

ABERDEEN EXAMINER



From left, Bobby Watkins, with his award as Forest Steward of the Year, and Ben Bingham, Monroe County forester for the Mississippi Forestry Commission.

Watkins is 2004 Forest Steward of Year

Bobby Watkins, joint owner of the Watkins Tree Farm in Monroe County, has been named Mississippi's 2004 Forest Steward landowner of the year.

The Watkins Tree Farm has been passed down through four generations. The farm is owned by Martha Bourland and her sons, Bobby and Richard Watkins. Located two miles north of Aberdeen on Coontail Road, the 193-acre tree farm has been host to several field days and other public education events promoting good forest management.

On this property, forest types include 66 acres of former cropland using CRP and 38 acres of converted pastureland into pine plantations, 40 acres of hardwoods and 10 acres of Tombigbee River hardwoods along with several ponds and green fields. The Watkins utilize intensive forest management practices including fifth row thins, herbicides and cool season burns, crop tree pruning and fertilization. These practices promote

increased tree growth and financial returns along with excellent wildlife habitat conditions. Mossy Oak, The National Wild Turkey Federation and Management Advantage have used the property for several TV shows featuring proper forest practices. A 1950s-era MFC fire tower stands guard over the property.

Each year the Mississippi Forestry Commission partners with the USDA Forest Service and State Stewardship Committee to honor one of Mississippi's 313,800 private forest landowners.

The Watkins received this prestigious award during a Feb. 17 ceremony at Lefleurs Bluff State Park in Jackson, Miss.

Mississippi Forest Stewards are an elite group of private, non-industrial landowners who develop productive forests, increase wildlife habitat, improve water quality, provide effective erosion control and improve outdoor recreation activities. Forests are a vital

and essential ingredient for a high quality of life for all Mississippians.

Forest Stewards set a standard for other forest landowner to follow and are chosen based on the following criteria:

1. The land holdings must be a minimum of 10 acres.
2. The landowner must have at least two objectives for management.
3. The landowner must have a current, approved 10-year multiple resource management plan on 100 percent of his/her forested land existing in a contiguous ownership block.
4. The landowner must demonstrate that he/she is a good steward by practicing multiple resource management in accordance with the resource management plan.

For more information about the Forest Stewardship Program contact your local county Forestry Commission Office or the Northeast District Office at 662-842-5312.