12 things AFA did for its members in 2021...

January – 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 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.

February – 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 began holding activities or meetings in person, while always taking the appropriate safety precautions after the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

March – The Women Owning Woodlands program 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 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, planning began for a WOW two-day conference in late October at the lodge at Lake DeGray State Park.

April – The AFA podcast, “Voices of Forestry,” continued to gain listeners in 2021 and has now been a regular part of AFA’s public education and outreach for almost two years. 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.

May – 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.

June – 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. The results from the 32 properties are being finalized but early indicators show only a few minor non-conformances compared to more than 25 Good Management Practices.

July – AFA continued to find new ways to tell the forestry story in 2021. Max Braswell and Seth Stephenson “zoomed” into thousands of Arkansas homes via KATV Channel 7’s Good Morning Arkansas show in September and October to provide an overview of the association’s work on behalf of its members and to educate viewers on the impact of the state’s forestry sector. The two highlighted National Forest Products Week and touted some of the more than 5,000 products we use every day that come from our forests. In November, Max and Ryan Diener with Quail Forever educated viewers on the value of active forest management.

August – AFA was pleased to serve as a communications partner to promote the Pandemic Assistance for Timber Haulers and Harvesters Program. The PATHH program provided financial relief to timber harvesting and hauling businesses that experienced a 10 percent or greater loss of gross revenue in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Eligible businesses received an initial payment of $2,000 after application approval. A final payment was made after the program ended. The sum of both payments could not exceed $125,000.

September – After a year hiatus, the annual Tree Farm Conference returned to an in-person event hosted by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture Forestry Division Baucum Nursery. An excellent crowd of approximately 50 family forest owners engaged in discussions on the new Arkansas Landscape Management Plan and Tree Farm Standards, forestry practices to enhance wildlife habitat, innovative income sources for timberland owners and tree improvement. Baucum Nursery Manager James Shelton then treated the attendees to a tour of the nursery.

October – COVID concerns may have reduced the in-person attendance by just a few, but it certainly didn’t hamper the excitement or success of the 76th AFA Annual Meeting October 5-7 at the Embassy Suites Northwest in Rogers. Telling our story within the changing landscape of forestry was the theme throughout the meeting as attendees heard great information on forestry’s role as a natural climate solution, how we are connecting with architects, engineers and builders to encourage the use of wood, how Walmart will incorporate Arkansas-grown pine into the mass timber used to construct their new corporate campus, and how there is a new vision on the impact of the state’s forestry sector. The two highlighted National Forest Products Week and touted some of the more than 5,000 products we use every day that come from our forests. In September and October to provide an overview of the changing landscape of forestry was the theme throughout the meeting as attendees heard great information on forestry’s role as a natural climate solution, how we are connecting with architects, engineers and builders to encourage the use of wood, how Walmart will incorporate Arkansas-grown pine into the mass timber used to construct their new corporate campus, and how there is a new vision for the College of Forestry, Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Arkansas-Monticello.

November – Continuing a theme from the annual meeting, AFA was pleased to help the National Alliance of Forest Owners facilitate a meeting in Hot Springs with a representative of the Environmental Defense Fund to discuss the impact of forestry on rural communities in Arkansas. Also amongst the attendees were a number of AFA members representing all facets of the timber and forest products community. The focus of the information sharing event was the role of forestry as a natural climate solution with emphasis on public policy that promotes the benefits of working forests.

December – Before 2021 even came to a close, the AFA Planning Committee began preparations for a very special event in October 2022 – the Arkansas Forestry Association 75th Anniversary. Organized in 1947, AFA is the only private non-profit trade association in Arkansas that represents the entire timber and forest products sector. We will celebrate our rich history and those who have and continue to contribute to our growing success, October 11-13, 2022 at the Doubletree Hotel in Little Rock.