**By Lauren Hawkins
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The old saying may be “It’s not what you know, but who you know,” but Julian Watson understands the value of the what and the who when it comes to tree farming.

Julian was born in Vicksburg but moved to his family farm in Holmes County when he was just five years

old. After graduating from Lexington High School, Julian attended Mississippi State University (MSU). Julian spent his first year in the agriculture department at MSU but decided a business degree suited him better. He graduated in 1968 with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and also served six years in the Army Reserve, which he joined while at MSU.

After graduation, Julian moved back to Jackson and

worked for a bank before going into the life insurance and financial planning business through Prudential.

A short time later, in 1975, Julian’s father passed away and Julian inherited the land in Holmes County that had been in his family since his great-grandparents purchased it in 1872. Over the years and through different generations, it had been used for cotton, corn, cattle, a dairy, a cotton gin and race horses. At the time, it was

being used for black angus cattle, which Julian sold before leasing out the land.

“I grew up on my family land quail hunting, fishing and riding horses, but I learned it’s not practical to have animals on your land if you don’t live there,” Julian said. “After leasing the land for a while, I decided that tree farming would be the best way for me to use the land.”

Julian did not know much about tree farming, so he surrounded himself with knowledgeable advisors and attended many workshops and field days hosted by the Mississippi Forestry Association and the MSU Extension Service.

“I understudied Dr. Terry Ozier from Brandon who was a past Tree Farmer of the Year for Mississippi as well as the Tree Farmer of the Year for the United States,” Julian said. “I also attended many workshops and classes taught by Tim Traugott, Charles Dismukes and Russell Fletcher.”

In 1986, with the help of a registered forester, Jason Kutack, and some superior seedlings, he planted his first pine plantation and became one of the first tree farms in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

He was very proud of his first planting and would tell everyone about what he was doing to take care of the trees.

“I was at an MFA meeting and was full of vigor,” Julian said. “I tried to impress the man next to me by telling him all I was doing for the land including hiring a plane to fertilize my trees. It turns out the man was Warren Hood who owned his own helicopters. I said, ‘well I guess you are in the forestry business!’”

In the 32 years Julian has been a tree farmer, he has learned a lot. The first time he thinned his timber was one of the learning experiences he will never forget.

“I went out to inspect the thinning job with Charles Dismukes and wore shorts and did not wear bug spray,” Julian said. “I was so eaten up with red bugs and ticks that I had to go to a dermatologist!”

Julian has been a member of MFA for over 30 years and is a member of the Hinds, Rankin and Holmes County Forestry Associations (CFA). He currently serves MFA as a member of the Tree Farm Committee and as a board member, and has served as a member of the Executive Committee. He is a past president and current board member of the Hinds CFA and is a past president of the Holmes CFA.

In 2009, Julian was selected as MFA’s Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year and represented Mississippi at the national convention in

Conservation Corner

by James Cummins
Executive Director
of Wildlife Mississippi

With all of the rain we have been receiving, you probably don’t want to hear more about water. However, I thought this would be an appropriate time to discuss the water cycle and how it works.

Water covers three-fourths of the earth’s surface. There are many forms of water – ice, snow, rain, hail, dew, fog and steam. The majority of this life source is sea water. It is from our oceans that most of our precipitation comes, although cleaned of its salt and minerals. So, how does this happen? Water moves from land to clouds to land and back to the ocean in an on-going cycle. This cycle is known as the water cycle, or the hydrologic cycle. Let’s take a closer look at it.

Every year about 95,000

Vermont. Another one of his advisors, Rusty Williamson, Holmes County District Forester, nominated him for the award.

Today Julian’s 1,200 acres include about 600 in CRP, 400 in mixed stands, 100 in hardwoods and 100 in ponds and roads. He still has a few years before he clear cuts his CRP timber, but finds plenty of uses for the land.

“My farm is for timber production first and recreation second,” Julian said. “I lease my farm out to a hunting club that also has the fishing rights, and they help me maintain my roads and boundary lines.”

Like all farmers, Julian has seen good times and bad. He knows there are challenges in the forestry industry but is optimistic for the future.

“We have many challenges ahead in forestry, but I make it work by intense management practices, government programs like CRP and hunting leases,” Julian said. “I’m in forestry for the long haul and I think the market will turn around in the long-term.”

This article was originally published in Tree Talk, a publication of the Mississippi Forestry Association. Lauren Hawkins is the communications coordinator for MFA, which is the only statewide non-profit organization dedicated to sustaining Mississippi’s forests. Founded in 1938, MFA seeks to unify members of the forestry community. Members and staff work to accomplish the MFA mission through public affairs, communications, and education programs that promote conservation, development, and wise use of forestland and resources. For more information, go to www.msforestry.net.

cubic miles of water evaporates from the oceans and land. This water evaporates into the atmosphere, leaving impurities behind. This evaporated moisture moves across the earth in the form of water vapor. A small portion of this water vapor is visible to us as fog, mist or low-lying clouds. The water vapor then condenses, filling the clouds and then releasing back to the earth in one of the various forms of water depending on region, climate, season and topography.

When water falls to the ground, some of it soaks into the soil and the rest runs off. The water that is absorbed by the ground sustains plant and animal life in the soil. The rest finds its way into underground reservoirs where almost all of this water re-enters the water cycle, which then starts over.

Humans can do little to alter this cycle, however we can manage and conserve water as it becomes available. Water management begins with soil management. Because our water supply comes as precipitation falling on the land, the fate of its fallen form depends on the condition of the soil it reaches.

A rainstorm on bare soil loosens soil particles and causes runoff, carrying the particles away. This is known as soil erosion. This repeated action ruins land for many uses and is the source of sediment that fills streams, pollutes water and shortens the useful life of dams and reservoirs.

In areas where much of the land is paved or covered, runoff occurs up to ten times faster than on unpaved lands. The water that falls here rapidly flows down storm drains and sewer systems carrying debris and other pollutants to nearby streams.

A human needs only a little over a gallon of water a day in order to fill his or her basic needs. Currently, however, we use close to 1,600 gallons each day to supply our needs and comforts which include cooling purposes, lawn maintenance and beautification, recreational endeavors and industrial supply.

The demand for water continues to rise as the population increases. This is precisely why quality management of precipitation is so vitally important.

James L. Cummins is executive director of Wildlife Mississippi, a non-profit, conservation organization founded to conserve, restore and enhance fish, wildlife and plant resources throughout Mississippi. Their web site is www.wildlifemiss.org.



Julian Watson is pictured on his Tree Farm with some of his Advisors in one of his growth plots at one of the numerous Forestry Field Days that have been held on his farm over the past 30 plus years. Pictured from left to right: Britton Hatcher, Area Extension Forester (at the time), Tim Traughott, retired Extension Forester, Julian, Rusty Williamson, retired District MS Forestry Commission Forester, Betsy Padgett, Extension Agent, and Russell Fletcher, Consultant Forester and County Forestry Association President.

(Photo by Lauren Hawkins)

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