

DISCOVERING

# Alabama

## Teacher's Guide

### Tuscaloosa County

#### Suggested Curriculum Areas

Science  
Geography  
Social Studies

#### Suggested Grade Levels

4–12

#### Key Concepts

Rural Heritage  
Sustainable Communities  
Land-Use Planning

#### Key Skills

Map Reading  
Critical Thinking  
Problem-Solving

### Synopsis

This video draws upon the history of Tuscaloosa County to highlight the natural appeal of the region and explore examples of environmental change resulting from increasing growth in the area. The video includes visits with a sampling of area residents who have been directly affected by the environmental consequences of recent growth. Also featured are local leaders concerned about balancing new growth with environmental protection, and a local planning initiative, entitled Challenge 21, that is seeking citizen involvement in achieving a vision for a quality future.

The video presents Tuscaloosa County as an example of southern communities that are undergoing expanding “New South” growth and development. An emerging concern for many local residents is whether this growth will bring excessive urbanization and sprawl similar to that found in other major growth regions. Thus, the video raises the question: Will the popular pursuit of New-South development eventually displace such distinctive southern values as abundant native wildlands and plentiful rural surroundings?



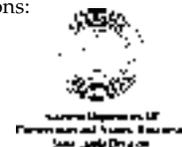
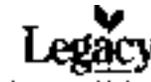
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## Before Viewing

1. Ask students to imagine they are each alone in the frontier wilderness of early America, long before such modern developments as telephones, automobiles, and video games. Conduct a brainstorm session to list: a) students' thoughts of what might be positive or appealing about living at such a time and in such a situation, and b) students' thoughts of what might be negative or unappealing about it.

2. Ask students to imagine they are each alone in the center of New York City, amidst endless high-rise buildings, traffic, and crowds of strangers. Conduct a brainstorm to list: a) students' thoughts of what might be positive or appealing about living in this situation, and b) students' thoughts about what might be negative or unappealing about it.

3. Ask the class to think about life in Alabama today, particularly about the pros and cons of living in their home communities. Discuss whether there are items, positive or negative, from the brainstorm lists that might apply to the local community. Introduce the video by explaining that it features an Alabama community (Tuscaloosa County) presently experiencing new growth and change, and that the citizens of this community face the challenge of deciding what kind of future they want for their area.

## While Viewing

Have students note positive and negative items revealed about the community shown in the video.

**Video Mystery Questions:** Toward the end of the video, what wilderness frontiersman from early America is featured returning to present-day Alabama? What kind of modern wilderness does he encounter? (Answer: Davy Crockett. The Dave Crockett featured in the video is a planning consultant for Chattanooga, Tennessee. His video comments, excerpted from a speech given to an economic development conference in Tuscaloosa, include mention of his arrival in Tuscaloosa along an area of "strip malls" surrounded by "sign forests," i.e., a wilderness of crowded commercial development.)

## After Viewing

1. Have the class identify aspects of the video that correspond to items listed in the earlier brainstorm sessions. Discuss how the situation portrayed in Tuscaloosa County compares to your local area.

2. Place students in small groups and have each develop a land-use plan for your county's future, say, 50 years from now. Where should development be located and where should it not be located? How much countryside, forestland, and open space should be retained? What might be an op-

imum number of people living in the county? What do students envision as preferred ways of living and working for the population of the future?

## Extensions

View other *Discovering Alabama* programs that present environmental issues associated with modern growth and development. Such videos include "Alabama's Natural Diversity," "Mobile River Basin," "A Walk in the Woods," "Village Creek," and "Cahaba River Watershed."

## Philosophical Reflections

A rarely-noted fact of history seems relevant to the politics of change in Alabama today. During the nineteenth-century period of Reconstruction, business entrepreneurs and industrialists were often viewed as being "liberals." Whereas, landowners with preference for rural, agrarian life were considered "conservative." Today, it seems the prevailing tendency is to apply this terminology in reverse order. Those with "liberal" leanings are often associated with activities for protecting the environment, the land, and the rural surroundings. Those with "conservative" leanings are often associated with business and development interests. Are there issues today you believe should supersede liberal/conservative political affiliation, matters that warrant a spirit of cooperation free of political partisanship?

## Nature in Art

Near Tuscaloosa, **Moundville Archaeological Park** annually conducts a Native American Festival, during which a variety of American Indian arts and crafts are exhibited. Many of these arts and crafts are representations and adaptations of nature. This event, usually held in the fall, is sponsored by the Alabama Museum of Natural History and is open to school groups. Contact the Moundville Archaeological Park (205-371-2234) to schedule a visit to the Festival.

## Community Connections

1. Arrange for the class to collaborate with local officials in preparing a land-use map for the future of your community (or county). The map should include preferred scenarios for all standard categories of land use (planning officials can explain these categories to the class). Work with local officials in helping students explore the complex issues—economic, social, political, and environmental—that are often associated with community planning. Also explore the complex problems that can arise in the absence of community planning.

2. Have the class develop goals and action plans to improve environmental quality for the local community.

## Additional References and Resources

*Tuscaloosa, Portrait of an Alabama County: An Illustrated History* by G. Ward Hubbs (1987). Produced in cooperation with the Tuscaloosa County Preservation Society.

**“100th Anniversary Commemorative Issue,”** *Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama Newsletter*, contributions from past chamber presidents. Available from the CCWA at 2200 University Blvd., Tuscaloosa AL 35401; 205-758-7588, and online: [www.tuscaloosachamber.com/itreasure.html](http://www.tuscaloosachamber.com/itreasure.html)

**West Alabama Planning and Development Council**, 4200 Highway 69 North, Northport AL 35473; phone: 205-333-2990 and website: [www.uronramp.net/~wapdc/](http://www.uronramp.net/~wapdc/)

*Design with Nature* by Ian L. McHarg (1969, 1971). How urban planning can be accommodated into the natural environment.

*State of the World: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society* by Lester Brown, Christopher Flavin, and Hilary French (1999).

*Creating Successful Communities: A Guidebook to Growth Management Strategies* by Michael Mantell, Stephen Harper, and Luther Propst (1990).

**Regional and Urban Planning Program**, Department of Geography, The University of Alabama, Box 870322, 202 Farrah Hall, Tuscaloosa AL 35487-0322; 205-348-5047.

**Geological Survey of Alabama**, The University of Alabama, Box 869999, Tuscaloosa AL 35486-9999; 205-349-2852.

## Parting Thoughts

The full story of growth and change in Tuscaloosa County includes many positive aspects not covered in this video. Also, environmental dilemmas such as those shown in the video are often complex beyond quick portrayal in a 30-minute program.

On the other hand, I would ask viewers to understand this video in appropriate context. Communities across the nation now realize that most environmental laws (for example, those aimed at regulating air and water quality) have done little to prevent the eventual loss of countryside and rural surroundings to unconstrained development.

Meanwhile, the kinds of change occurring in Tuscaloosa County today signal an era of new, complicated challenges. Now is the time for the region to seriously explore land-use issues that will influence the quality of life in the future. Ironically, this dimension of environmental concern often is the last to receive attention. Indeed, community leaders commonly consider it “politically dangerous” to raise basic questions about controlling growth, population increase, and other changes that could radically alter native surroundings.

In this context, I hope viewers will understand that the video seeks to highlight important issues and concerns that are rarely given such public exposure when considering the environmental future of communities like Tuscaloosa.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot. The good news for Tuscaloosa County is that the Challenge 21 Planning Program is implementing project “COMPASS” (Comprehensive Planning to Achieve a Sustainable Society). This project will engage county residents in considering a range of options in planning for desirable land-use patterns for the future. Area residents with environmental interests (including those who do not want undesirable development to catch them by surprise) should contact Challenge 21 (205-759-1800) and participate in the COMPASS project. Residents in other Alabama communities should check with local officials to learn of similar planning opportunities in their areas.



Happy outings,

*D. DeG*



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Activity/Information Sheet

**Tuscaloosa County**

***Keeping Our Rural Heritage:  
Preserving a Basic American Value***

•Understanding This Video in Broad Context•

As Ben Franklin was leaving the Constitutional Convention one afternoon in 1787, a young woman approached him and asked, "Well, Dr. Franklin, what have you given us?" "A Republic—if you can keep it," was his reply. Today, the question of whether we can keep our republic remains relevant, as most schools teach various dates and events from American history but overlook the profound extent to which our democratic republic is grounded in the history of our relationship with the land. Indeed, many of the nation's founding fathers, including Ben Franklin, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson, were reinforced in their love of freedom by their love of the land.

In this national context, Alabamians have an opportunity to appreciate the state's predominantly rural character from a special perspective. That's not to say we should accept the economic distress of much of rural Alabama, nor that we should ignore the reality that many rural counties are suffering from population *decline* rather than from population growth. But then, neither should we perpetuate an attitude of being ashamed of our ruralness. Such an attitude will only contribute further to the troublesome situation whereby many urban communities

of the state are experiencing uncontrolled sprawl while many rural parts of the state are in desperate need of economic development.

This *Discovering Alabama* video, featuring Tuscaloosa County, is intended to promote appreciation for Alabama's rural heritage while we still have the opportunity to choose and plan for a desirable future. Thoughtful planning might help us better retain important rural values in communities experiencing rapid development and help us better utilize these values in communities needing economic improvement.

***Recognizing New Environmental Needs***

Today, communities such as Tuscaloosa face new environmental concerns. Rising rates of modern growth and development pose myriad environmental dilemmas, from increasing traffic congestion to the loss of native natural surroundings. While this growth has helped improve the standard of living for many citizens, it has also prompted reassessment of the criteria used to measure the standard of living, with environmental quality today becoming a highly valued criterion. In survey after survey, Americans are registering priority concern for maintaining the values and freedoms of open space, natural surroundings, and a healthy environment. Yet, many communities across the nation are experiencing the rapid loss of their native landscapes, often despite assurances from local officials that the pursuit of growth and development "will not be allowed to harm the environment."

Apparently, there are differing perceptions of what constitutes "the environment." Some people tend to view environmental protection largely in terms of regulating emissions and effluents to maintain standards for air and water quality. Others emphasize the need to preserve remnant habitats of rare and vanishing species. Then, there are those of us who include concern for keeping intact natural systems, native wildlands, and rural landscapes. In Alabama, we have the advantage of recognizing that these different perspectives exist, and we have the option of choosing a preferred perspective for guiding community development. The choice we make will have overriding influence on Alabama's future.

***Facing the Challenge  
of Comprehensive Planning***

In this age of accelerating change and complexity, concern for protecting the environment can come into conflict with the growing pressures of an increasing human population. Many communities today are attempting to avoid such conflict by preparing plans to control or guide growth. This planning often considers the need for land-use regulations, such as zoning laws and building restrictions. In Alabama, local governments with autonomous authority to impose land-use regulations are said to have "home rule." However, present state law does not allow home rule for most counties in Alabama. This is one reason there are instances when, for example, established residential communities are confronted by such unwelcome new neighbors as industrial-scale hog farms, and, vice versa, established farms are sometimes confronted by intrusive residential subdivisions.

So, on the one hand, there are obvious reasons to consider land-use controls as a useful tool for planning. On the other hand, these restrictions sometimes meet with understandable resistance from residents who object to an encroachment on their individual property rights. In Alabama, such unrestricted private property rights are an honored American freedom, long-enjoyed by the citizens of a predominantly rural state. One way of keeping this freedom is to remain largely rural with a small population. This, of course, would require that we are careful not to attract significant numbers of new residents—an option no longer available to many parts of the state. Another way is to involve citizens in a comprehensive process of: 1) understanding the complexities discussed above, 2) choosing desirable goals and options for the future, and 3) participating in innovative planning and problem-solving to secure a future that provides for economic health and proper stewardship of our remarkable natural heritage. In essence, such a process of citizen participation is the heart of American democracy. If we insure that this process functions well, we stand the best chance of keeping our republic.