10 things AFA has done for its members lately...

1. **Advocacy is #1** – AFA’s primary reason for existence is to advocate for its members in the public policy arena. No place is this more evident than in the Arkansas General Assembly. AFA recently completed a successful Arkansas Legislative Session by working to support bills that created new opportunities for loggers, wood products facilities looking to locate in Arkansas, and landowners battling feral hogs. We also worked to ensure the forestry sector was well-represented on the Arkansas State Plant Board and defeated a measure that would have weakened our long-standing, successful Arkansas Voluntary Best Management Practices for Water Quality.

2. **Working on solutions** – AFA also works on solutions at the federal level. AFA recently participated in sessions with U.S. Senator John Boozman to discuss the potentially devastating implications to forest landowners of changes to the inheritance tax code and Congressman Bruce Westerman to seek solutions for federal forest health issues and other factors that have contributed to record lumber prices. There are currently a plethora of federal forestry bills working their way through the U.S. House and Senate, and AFA seeks to provide context on how these bills may positively or negatively impact its members here in Arkansas.

3. **WOW! AFA makes women a priority** – The Women Owning Woodlands program has received a jolt of energy through the work of AFA’s Jennifer Johnson and AFAEF’s Rob Beadel. The Arkansas Tree Farm Program and AFA Education Foundation have stepped into the gap and revitalized WOW through consistent, monthly education and outreach sessions for woman woodland owners covering topics such as Prescribed Fire, Timber Tax Tips for Forest Landowners, Forest Boundary Lines and Pruning Trees. In addition, there are big plans for the first WOW two-day conference in late October at the lodge at Lake DeGray State Park.

4. **Face-to-face networking is back** – After more than a year of “virtual-only” activities, AFA hosted its first big in-person networking event in late May - the always popular “Night with the Arkansas Travelers.” More than 120 AFA members, family and friends gathered at Dickey-Stephens Park to watch the Travs take on the Tulsa Drillers. While at the ballpark, they enjoyed an all-you-can-eat buffet of ballpark favorites, topped off with a spectacular fireworks display after the game. There will be many more in-person activities to come.

5. **Key Programs get back in gear** – The return to in-person outreach enabled several important AFA programs to return to full capacity in early 2021. The AFA Emerging Leaders Program, Project Learning Tree, Log-A-Load for Kids fundraising, Teacher Conservation Tour Sessions and all AFA committees are now holding activities or meeting in person, while always taking the appropriate safety precautions after the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. **Landowner Outreach and Education** – In addition to monthly Women Owning Woodlands workshops, the AFA Education Foundation and the Tree Farm Program are partnering to offer monthly online landowner workshops. Upcoming sessions scheduled for the last Friday of each month will focus on silviculture opportunities, timber security, best management practices for water quality and quail habitat.

7. **Annual Meeting takes shape** – The 76th AFA Annual Meeting is set for a face-to-face session October 5-7 at the Embassy Suites Northwest in Rogers. The AFA Staff and Planning Committee has crafted a three-day agenda packed with great speakers, recreational activities, networking opportunities and more to explore “the changing landscape of forestry.” Planning for the AFA Annual Meeting takes an entire year, and we look forward to seeing a large crowd of AFA members and guests in northwest Arkansas later this year.

8. **Meeting the standards** – Once every four years, the Arkansas Tree Farm Program undergoes a third-party audit conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers. Spring 2021 was our time at AFA as 32 properties went under the microscope over the course of two weeks. Jennifer Johnson, tree farm coordinator, and a group of excellent volunteer inspectors coordinated with the auditors and representatives of the American Forest Foundation, the parent organization for the program, which serves small family forest owners.

9. **Podcasts Growth Expands AFA Voice** – The AFA podcast, “Voices of Forestry,” continues to gain listeners and has now been a regular part of AFA’s public education and outreach for more than a year. The podcasts have surpassed 5,500 listens, including downloads from Canada, Chile, Brazil and the United Kingdom. A new episode of the podcast premiers on the first Friday of each month and has a “five-star” rating on iTunes. Seth Stephenson, AFA communications coordinator, and his guests have touched on subjects ranging from invasive species, the benefits of recreational uses of forestland to the economic impact of the forestry sector in Arkansas.

10. **Gold Star Status** – The national Project Learning Tree program recently honored Rob Beadel, director of forestry education for the AFA Education Foundation, with its Gold Star Award. The PLT Gold Star Award is the highest honor bestowed to a PLT program coordinator or partner to recognize their years of exemplary service to Project Learning Tree. PLT is an award-winning environmental education program that meets the Arkansas state education standards. Beadel has been the director of forestry education at AFAEF since 2008.