



# DISCOVERING *Alabama*

## Teacher's Guide

## Forest Issues

### Suggested Curriculum Areas

Social Studies  
Language Arts  
Science

### Suggested Grade Levels

4–12

### Key Concepts

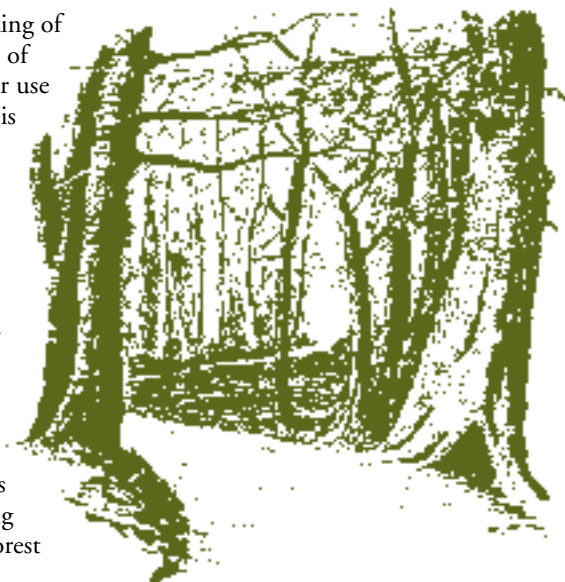
Truth  
Scientific Inquiry  
Critical Analysis  
Forest Sustainability

### Key Skills

Research  
Critical Thinking  
Communication

## Synopsis

Most of us enjoy thinking of the forest as a realm of natural wonder. Our use of the forest, on the other hand, is frequently the subject of angry conflict. News stories today regularly highlight this conflict, often pitting environmentalists against commercial timber interests in disputes involving endangered species, stream pollution, wilderness preservation, and other forest-related matters. Alabama, with an uncommon abundance of forestlands, has experienced long-running debates over a host of questions regarding the status and management of forest resources.



This video examines several key issues of prevailing forest controversy in Alabama while giving special focus to the concept of forest sustainability. The program visits with representatives from various organizations who present the views and positions of different interest groups. A primary theme of the video is that forest controversy is often fueled by insufficient communication, misinformation, and misunderstanding. Sadly, such problems often hinder opportunities for needed cooperation in working for future forest sustainability.



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
ALABAMA



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## Before Viewing

1. Select a “controversial” issue that is suitable for enthusiastic debate by your class. Simple, fun topics include, for example, whether boys are smarter than girls, whether cats are better pets than dogs, or whether hip-hop music is more pleasing than country music. Make sure the class recognizes the essential point of disagreement concerning the issue you select, then have students each choose which view/position they would prefer to support.
2. Organize debate teams and, prior to doing any research, conduct an impromptu debate about your selected issue. Following debate, discuss the many factors that can influence people to develop biased views about controversial subjects. These factors include peer pressure, family attitudes, organizational affiliations, television and other media, political propaganda, false assumptions, etc.
3. Brainstorm a list of strategies to help prevent/correct inaccurate and inappropriate views/positions on controversial issues. This list might include suggestions such as: listen to all perspectives, ask the right questions, research the facts, check with experts, identify false assumptions, etc. Discuss how these strategies can be applied to resolving the issue you selected for debate.

## While Viewing

Have students note the issues discussed and watch for examples of biased viewpoints/positions offered by different interest groups represented in the video.

**Video Mystery Question:** At one point in the video, the host quotes a famous poet. Who is this poet, and what line is quoted? (Answer: Ralph Waldo Emerson; the quoted line is: “In the woods we return to reason and faith.”)

## After Viewing

1. Review the issues and information presented in the video. Discuss any viewpoints presented in the video that students feel are biased. What facts can be established to support or refute these viewpoints?

2. Have the class select a current issue of environmental controversy, ideally a forest-related issue, preferably one identified in the video. Work with students to frame this issue suitably for formal debate. Establish debate teams and have the teams research the issue and prepare for competitive debate.
3. After formal debate, invite the class to judge the competition and choose a winning team. Examine the arguments/positions of each debate team and analyze the validity of relevant premises, logic, and supporting information. Discuss whether students now feel they have a better understanding of this issue.
4. Point out to the class that, when controversy/disagreement arises over an important issue, there is an obvious question to be resolved: Which view of the issue is correct, i.e., What is the truth? Review the ways your class sought to learn the truth about your selected issue. Do your students now have a better understanding of the truth about this issue? Are there controversial issues of sufficient importance to society that all interest groups should be actively cooperating to determine the true and best solutions? Discuss possible reasons why opposing sides on such issues seem to have difficulty doing this.

## Extensions

1. Invite representatives from commercial forestry groups and from environmental groups to visit the class and share their views on environmental issues, including the controversial issue your students researched/debated. Afterwards have the class analyze the positions espoused by these visitors.
2. View other *Discovering Alabama* videos featuring forest issues, e.g., “Alabama Forests,” “Alabama Trees,” “Longleaf Pine,” “Longleaf Ecosystem,” “Red-cockaded Woodpecker,” “Red Hills Salamander,” “Sipsey Wilderness,” “Dugger Mountain,” and “A Walk in the Woods.”



## Philosophical Reflections

History reveals numerous wars, injustices, and horrific human sufferings spawned by misguided ideas that stem from the zealous embrace of nationalistic or religious beliefs. The phenomenon of extreme commitment to rigidly-held doctrines about order and truth is sometimes referred to as “moral absolutism.”

Partly in response to such absolutist thinking, a new mindset has emerged that conveys greater tolerance for differences among cultures, religions, ethnic backgrounds, etc. This is reflected in the popular expression, “What’s right for me is right for me; what’s right for you is right for you,” and the adage, “It’s not important what you believe, only that you believe.”

The phenomenon of eschewing any set doctrine of order and truth is sometimes referred to as “moral relativism.” Clearly, both phenomena—moral absolutism and moral relativism—are lacking in basic areas of critical thinking. Furthermore, it would seem that both may be contributing to another phenomenon of our time—a growing tendency among modern society to shun the rigors of intellectual thought and scientific inquiry. So, where does this leave us in the present age of troublesome controversy over many issues of great complexity, including serious environmental issues requiring intelligent solutions?

Perhaps it is time to promote the perspective of the seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher, Spinoza, who observed, “He who would distinguish the true from the false must have an adequate idea of what is true and false.” In making this observation, Spinoza invites us to practice rigor in our thinking, to examine all available evidence, and to be ever-questioning and careful about underlying assumptions. Spinoza invites us to be neither “absolutist” nor “relativist,” to neither accept doctrinal truths uncritically, nor to pretend that truth is simply a matter of personal preference. In other words, according to Spinoza, truth may not always be easy to ascertain, but it is always a function of that which is factual and real.

This perspective suggests a key challenge for those with differing views of the truth about controversial issues of our time. Resolution of such issues might occur more effectively if conflicting parties work together—reasonably and in good faith—to determine what is factual and real.

## Nature in Art

The forest is frequently portrayed in paintings, poetry, and literature as a place of unique beauty and enchantment. Anyone who has quietly wandered through a woodland setting can attest to the intrigue of various haunts, each harboring interesting plants and animals, and each with its own aura of textures, shapes, and colors. Is it any wonder so many of us have, at one time or another, attempted our own rendering of a tree?

Inquire of the class to learn how many of your students have ever sketched a tree or forest scene. Invite each to do so as a special project. If possible, include in this project a field trip to an art museum and a study of the artists whose subjects are landscapes and nature. Examples of American landscape artists include Thomas Cole, Frederick Church, Asher B. Durand, Albert Bierstadt, and Winslow Homer.

## Community Connections

1. Develop a questionnaire and survey a sampling of local citizens to learn about their viewpoints/positions on a variety of today's environmental issues. Compare results based on respondent characteristics such as age, gender, education, employment/career, political affiliation, etc.
2. Research a cross section of the community (a sampling of stores, businesses, homes, utilities, the school, etc.) to determine the variety and number of forest-related products available/used in your area. Tally the different jobs, services, and professions that are connected directly or indirectly with these products.
3. Check with local foresters or the agriculture extension office to find out if there are forestland owners in your area that allow field trips/visits to their property. Frequently, such willing landowners are members of the Alabama Treasure Forest Association, the Alabama Forest Owners Association, the American Tree Farmers Association, or other organizations supportive of conservation education. When a suitable forest site has been located, arrange a class field trip to investigate local tree species, natural habitats, wildlife species, forest management practices, and economic values.

## Complementary Aids and Activities

**Project Learning Tree:** activities: grades 5–6: “My Use or Your Use or Our Use” and “Changing Land Values”; grades 7–12: “What is Wise Use”; grades 9–12: “How Much is Enough.” Contact: Alabama Forestry Association, 555 Alabama Street, Montgomery AL 36104; also visit their site: [www.plt.org](http://www.plt.org).

**Project WILD:** activities: grades 4–6: “Smokey Bear Said What?”; grades K–8: “Ethi-Thinking”; grades 7–12: “Fire Ecologies”; grades 6–9: “To Zone or Not to Zone.” Contact: Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, 64 N. Union Street, Montgomery AL 36130; also visit their site: [www.projectwild.org](http://www.projectwild.org).

## Additional References and Resources

“Who’s Right, Who’s Wrong: An Overview to Understanding Environmental Controversy” by Doug Phillips (2002). Available from *Discovery Alabama* office. See front page for address & phone number.

**Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Environmental Issues** by Theodore Goldfarb (1997).

**Problem Solving and Comprehension** by Arthur Whimby and Jack Lochhead (1986).

**Forestry-related Websites** (except where noted, addresses begin with <http://www>):

**Alabama Conservation Easement Resources**  
[southernsustainableforests.org/alabamahal\\_easements.html](http://southernsustainableforests.org/alabamahal_easements.html)

**Alabama Forest Owners Assoc.**  
[alabamaforestowners.com](http://alabamaforestowners.com)

**Alabama Forestry Assoc.**  
[alaforestry.org/sfi/frameset\\_edu.htm](http://alaforestry.org/sfi/frameset_edu.htm)

**Alabama Forestry Commission**  
[forestry.state.al.us](http://forestry.state.al.us)

**Alabama Forests Forever** [alaforestsforever.org](http://alaforestsforever.org)

**Alabama Sustainable Forestry Resources**  
[southernsustainableforests.org/alabamahal\\_forestry.html](http://southernsustainableforests.org/alabamahal_forestry.html)

**Alabama Treasure Forest Assoc.** [atfa.net](http://atfa.net)

**American Tree Farm System** [treefarmssystem.org](http://treefarmssystem.org)

**Auburn University Forest Products Development Center**

[forestry.auburn.edu/afpdc/afpdc/home.html](http://forestry.auburn.edu/afpdc/afpdc/home.html)

**Center for Forest Sustainability**  
[forestry.auburn.edu/cfs/html/info\\_nav.htm](http://forestry.auburn.edu/cfs/html/info_nav.htm)

**Continuing Education for Loggers**  
[preceda.com](http://preceda.com)

**Forest Legacy Program**  
[preceda.com/for\\_legacy.htm](http://preceda.com/for_legacy.htm)

**ForestEthics** [forestethics.org](http://forestethics.org)  
**Society of American Foresters**  
[safnet.org/educate/educators](http://safnet.org/educate/educators)

**Southeastern Sustainable Forestry Resources**  
[southernsustainableforests.org](http://southernsustainableforests.org)

**Southern Forest Resource Assessment**

[srs.fs.fed.us/sustain](http://srs.fs.fed.us/sustain)

**Sustainable Forestry Initiative** [alaforestry.org/sfi](http://alaforestry.org/sfi)  
and [pfmt.org/sfi/htm](http://pfmt.org/sfi/htm)

**Sustainable Forestry Partnership**

<http://sfp.cas.psu.edu>

**Timber Harvesting** [timberharvesting.com](http://timberharvesting.com)

**Treekeepers** [treekeepers.org](http://treekeepers.org)

**U.S.D.A. Forest Service**

[southernregion.fs.fed.us/alabama](http://southernregion.fs.fed.us/alabama)

**Wild Alabama** [wildalabama.org](http://wildalabama.org)

**WildLaw** [wildlaw.org](http://wildlaw.org)

## Parting Thoughts

*Alabama has seen progress toward consensus in many areas of environmental controversy. Yet there are several key areas, including issues of forest controversy, where disagreement remains polarized. Of course, a number of these conflicts are fueled by plain, old-fashioned competition over self-interest, political power, or economic gain. Unfortunately, these tendencies of human nature can compound the challenge of achieving solutions to many complex issues of our time. Perhaps more troublesome today, even when conflicting parties put self interest aside, they seem to have great difficulty reaching agreement, often about basic truths that one might think could be easily verified by examining the facts. This difficulty arises because factual information is but one element in a quagmire of human influences—psychological, perceptual, emotional, and philosophical—that typically affect communication and understanding.*

*Therefore, allow me to suggest once again (the suggestion has been offered to state leaders many times over the years) that Alabama would benefit by implementing a formal process of conflict-resolution. Developed correctly, such a process would guide conflicting parties past this quagmire and lead them through the steps of: 1) thoroughly analyzing the issue in question, 2) clarifying pertinent differences of belief and position, and 3) finding a consensus solution.*

*Oh yeah, I almost forgot. Alabama's acclaimed "Forever Wild" land conservation program was established by means of such a guided process of consensus resolution. However, this fact is rarely recognized and thus seems never to be considered for other issues where guided conflict resolution might be useful.*



Happy outings,

*D. Long*



## DISCOVERING *Alabama*

### Activity/Information Sheet

## Forest Issues

GETTING TO THE FULL TRUTH about many forest issues requires extensive research. You are likely to learn that most of these issues are comprised of multiple sub-issues, each requiring its own separate analysis. You are also likely to find that the “facts” can depend upon which interest group is presenting them. Along the way, you will at times determine that, for example, environmental activists are more accurate in their understanding of the facts, and, at other times, that industry groups have the better understanding. A complete assessment involves sorting and resorting the best available evidence, and doing so in context with larger questions of human responsibility—socially, economically, and environmentally.

This should begin with a simple recognition: we need only look into the mirror to see a fundamental reality often linked to forest controversy. We—the consuming public—are the source of an increasing variety of demands placed upon our forests. Our society today uses over 5,000 different wood-related products. On a daily basis, each of us may enjoy as many as several hundred such products, including medicines, clothing, packaging,

fuels, resins, musical instruments, photographs, cosmetics, adhesives, and decorations—not to mention such commonly-recognized wood products as myriad building materials, furniture items, and paper supplies. And today, we the consuming public must realize that society has a responsibility to supply its wood-product demands in ways that are environmentally and economically sustainable. Two organizations for whom this responsibility is a priority concern are the Alabama Sustainable Forestry Initiative and the Alabama Forests Forever Foundation.

### SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE (SFI)

The SFI is organized nationally by the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA) to promote sustainable forestry among the general public, forest landowners, and the forest, paper, and wood products industries. As with SFI programs elsewhere, the Alabama Sustainable Forestry Initiative is committed to:

- *broaden and promote the practice of sustainable forestry on member company lands;*
- *promptly reforest harvested areas;*
- *protect water quality in all forest management operations;*
- *enhance the quality of wildlife habitats and the conservation of plant and animal populations in forest communities;*
- *minimize the visual impact of harvested sites through judicious harvesting methods;*
- *protect the quality of ecologically-, geologically-, and historically-significant sites;*
- *contribute to the conservation of biological diversity;*
- *continue to improve utilization of harvested trees;*
- *continue prudent use of forest chemicals to improve forest health and growth;*
- *foster the practice of sustainable*

*forestry on all forest lands by further involving private landowners, loggers, consulting foresters, and other forestry sectors;*

- *publicly report progress in fulfilling commitment to sustainable forestry; and*
- *provide opportunities for the public and the forestry community to participate in the sustainable forestry commitment.*

In Alabama, 22 companies are committed to the principles of SFI. Together, these companies own or manage over 5 million acres of forest land. Within Alabama, the SFI is implemented by a State Implementation Committee that meets four times a year. This committee includes loggers, wood suppliers, AF&PA member companies, and others interested in forest sustainability. For more information about Alabama’s SFI, see their website: [www.pfnt.org/sfi.htm](http://www.pfnt.org/sfi.htm), or phone: 800-206-0981.

### ALABAMA FORESTS FOREVER FOUNDATION

The video credits the Alabama Forest Stewardship Fund for its support of this *Discovering Alabama* production. Since completion of the video, this fund has been merged with other sources into the Alabama Forests Forever Foundation.

The Foundation promotes the idea that we must take care of the forests in order to balance the needs of society and the environment. Through a variety of media, its “Alabama Forests Forever” campaign seeks to educate the public about Alabama’s forests and show how proper forest management can protect the environment while continuing to produce the many wood products that enhance the quality of our lives. Foundation members include: the Alabama Forestry Commission, the Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, the Alabama Forestry Association, and the Alabama State Board of Registration for Foresters.

For more information, see the AFFF Website: [www.alaforestsforever.org](http://www.alaforestsforever.org) or contact: Alabama Forests Forever Foundation, 555 Alabama Street, Montgomery AL 36104; phone: 334-265-8733.