2019: AFA Accomplishes Much During “Season of Change”

By: Max Braswell

2019 was another busy and successful year for the Arkansas Forestry Association. Here is a quick look at a sampling of at least one major accomplishment during each month of the year:

January – The 92nd Arkansas General Assembly convened January 14. The association coordinated multiple special events and projects to heighten the forestry profile in the state including Forestry Day at the Capitol, a luncheon for members of the General Assembly and staffers, the always popular Legislative Maps, and weekly Legislative Updates. AFA was successful in advocating for a forestry position to be maintained on the Arkansas Pollution Control & Ecology Commission.

ATFS Launches Public Comment Period for Standards of Sustainability

The American Tree Farm System (ATFS) launched a 60-day public comment period on the American Forest Foundation’s (AFF) current Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification (Standards) in early January.

According to a release from AFF, this is only the first of two public comment periods that will take place in 2020. Interested members of the public are invited to participate from January 2, 2020, through March 2, 2020. You can submit comments by visiting http://www.tfaforms.com/330231.

ATFS also announced the 13 members of the new Independent Standards Review Panel (ISRP), which is the group of stakeholders charged with reviewing the Standards and recommending revisions to the AFF Board of Trustees based on public review.

AFF said this collection of people is a “cross-section of forestry community leaders and stakeholders with a stake in the ATFS Program and/or a sincere...
ATFS Public Comment Period, con’t.

The Standards Review Process started around September 20, 2019, when the AFF Board of Trustees invited ISRP candidate recommendations and feedback on the Standards Setting Procedures. In the Fall of 2019, the board seated the ISRP and formally initiated the review process.

The timeline now includes the public review and in-person listening sessions at the ATFS National Leadership Conference in Baltimore, MD, February 25-27, 2020.

Starting in the Spring, the public will review the proposed 2020-2025 standards, and then the board will approve them in the fall.

The initiation of the training and enactment of the standards is not scheduled to take place until 2021.

Every five years, the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certifications (PEFC) requires endorsed certification programs, like ATFS, to undergo a review to make sure it conforms with its international requirements.

For more information, you can visit treefarmsystem.org/standards-process-overview.

TCT Brings Forestry Into Focus

By: Rob Beadel

This year marks the 27th Anniversary of Arkansas’s Teacher Conservation Tour (TCT). The AFA Education Foundation, along with partners from our forestry community, have been providing this professional development workshop for Arkansas educators since 1993.

Although structured for classroom teachers, these workshops are open to natural resource professionals, landowners, state park staff, scout leaders, 4-H leaders, master naturalists, and interested citizens to learn more about Arkansas’s forests and sustainable forestry.

The TCT Workshop Series features three 2-day workshops focusing on the environmental, ecological, and economic benefits of Arkansas’s forestlands, natural resources, and timber industries. Each session includes presentations on specific topics and in-the-field site visits or facility tours. Participants also interact with natural resource professionals and members of the forest industry who are in the field conducting this work on a daily basis.

This year’s workshop topics and dates are –

Session 1 - Woods, Water, and Waterfowl
February 20-21, 2020 — Casscoe, Arkansas

Session 2 - Prescribed Fire for Educators
March 12-13, 2020 — Huntsville, Arkansas

Session 3 - Pine to Paper
June 23-24, 2020 — Russellville, Arkansas

More details about each workshop and registration information is available at www.arkforests.org/page/TCT.
AFA Accomplishes Much During “Season of Change”, con’t.

May – The Arkansas Forestry Association Education Foundation hosted the 33rd Annual International Project Learning Tree Coordinators’ Conference in Little Rock on May 5-10. A total of 113 PLT professionals from 39 states, Washington DC, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, and Japan attended the conference. Rob Beadel, Director of Forestry Education for AFAEF, coordinated the week-long conference, a first for Arkansas, and received rave reviews from the participants.

June – AFAEF partnered with the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center in Little Rock on their temporary exhibit “Finding Freedom in the Forest”. The multi-faceted exhibit explored the historical role and contribution of African-Americans to the timber and forest products industry in Arkansas. AFAEF Forestry Education Director Rob Beadel provided the first of several educational workshops for kids during the month.

July – AFA Executive Vice President Max Braswell moderated a “Connecting Educators to Industry” panel of forestry experts at Henderson State University in Arkadelphia in partnership with the University and Economics Arkansas. AFA leaders Mark Karnes, with the Ross Foundation; Allen Morgan – Hunter-Wasson, Inc., and Pete Prutzman – Kingwood Forestry Services, Inc., shared insight on the employment needs of the forestry community, identified challenges in finding qualified employees, discussed misconceptions about forestry and discussed strategies with the educators on how to encourage students to seek natural resource careers.

August – AFA coordinated the publication of a new “Landowner’s Guide to Sustainable Forestry”. The 16-page full-color brochure is designed to help forest landowners find the resources they need to prepare a management plan, implement voluntary best management practices for water quality, identify threatened and endangered species, forests of exceptional conversation value and more. In addition to a printed version, the publication is also available on the AFA website at www.arkforests.org.

A Landowner’s Guide to Sustainable Forests

“The Landowner’s Guide to Sustainable Forests” is available online and at the AFA office.

September – Seven members of the Arkansas forestry community, including AFA Executive Vice President Max Braswell, participated in the annual Forest Resources Association (FRA) Fly-In, September 17-19 in Washington, DC. While there, the group met with members and staff of the Arkansas Congressional delegation to advocate for support of three important issues: The Safe Routes Act, H-2B Guestworker Visa Program, and Forest-Based Carbon Neutrality – all of which saw progress by year-end.

October – The 74th AFA Annual Meeting “Seasons of Change”, once again attracted more than 280 attendees from all sectors of the timber and forest products community October 8-10, at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Little Rock, highlighted by a keynote address from Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson. AFA also participated in a “Future of Forestry” roundtable discussion, facilitated by the University of Arkansas Sam. M. Walton College of Business. In several hours of discussion, the group identified global trends affecting the industry and offered insights into how forestry leaders can respond and grow with the times.

November – AFA was an integral partner in Arkansas’s 3rd statewide forum on forests and drinking water, November 4-5 at The Lodge at Mount Magazine. During the forum, Max Braswell, AFA Executive Vice President, moderated a panel discussion on the state’s updated Forest Action Plan. State Forester Joe Fox, Doug Zollner with The Nature Conservancy and Scott Meek of Green Bay Packaging provide insight into the history and purpose of the plan, its focus areas – including water quality protection, and why it is important to both the forestry and drinking water communities.

December – Jennifer Johnson, AFA director of business, coordinates one of the nation’s largest and best State Tree Farm Programs. 2019 was an exceptional year. The program completed 1,367 tree farm inspections and experienced continued growth. As of December, there are 2,578 certified Tree Farms in Arkansas representing 480,441 acres in 62 of the state’s 75 counties. Those certified acres are owned by 633 Tree Farmers. Thanks goes out to the volunteers who serve on the committee and do the inspections, the organizations that support Tree Farm, and the Tree Farmers who invest their time and money to sustainably manage their timberland.

Tree Farm Committee Chair John Cook announces the award winners during the final 2019 Tree Farm Committee meeting.

There’s always too much to include! Other notable accomplishments include ongoing work on trade issues, the annual Tree Farm Conference, Night With the Trav’s (which again set a record for attendance), the annual AFAEF Teacher Conservation Tour, increased support for House and Senate candidates through the AFA Forest Express PAC, dozens of landowner workshops, the Arkansas Log A Load for Kids Program winning the Outstanding Volunteer Organization Award from the Arkansas Association of Fundraising Professionals, and outreach to more than 1,900 landowners in southeast Arkansas as part of the Morehouse Family Forest Initiative.
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