

## 4-H GRAD Club Learns about Forestry Careers

Each month the 4-H GRAD Club investigates a different career that high school students may decide to pursue. Dr. Doug McConnell, Registered Forester was our guest speaker for the January 4-H GRAD Club meeting. He gave a very interesting presentation on his career as a consulting forester and explained why he really enjoys his work. In fact his wife, Sarah Baldwin is also a consulting forester and together they operate their business called Forest Owner Services. They also manage the family forest called Hatchett Valley Farms. So when they are consulting with other landowners, they can talk from personal experience about forestry practices that they are implementing on their own land.

Coosa County is a rural county and forestry is big business. In fact forestry produces more agricultural revenue in the state than any other agricultural commodity. Every forest is a valuable investment and can yield some great financial and recreational returns if managed properly. This is why people with forestry degrees are always needed. Doug also brought out an interesting aspect about forestry careers that I had not thought about. In today's global economy, many times, jobs are being out-sourced to other countries, but with forestry, the jobs will always be here because this where the trees are. There will always be forests here to manage.

Doug explained that there are a variety of directions you can go with a forestry degree. Some of these include working for the Alabama Forestry Commission, Alabama Department of Environmental Management, industries like International Paper, forest management consulting, estate planning, and forest services. There are also educational positions available such as college professors, and extension forestry specialists. Even corporations like Alabama Power have their own forestry professionals.

In Alabama, to practice forestry, you must be a registered forester. That means getting an education and then passing a test. Doug described the test as a grueling 8 hour open book test or an intense 1 hour oral test. Foresters must also continue their education by obtaining 10 hours of continuing education each year to maintain their certification. There are many jobs available with a bachelor's degree, but Doug made it his goal to finish a doctorate degree. By taking a heavy course load he was able to complete this degree in just four years.

When asked if there was anything he did not like about his job, Doug related a story about doing a property boundary marking job that took him directly through the middle of a swamp. Wading through chest deep water, a snake dropped off a limb into the water. The snake "eye-balled" him briefly and then disappeared. "I wanted to throw up my arms and say I quit, but of course that doesn't help much when you are in the middle of a swamp!"

Doug also gave some great practical advice that he has learned along the way. He told the 4-H'ers to make saving money a habit and pay off credit cards every month. He also mentioned using cash instead of a debit card - it just makes you more aware of your spending if you see the cash leaving your hand. He told the group to keep in contact with

your classmates and friends. Relationships are very important. Lastly, he said "high school and college teaches you how to learn, but it's up to you to decide to continue learning all your life. And one more piece of advice "As my Mom told me, mind your manners", it says a lot about who you are.

The group also heard from Regional Extension Agent, Isaac Chappell who introduced a six week financial planning program. This is a great program and includes a free workbook. This classes will be starting soon.

The GRAD Club stands for "Getting Ready for Adult Decisions" and is for high school age students. Any student in the 9-12 grades is invited to join. Contact Roger Vines at the Coosa County Extension Office at 256-377-4713.