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

1. **Economic Recovery Task Force** – AFA Executive Vice President Max Braswell represents the timber and forest products community on the Governor’s Economic Recovery Task Force, created on April 18, 2020, by Executive Order 20-20. The Task Force, made up of 35 industry and state leaders from the private and public sectors, has been actively working during the COCID-19 pandemic to reopen Arkansas’s economy and restore consumer confidence.

2. **Battling Feral Hogs** – AFA also participates in the Arkansas Feral Hog Eradication Task Force. The public/private coalition of agriculture and natural resources organizations has acquired additional feral hog trappers and resources in multiple counties across the state. It has also recently ramped up its public education and outreach efforts on feral hogs’ negative impacts. It is preparing legislation to improve the systems and processes in place to manage this costly invasive animal.

3. **Annual Meeting Do-Over** – Pretty much every box was checked for the 75th AFA Annual Meeting when COVID-19 struck. Afterward, several months of planning by the AFA staff and Program Committee went into limbo as discussions began on if and how those plans should move forward. Ultimately, the team decided to move forward with a virtual meeting, which meant every aspect of the event had to be reassessed and planned over again – from speakers to sponsors to special technical resources necessary to package three days of meetings into a Zoom setting. See the results below.

4. **Virtual Annual Meeting Success** – More than 240 people attended the 75th AFA Annual Meeting, September 29-October 1, 2020. The meeting was the first-ever virtual annual meeting. It included a forest management workshop, a full day of general sessions speakers, and a 30-minute video salute to this year’s AFA award winners. Also, 33 outstanding companies and organizations stepped up to sponsor the meeting. The reviews are in from those attending, and the consensus is the 75th AFA Annual Meeting was a resounding success!

5. **Advocacy Continues** – The pandemic did not diminish the need for AFA to fulfill its role as the primary advocate for the state’s forestry community. County logging ordinances continue to be a challenge for the logging sector, and AFA was there in Nevada County to advocate for regulations that were not over-burdensome to loggers but helpful to the County in tracking logging activity. AFA also reached out on several federal issues, including H-2B workers, the Endangered Species Act, and biomass carbon neutrality.

6. **Podcast Gains Followers** – AFA’s “Voices of Forestry” podcast continues to gain listeners after premiering in February. The podcasts have all garnered more than 100 listeners within the first month of release and, in total, have surpassed 1,400 listens, including downloads from Canada, Chile, Brazil, and the United Kingdom. Topics have touched on AFA’s work, the Arkansas Department of Agriculture - Forestry Division, Arkansas Timber Producers Association, Arkansas wildlife, feral hogs and other invasive species, the role of consulting foresters, and more. The podcast has a “five-star” rating on iTunes.

7. **The Voice of Forestry** – When lumber prices began to skyrocket, the news media noticed and reached out to AFA to determine why. The association provided some context to the issue and directed reporters to other credible sources to explain the factors that drove lumber prices to an all-time record high. We also highlighted the information in the weekly e-Newsletter, Tree Mail, and featured Pete Stewart, President and CEO of Forest2Market, during the AFA Virtual Annual Meeting, who provided more insight into lumber prices, the relationship to stumpage prices, and other broad market-related information.

8. **Arkansas in the Spotlight** – AFA was pleased to play a role in the success of the first American Forestry Conference, hosted by the Georgia Forestry Association. The national virtual conference, which drew more than 500 participants, had a distinct Arkansas flavor. AFA helped secure Governor Asa Hutchinson’s participation in a panel discussion facilitated by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue to discuss the timber industry’s importance to Arkansas. In addition, 4th District U. S. Representative Bruce Westerman was featured in a session to discuss his Trillion Trees Act, which also included Ivanka Trump, advisor to President Donald Trump.

9. **Candidates, Campaigns, and Contacts** – Late summer and early fall saw candidates for elected office in Arkansas return to the campaign trail after a pause due to COVID-19. AFA supports candidates with contributions from its non-partisan Forest Express Political Action Committee (PAC). The AFA Government Affairs Committee reviews each race and makes recommendations for support based on many criteria. The Executive Committee then approves the recommendations. Thus far, the PAC has supported 28 candidates during the 2019-2020 election cycle.

10. **Telling our Story** – Speaking of the Forest Express PAC, AFA had the opportunity to provide more details on its advocacy efforts during a recent presentation to registered foresters during their annual training day. Max Braswell, executive vice president, covered various local, state, and federal public policy issues and provided insight into the upcoming 2021 Arkansas General Assembly and more. During the same training series, Jennifer Johnson, Arkansas Tree Farm Program administrator, shared information on new Tree Farm standards, the value that Tree Farm inspectors provide, and preparations for the Arkansas program’s 2021 assessment.