



# Discovering Alabama

## Suggested Curriculum Areas

History  
Geography  
Environmental Studies

## Suggested Grade Levels

4–12

## Key Concepts

Comprehensive Planning  
Sustainable Communities  
Rural Heritage

## Key Skills

Research  
Critical Thinking  
Future Forecasting



Teacher's Guide

Tuscaloosa City

## Synopsis

This video traces the history of the City of Tuscaloosa while showcasing the region's natural assets and giving consideration to how Tuscaloosans might choose a desirable future for the area. Included are interviews with local leaders concerned about balancing new growth with environmental protection, and interviews with participants of a city planning initiative that is seeking citizen involvement to create a vision for a quality future. (The video includes brief mention of the historic storm of April 27, 2011 when an EF4 tornado cut a wide path of destruction through Tuscaloosa. The full story of that tragic event is presented in the *Discovering Alabama* video, "Tornado.")



*Discovering Alabama* is a production of the **Alabama Museum of Natural History** in cooperation with **Alabama Public Television** and **The University of Alabama College of Continuing Studies**. For a complete list of titles in the *Discovering Alabama* series, as well as information about ordering videos and accompanying Teacher's Guides, contact us at either: *Discovering Alabama*, Box 870340, Tuscaloosa AL 35487-0340; phone: 205-348-2039; fax: 205-348-4219; or email: [orders@discoveringalabama.org](mailto:orders@discoveringalabama.org). Also visit our website: [www.discoveringalabama.org](http://www.discoveringalabama.org).

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Alabama Power

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Rotary Club of Tuscaloosa

## Before Viewing

- 1 Today we often hear community leaders express the intent for economic growth in “balance” with protecting environmental quality. Have each student develop a short essay (100–200 words) describing what they think community leaders might mean when using “balance” in this context. Ask students to each also cite specific examples that might represent such “balance.” (Don’t give any hints here. Leave students to their own imaginations for now.)
- 2 Place students in small groups and have them share and discuss their thoughts. Introduce the video by explaining that it features the history of an Alabama community over many periods of time, each period bringing change to the community together with new concerns for seeking “balance” with the natural environment.

## While Viewing

Have students note the ways that Tuscaloosa has changed from period to period since the time of settlement.

### Video Mystery Question:

How is the city’s name, “Tuscaloosa,” related to the name of the city’s major river, the “Black Warrior”? [Answer: Both are derived from the name of Chief Tuscaloosa (“Tuscaloosa” being a Muscogee Indian word meaning “black warrior”) who reigned over this region of Alabama at the time of European exploration.]

## After Viewing

- 1 Discuss how the Tuscaloosa area has changed since the time of Chief Tuscaloosa’s reign. If your school is in a different part of the state, discuss how your community might be similar or different compared to Tuscaloosa.
- 2 The video concludes with visiting a meeting of Tuscaloosa’s “Forum on the Future” and hearing from local leaders concerned about planning for the future. Return students to their small groups and, given that Tuscaloosa leaders anticipate on-going growth well into the future, have each group develop a “vision” of what they feel would be a quality future that achieves a proper “balance” between expanding growth and protection of the environment. Allow the groups to share their respective ideas with the class. Discuss. (And this is the teacher’s opportunity to provide any suggestions that might be helpful.)

## Extensions

- 1 View other *Discovering Alabama* programs that highlight aspects of Alabama history and that consider what might lie ahead for the future. Selecting such programs is easy – almost *all* of the programs in the *Discovering Alabama* series include aspects of Alabama history and also emphasize the importance of thoughtful consideration in planning for Alabama’s future. And you might want to start by viewing our program, “Tuscaloosa County,” which nicely complements “Tuscaloosa City.”

## Philosophical Reflections

Let us then consider: What actually is meant when someone speaks of seeking growth “in balance” with protecting the environment? The answer to this question can differ depending upon an individual’s particular perspective, which in many cases is a function of an individual’s philosophical viewpoint. For example, a common philosophical view contends that humans have the right of complete dominion over nature, that nature belongs to humankind to use, alter, or develop as needed to serve the preferences of people. Thus some folks with such perspective tend to think of environmental quality as involving matters mostly of human need, and often with a singular focus on the human need for clean air and clean water. When speaking of wanting growth “in balance” with environmental protection they can mean wanting unlimited growth as long as steps are taken to minimize air and water pollution.

Another philosophical perspective maintains that humankind is one member of the “Community of Life,” the larger community of diverse life forms and ecosystems with which people share the earth in an interdependent relationship requiring respect for the natural world. Folks with this viewpoint typically have a broader idea of what is meant by growth “in balance” with environmental protection. Their idea can include concern for controlling the spread of growth and development so as to protect rural lands, river systems, and natural habitats that sustain the larger biota and diversity of species (as well as helping to sustain the quality of our air and water).

Which philosophical view do you think is the more prevalent today? Which do you think might best serve in planning for Alabama’s future?

## Nature in Art

Tuscaloosa, in addition to being the base of operations for our Emmy-winning TV series *Discovering Alabama*, also boasts a number of other venues of artistic significance. For example, downtown Tuscaloosa is home to the Paul R. Jones Art Gallery with regular exhibits for public enjoyment. The University of Alabama Department of Art and History has the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art, long a distinguished attraction for art lovers. And, across campus, the Alabama Museum of Natural History includes a gallery that features periodic exhibits of artistic photos and renderings with interesting nature themes sure to intrigue the imaginations and captivate the curiosity of student groups. For teachers considering an art field trip, enough said.

## Community Connections

**1** If you are a Tuscaloosa school (City or County), assign student teams to research local planning efforts (such as the “Forum on the Future” featured in the video) to determine what is being considered in the planning scope and process. For example, what are the planning concerns for business and commercial development and what are the priorities for open space and environmental quality. Inquire of local officials or other knowledgeable sources if present planning efforts are adequate for possible growth and change that might occur in the next 30, 50, or 100 years. Be sure to consider potential changes that might affect outlying rural lands and natural areas.

**2** Have the class develop an inventory of special natural features/assets in your area and investigate whether they are subject to any environmental management or regulatory rules to ensure environmental protection. (Most likely there will be various state and federal rules

that apply, but students might find it interesting to also explore the situation with local authorities.)

## Additional References & Resources

- *Tuscaloosa: 200 Years in the Making* by G. Ward Hubbs. University of Alabama Press, 2018.
- *Tuscaloosa, Portrait of an Alabama County: An Illustrated History* by G. Ward Hubbs. Windsor Publications, 1987.
- *Discovering Alabama* videos, all with Teacher Guides: “Tuscaloosa County,” “Black Warrior River,” “North River Watershed,” “Moundville,” and “Alabama Countryside” ([www.discoveringalabama.org](http://www.discoveringalabama.org))
- *Land Development and the Natural Environment: Estimating Impacts* by Dale L. Keyes. Urban Land Institute, 1976.
- *Conservation Communities: Creating Value with Nature, Open Space, and Agriculture* by Edward T. McMahon. Urban Land Institute, 2010.
- *Saving America’s Countryside: A Guide to Rural Conservation* by Samuel Stokes, A. Elizabeth Watson, and Shelley S. Mastran. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth* by E.O. Wilson. W.W. Norton & Co., 2006.
- *Toward a Sustainable Quality Future for Tuscaloosa County: An Assessment of Water and Sewer Needs and Issues Today and for the Future* (Planning considerations and recommendations of the Tuscaloosa County Water and Sewer Study Committee), developed by Committee Co-Chairman, Doug Phillips, 2009. Available by contacting *Discovering Alabama*, Box 870340, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487; phone number (205) 348–2039.

## Parting Thoughts

*I was raised on a farm in rural Alabama. Following high school, the next phase of my formal education was among the urban confines of an “elite” college in New York State, where I endured a constant longing for the wondrous woods, waters, and wilds of Alabama. When time came to pursue a graduate degree, there was only one place for me, the beautiful campus of The University of Alabama in the lovely City of Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Such a comfortable community in such an appealing setting, with the historic Black Warrior River flowing by the very edge of town, and minutes from scores of other alluring rivers and streams, amidst vast stretches of farm and forestland, and, well, the perfect mix of pleasant town life with abundant surrounding countryside.*

*Over the years since college, Tuscaloosa has remained my home – and in my heart – for all the same reasons that appealed to me originally. Tuscaloosa is a marvelous community with plentiful natural resources, exceptional people, and outstanding leadership. This is evident in the fact that the Tuscaloosa area today is poised for an unprecedented era of new growth. And the City is actively promoting such growth by prioritizing programs for new infrastructure, job force training, and increased support for schools and public education. Seeing the many signs of progress around Tuscaloosa today evokes a heightened sense of pride for the community. However, looking ahead long term, we should be mindful that city boundaries together with continued growth and population increase are likely to be ever-expanding out across Tuscaloosa County. This reality raises the question of whether our uniquely nice part of Alabama may eventually incur the kinds of endless development that have dramatically altered the once pleasant landscapes of many sprawling communities elsewhere in the nation. So, as we in Tuscaloosa and Alabama celebrate our 200th year, perhaps this is a fitting time to consider what our town, our county, and our state might become in the next 200 years.*

*Oh yeah, I almost forgot. Among the exceptional people and outstanding leaders in Tuscaloosa are the members of Tuscaloosa’s Bicentennial Committee and the numerous individuals and organizations that have collaborated so effectively to ensure a meaningful, successful bicentennial celebration. I am very grateful for their support in the production of this video.*

Happy outings,

*Dr. Doug*





## Discovering Alabama

### Activity/Information Sheet

#### Tuscaloosa City

### Alabama's Forests during the State's Early History

Alabama's forests today are among the most extensive and diverse of any state in the nation. But these forests are largely "recovered" forests after an early history of heavy use, forest history that is the story for the state and for the Tuscaloosa area.

By the early 1800s, Alabama's vast forests were contributing to a phenomenon called "Alabama fever," whereby the heralded resources of the state drew waves of settlers into the region to take advantage of "land and timber aplenty." Use of the forest began innocently enough. Trees were felled for building cabins, pens to hold livestock and, conversely, pens to keep free-roaming livestock from intruding on crops, yards, and gardens. Perhaps most rapaciously, wood was used for heating and cooking. More than half the wood cut from the forest was used for energy. An average household might burn as much as forty or fifty cords in a year, consuming upwards of sixty tons of wood annually. Fence-building was another major use. Historians calculate that around this time in United States history

there were 3 million miles of wood fencing, much of it aging and rotting at a rate that required 64,000 miles of replacement each year. The uses of wood during the early 1800s included ways the modern world has long since forgotten. There were wooden plates, wooden nails, and wooden dams. Some communities even constructed wooden roads of layered planks.

During early settlement days the task of cutting trees and squaring timbers with an ax was slow and difficult. Timbermen often developed great physical endurance and exceptional skills as they swung their axes from daylight until dark, "from kin 'til kant." An early method of sawing logs into timbers and planks was also physically difficult. Called "pit sawing," it required men to pull a log gradually through the length of a constructed trough while other men stood on a platform built around this "pit," manually pulling a saw blade back and forth into the face of the log. For most of the 1800s, the felling of Alabama forests continued at a rate dictated by the physical limitations of man and animal. So the coming of the industrial age found Alabama and other parts of the Deep South still with large areas of old-growth woodlands. Many such areas contained tracts of Alabama's original forest and represented the last sizeable stands of untouched, virgin forests remaining in the region. This would soon change forever during a period of the most relentless forest exploitation in American history.

Armed with the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, Americans were marching west to claim new territories of land aplenty. Only, many of these lands were sparsely forested. Timber for crafting tools, building towns, and most other needs was in short supply and in big demand. Among the most ravenous of demands was that of the smoking iron horse and its requisite railroad tracks. Not only did the early locomotives burn wood, but the

freight cars, bridges, and train stations were made of wood. And, of course, the rail tracks were laid atop wooden cross ties, at an average of five miles of cross ties per mile of rail. Like wooden fences, ties also required replacement every few years. According to official estimates, by 1900 the need for railroad ties alone had resulted in the cutting of more than 20 million acres of forests.

During the latter half of the 1800s, most of the prime timber of the North was exhausted. Timbermen began looking to the South and to Alabama. By now, new practices were needed to speed up the logging process. The slower oxen teams were replaced by steam-powered "skidders," which dragged larger clusters of logs out of the forests to be piled beside railroad tracks and then quickly loaded onto freight cars by machine loaders. Thus began the infamous era of "cut-out and get-out." Railroads pushed into all parts of the South, at the behest of a new breed of woodland intruder, the railroad lumbermen, who stripped large portions of southern forests hurriedly and abusively. This careless overcutting was compounded by the expanding conversion of forestlands to pasturelands and row crop agriculture. Between 1880 and 1920, forest cover in many parts of the South had been reduced by 80 percent. The forest impacts that occurred during this period left many landscapes largely denuded, soils badly eroded, and streams heavily silted. With natural habitats fragmented and destroyed, wildlife populations were decimated. This sad moment for Alabama marked the culmination of a fifty-year span of similarly unchecked exploitation across America, a period of natural resource devastation that became known as the "age of extermination."

Excerpted from *Discovering Alabama Forests*, author Doug Phillips, University of Alabama Press, 2006.