

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



- 1 Critical Infrastructure** – AFA spent significant time early in the pandemic working to position the timber and forest products sector as a component of the state’s critical infrastructure. Working with the Arkansas Department of Agriculture and the Governor’s office, timber and forest products sector workers who support sawmills and the manufacture and distribution of fiber and forest products, including, but not limited to timber, paper and other wood and fiber products are included.
- 2 ADEQ Guidelines** – One of the first COVID-19 outreach efforts centered on requesting temporary relief from certain regulatory reporting requirements on activities that are inconsistent with being carried out safely during the pandemic. The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality worked with the regulated community to provide a measure of relief, while also continuing to hold businesses accountable for meeting their permit guidelines.
- 3 Truck Weight Restriction Variances** – AFA worked closely with the Arkansas Timber Producers Association to include the logging community in the business sectors granted temporary truck weight relief from the Arkansas Department of Transportation. As part of the Governor’s emergency declaration EO 20-03, motor carriers and drivers providing direct assistance in support of relief efforts related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including haulers of wood chips and pulpwood used to manufacture paper products, including packaging for the transportation of groceries, etc., were able to haul up to 90,000 lbs.
- 4 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 to reopen Arkansas’s economy and restore consumer confidence in a safe and healthy manner. The Task Force recently delivered its first interim report, which summarizes the work of the Task Force to date, assesses the status of the recovery effort, specific recovery recommendations and outlines areas where it will continue to focus its attention.
- 5 Outreach on Recovery** – Outreach to the timber and forest products community has been enhanced during the pandemic to request feedback on how COVID 19 is impacting our sector. That feedback has been passed along to a variety of policy and decision makers as they implement programs that provide relief, including the Governor’s Economic Recovery Task Force and the Arkansas Congressional delegation. AFA has also served as a catalyst to create discussion amongst state and national timber and forest products associations to identify critical relief and recovery needs.
- 6 Increased Information Sharing** – One of AFA’s primary roles is to facilitate communication to help our members create and maintain a sustainable and profitable business climate. AFA ramped up its effort to gather, filter and communicate the immense amount of information on every aspect of COVID-19, from the virus itself, to the wide range of health and safety guidelines, and relief and recovery programs.
- 7 Maintaining a Personal Touch** – Since the pandemic began, AFA has maintained its commitment to deliver value and service to its members. At least one staff member was in the office each day to provide personal service to those calling in, and to direct calls to other staff members working remotely. The staff returned to the office on Monday, June 8.
- 8 Arkansas Agriculture Stakeholder Group** – The timber and forest products sector is increasingly recognized as a key component of the state’s greater agriculture community, with AFA as the voice of forestry. To that end, AFA participates in weekly agriculture stakeholder group calls to share information on COVID-19’s impact on the sector, and develop collaborative approaches to help the agriculture community maintain its critical economic contributions to Arkansas.
- 9 COVID Specific Podcasts** – Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture Wes Ward was the guests for AFA’s May “Voices of Forestry” podcast to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the Arkansas agriculture community, including forestry. AFA Communications Coordinator Seth Stephenson and Secretary Ward explored the economic impact on the ag community, some of the sectors hardest hit and some of the relief and recovery programs that had the most positive impact on Arkansas agriculture. Seth also hosted Larry Boccarossa, executive director of the Arkansas Timber Producers Association, for the June podcast to discuss the pandemic’s impact on the logging community.
- 10 Immunity for Business** – As the state and nation moved toward a gradual reopening, AFA joined a large coalition of business organizations requesting that Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson provide assurances of immunity to all industry sectors providing critical services, goods, and facilities from the threat of unwanted lawsuits that can be financially devastating and close doors. This effort was concurrent with a similar request from national business organizations including the American Forest & Paper Association, who asked Congressional leaders to provide limited and rational safe harbors for good actors doing their best to limit the spread of the disease.