EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2023 year included some big changes and an equal amount of growth.

Each year brings its share of successes and challenges. The past year was unique in that even AFA’s biggest challenges contributed to our success story. Starting the year without two staff members is never ideal, especially when it includes a loss of institutional knowledge of several critical systems and programs – which in our case was the AFA membership database, dues billing and Tree Farm program. Those are the kinds of challenges that make me appreciate great staff members - they know just what to do to deliver on their responsibilities, and when a team member is no longer here, they can step in to figure out how to keep the ship afloat. So kudos to Seth Stephenson and Rob Beadel for helping me ensure that AFA members didn’t miss a beat on the value of their investment from late December 2022 to mid-March 2023, when we welcomed Anna Sparks to the AFA team as our new Director of Business and Tree Farm Program administrator – then in May, when Kris Durham joined the staff as our administrative assistant. Anna brings a degree in forestry from UAM and experience in the industry with Georgia-Pacific to her role here at AFA and she hit the ground running. Anna and Kris are perfect fits for AFA. I’ve already seen what they can add to the AFA “staff family” and look forward to the opportunities we have in 2024 to make AFA the strongest voice of forestry possible.

A successful legislatives session, the addition of two new staff members, an outstanding 78th annual meeting, the kickoff of a targeted fundraising campaign for the Forest Express PAC - these are just a few of the accomplishments AFA members can be proud of in 2023. There were plenty of new initiatives in 2023, but we also continued to grow some already established programs and services this past year. We continued to tell the forestry story through our “Voices of Forestry” podcasts that now total more than 40 episodes with a growing audience across the country and around the world.
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AFA STAFF

MAX BRASWELL
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

ROB BEADEL
DIRECTOR OF FORESTRY EDUCATION
AFA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

ANNA SPARKS
DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS
AR TREE FARM PROGRAM

SETH STEPHENSON
COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR
AFA COMMUNICATIONS

KRIS DURHAM
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
AFA advocates for the sustainable use and sound stewardship of Arkansas’s forests and related resources to benefit members of the state’s forestry community and all Arkansans, today and in the future.

AFAEF serves as an information and education source to Arkansas landowners, teachers, and students. It provides educational workshops across the state and publishes educational guides to provide landowners the information they need to make sound forest management decisions.

The Arkansas Tree Farm Program is affiliated with the American Tree Farm System (ATFS). ATFS is a program of the American Forest Foundation and is committed to sustaining forests, watersheds, and healthy habitats through the power of private stewardship.

Project Learning Tree (PLT) is an award-winning environmental education initiative designed for teachers and other educators, parents, natural resource professionals, and community leaders working with youth from preschool through grade 12.

The Forest Express PAC was formed to provide financial assistance to candidates for statewide political office who support forestry and the forest products industry. It is non-partisan and not affiliated with any political party.

Since the program began in 1993, loggers and members of the forestry community have demonstrated their commitment to Arkansas’s children by raising millions of dollars for Arkansas Children’s at events throughout the state.
AFA delivered on its proactive legislative agenda during the 94th General Assembly. Working with strong leadership from the Forestry Caucus and excellent collaboration from multiple partners, we were successful in passing legislation that returned a forestry representative to the Arkansas State Plant Board, created liability protection for private landowners who take prudent precautions when conducting a prescribed burn, and required the director of the Arkansas Department of Transportation to request a federal waiver to allow log truck on the interstate system for no more than 20 miles. In addition, the AFA government affairs team, which also includes Justin Allen, our contract lobbyist and attorney with Wright Lindsey & Jennings, spent significant time working on legislation that defined forest biomass as carbon neutral, created workable solutions to the issue of foreign ownership of agriculture land, and a realignment of Arkansas Department of Agriculture boards and commissions. Work on all of these issues involves strategic planning, multiple meetings, frequent texts, and email communication in order to present factual and credible information to members of the General Assembly, Governor’s office and collaborative partners.
LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Forestry Day at the Capitol** - AFA raised its profile through special events during the session like the very successful Forestry Day at the Capitol on January 27. We had excellent legislative traffic flow through the Capitol rotunda, interacting with representatives of 12 organizations, followed by a luncheon for members of the General Assembly and staff members, with an estimated attendance of 150.

- **Act 135** - amends the method of how board members are selected to the Arkansas State Plant Board. The timber and forest products sector will again have a seat on the board, appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. AFA crafted the language that defines the qualifications for the timber and forest products representative.

- **Act 243** - will create an agricultural education pilot program in public elementary schools. AFA supported this bill initiated by Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation and plans to participate as a stakeholder with a focus on forestry education.

- **Act 253** - revises the law regarding timber sales; revises the law regarding co-owners or coheirs, defines “unknown or unlocatable co-owners or coheirs” and amends requirements related to timber sale contracts. All unknown or unlocatable owners will still be paid for their timber under the law. AFA supported this bill.

- **Act 636** - creates the Office of Agricultural Intelligence within the Arkansas Department of Agriculture and prohibits ownership of agricultural land in Arkansas by a foreign party subject to International Traffic in Arms Regulations. AFA worked diligently to minimize any unintended consequences to forest landowners with institutional ownership.

- **Act 691** - consolidated, abolished and/or transferred certain agriculture boards and commissions. This controversial bill abolished the Arkansas Board of Registration for Foresters and placed the duties under the Arkansas Forestry Commission. AFA and multiple forestry interests worked to minimize the negative impacts of the bill through amendments that so far are working to maintain the viability and credibility of the registered forester qualifications in the state.

- **Act 693** - requires energy produced from forest biomass to be considered carbon neutral and when used in conjunction with carbon capture technologies be considered carbon negative. AFA supported this bill and worked to educate legislators on its importance to the timber and forest products sector.

- **Act 695** - creates the Arkansas Prescribed Burning Act and establishes a simple liability standard of protection for conducting prescribed fire on private land. This was one of AFA’s priority bills, carried in the Senate by Sen. Matt Stone and in the House by Rep. Howard Beaty, Jr.

- **Act 711** - Required that the Director of the Arkansas Department of Transportation request that the Congress of the United States create a waiver to allow log trucks to access the Interstate Highway System at the state legal weight limit of 85,000 pounds for a distance of no more than 20 miles. The request has been made. It will now take Congress to act on the request and include it in Federal legislation. This was the third priority bill for AFA, sponsored by Sen. Matt Stone and Rep. Mindy McAlindon.
COMMUNICATIONS

RESPONSIBLE STAFF: SETH STEPHENSON, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

GOAL
To create and empower a membership base with the ability to influence important forestry issues

OBJECTIVES

- Anticipate, identify and address emerging issues
- Heighten the profile of AFA with the news media and general public by increasing opportunities to promote forestry
- Create member business efficiencies through utilization of AFA communication vehicles
- Improve member education of public policy issues
- Become the trusted credible source for information relating to forestry and the environment

**Voices Of Forestry**

- 48 Total Episodes
- approx. 21,500 Total Downloads
- 12 Sponsored Episodes in 2023
- 85 Countries/Territories Reached

**Facebook**

- 2,900 Lifetime Followers
- 29,400 Reached
- 11% Increase from 2022
- 2,600 Content Interactions

**Twitter**

- 3,967 Followers
- 7,116 Post Impressions in 2023
- approx. 33 Post Visits
AFA continues to provide multiple communications resources to members and those curious about forestry. In 2023, the association published another 12 “Voices of Forestry” podcast episodes with topics including advanced genetics, The Wildlife Conservation Initiative, and stories of forest stewardship from various Tree Farmers of the Year. Communications Coordinator Seth Stephenson visited with members of the Railway Tie Association and Keeping it in the Family to share information on AFA’s work to foster and promote sustainable forestry in Arkansas. The association provided information to local media and members regarding the pine decline anomaly that continued throughout 2023. Staff worked to connect officials by providing meeting opportunities to stay up to date on the ongoing issue. AFA’s Emerging Leaders program welcomed a new class of 10 forestry professionals across the state. Four tour opportunities offered them the chance to get a first-hand look at some of the forestry operations found in our area. This class will participate in one more year of educational events before they graduate at the annual meeting.

Log A Load for Kids chapters raised a total $430,787.26 in 2023 for the Arkansas Children’s Heart Institute.
GOAL
To establish the forestry community as the recognized forest conservation leader in Arkansas

OBJECTIVES

- Facilitate programs and services that promote profitable forestry, sustainability and stewardship
- Gain better recognition of programs such as Project Learning Tree, Tree Farm, Public Education and Outreach and other services
- Expand the understanding and effectiveness of sustainable forestry practices
- Facilitate partnerships that promote the growth of forestry programs and the logging profession in communities, schools and universities

The Arkansas Forestry Association Education Foundation spent 2023 traveling the state providing education and information to students, landowners, educators and forestry professionals. The work done at the foundation ranges across multiple programs including Project Learning Tree, Teacher Conservation Tours, Forestry Careers and Workforce Development, and Forest Landowner Education and Outreach.

Arkansas Project Learning Tree continues to be the leader in forestry education professional development in the state. In 2023, AFAEF staff conducted 40 educational trainings certifying 634 formal and nonformal educators statewide. Nearly half of those trained, 49%, were college students working toward their education degrees.

AFAEF joined as a state partner of ForestryWorks, a collaborative effort between the Forest Workforce Training Institute and various partners within the forest industry to develop a pipeline of qualified workers for the nation’s forestry and forest products manufacturing industries. ForestryWorks educates students, parents, and teachers about career opportunities in the forest sector while providing pathways for students and job seekers to start their future career in the industry.

In 2023, the AFAEF participated in six career education programs with Be Pro Be Proud interacting with 23 Arkansas schools reaching 347 students and 169 adults. The Arkansas Be Pro Be Proud Mobile Workshop Trailers conducted over 176 tour stops across the state with over 28,734 student interactions.

The AFAEF partners with organizations and agencies throughout the state to provide education and outreach opportunities for forest landowners to help them learn how to better manage their forestlands to reach their management goals. In 2023, 15 landowner events were held throughout the state reaching 508 landowners managing or owning over 70,000 acres of forestlands.
The Arkansas Forestry Association Education Foundation, along with partners from our forestry community across the state have been providing this professional development workshop for Arkansas educators since 1993. These three 2-day workshops provide information, resources, and field experiences delivering background knowledge and understanding of the benefits and importance of sustainably managed forests and the forestry community within the state.

In 2023, the AFAEF hosted three workshops –

**Forestry 101** was held June 8-9 in Eureka Springs. It focused on tree ID, basic forestry techniques, sustainable forestry practices, tree pests and disease, and tree age and growth analysis. Twenty-four educators participated in this event.

**Urban Forestry** was conducted on June 28-29 in Fayetteville providing hands-on programming related to urban forests, tree health, green infrastructure, and the benefits these unique ecosystems provide to us and our communities. Twenty-three participants attended this program.

**Butterflies, Bees & Pollinator Trees** was held October 11-12 at DeGray Lake Resort State Park near Bismarck. This workshop focused on Arkansas's pollinators and pollinator habitat. Participants learned about Arkansas bees and butterflies and the habitats they need to survive and prosper and how proper forest management can benefit our pollinators. Twenty-two educators participated in this event.

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"It was a really good PD event & it helped expand my knowledge on how to incorporate the environment into my teaching" – Jinisa Williams, University of Central Arkansas

"Excellent workshop. Fun & came away with many activities & hands on lessons that I will use with my youth. Thanks!" – Marley Shaddox, Pulaski County Extension 4-H

"This makes me much more excited to teach science and encourages me to take my students outside." – Layla Schwab, University of Arkansas Little Rock

"So many wonderful ideas and resources. I love how the activities are low-key and don't require tons of prep and can be taken anywhere." – Andrea Reese, homeschool parent

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**Teacher Conservation Tours**

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**2023 TCT Partnering Agencies, Companies, and Organizations**
ARKANSAS TREE FARM PROGRAM

RESPONSIBLE STAFF: ANNA SPARKS, DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS

GOAL
To enhance networking and educational opportunities to help AFA and Tree Farm members actively manage their property

OBJECTIVES

- Facilitate programs and activities that grow attendance and attract new members to the Tree Farm Program
- Facilitate programs and activities that increase the level of active forest management in Arkansas
- Increase the effectiveness and participation of registered foresters as Tree Farm inspectors by providing additional training and mentoring
Our greatest achievement in 2023 was having a representative from Arkansas as a finalist in the Regional Tree Farm of the Year competition. Two American Tree Farm System members interviewed Miles Goggans and toured his impressive Tree Farm in Cleveland Co. There they witnessed first-hand the combined efforts of many state agencies and partnerships that want to help our Arkansas landowners manage their timberlands well. Even though Miles did not win the award, it was an honor for Arkansas’s best to be recognized with some of the finest landowners across the country. Another highlight of the year was touring the Tree Farm of the Year in Stone Co. The Vickers Family farm is a diverse property near Mountain View. Charles and Martha Vickers are outstanding examples of what the Tree Farm Program represents, and their dedication to sustainable forestry and the results of their hard work earns much admiration from fellow landowners.

The Tree Farm committee was integral to getting the work done in 2023 as the program transitioned to a new coordinator. Together, this new team is well-positioned for significant accomplishments in 2024 under the leadership of Anna Sparks. Her focus is assisting the professional foresters as they complete the inspections across the state. Communication is the key, and the program could always use more boots on the ground to get the work completed. Women Owning Woodlands will restart in February 2024. AFA, the Tree Farm Program and AFAEF are eager to promote this program and educate more women about sustainably managing their forestland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Quick Stats - December 2023</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active(^{1}) Tree Farms / Farmers(*): 2,464 / 518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pioneer Tree Farms / Farmers(*): 24 / 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospect Tree Farms / Farmers(*): 2 / 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Acreage: 487,546</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Tree Farms: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decertifications: 31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspections: 37</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quick Stats Previous Year - December 2022(^{2})</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active(^{1}) Tree Farms / Farmers(*): 2,582 / 2,652</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pioneer Tree Farms / Farmers(*): 25 / 28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prospect Tree Farms / Farmers(*): 1 / 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Acreage: 502,120</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Tree Farms: 0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decertifications: 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspections: 6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* A discrepancy was found in the Tree Farmer count values in the Quick Stats. The report incorrectly counting Tree Farmers who owned multiple Tree Farms and overstated the actual count of distinct Tree Farmers. This has been corrected as of the August, 2023 report, but the Tree Farmer counts for months prior to August will be incorrect.
AFA 2023 ANNUAL MEETING

211 Attendees

63 Sponsors & Exhibitors

Legislators of the Year


Outstanding Forestry Educator

Krissy Kimbro

Tree Farmer of the Year

The Vickers Family

Communicator of the Year

Justin Mallett

LAL for Kids Founders’ Award

Grant Pace
JOIN US AS WE RETURN TO THE OAKLAWN RACING CASINO RESORT ON OCT. 8-10 FOR THE 79TH AFA ANNUAL MEETING!

When:
October 8-10, 2024

Where:
Oaklawn Racing Casino Resort
2705 Central Ave.
Hot Springs, AR 71901

Keep an eye on future AFA publications to know when an agenda is announced and when registration begins.