Anna Sparks Joins Arkansas Forestry Association as New Director of Business

Anna Sparks joins the Arkansas Forestry Association as the new Director of Business and Tree Farm Program Administrator. The Arkansas Forestry Association would like to welcome the newest member of our team, Anna Sparks. She will be taking on the role of Director of Business and Tree Farm Program Administrator within the association.

A University of Arkansas at Monticello graduate, Anna started her career at Georgia Pacific in El Dorado before being transferred to Fordyce. After about nine years in the industry, she chose to make a change.

“I decided that I wanted to be home more with my family,” Anna explained. “So, I stepped away from forestry even though it was a big part of my life.”

In between that decision and joining AFA, Anna was an elementary school teacher for about six years, spent some time in children’s ministry and was a registered dental assistant.

A conversation between her and a friend sparked the interest into coming back to forestry via the association. She said now that her children are older and more self-sustaining, it was an excellent time to come back.

“The opportunity that I saw was very attractive,” she said. “I thought that if I was going to go back into forestry, I would like to work for AFA.”

Anna’s love for forestry started before she obtained her degree. She said during high school, she did some work with the U.S. Forest Service. It was her time there that sparked her love for the outdoors.

“My goal in life was to be a park ranger,” she said. “That’s what I thought I wanted to do when I was about 15. I received the opportunity to work for the Forest Service for three summers and just fell in love with it.”

Anna’s love for forestry sparked her love for the outdoors. She said during high school, she did some work with the U.S. Forest Service. It was her time there that sparked her love for the outdoors.

In May 4-5, our group will gather for our board meeting. Members will hear from AFA staff, representatives of the U.S. Forest Service, the state forester, and receive a legislative update. Our meeting will end around noon.

That presenter has yet to be determined. Beginning at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, May 6, our group will gather for our board meeting. Members will hear from AFA staff, representatives of the U.S. Forest Service, the state forester, and receive a legislative update. Our meeting will end around noon.

Breakfast tickets for this morning will be provided by the hotel the day you check-in. The room reservation deadline is April 14, 2023. After that cut-off date, any remaining rooms that have not been picked up will be released back into general hotel inventory and would not be guaranteed available at the group rate.

With all the changes being made at the association, we are a little late getting this information out to everyone. We advise if you do plan on joining us that you reserve your room ASAP.

If you would like a physical registration form, please call the AFA office at (501) 374-2441. We look forward to seeing all of our board members in May!
Sparks Joins AFA, cont.

being outside, appreciating nature and the big role that it has in our communities.”

In her free time, Anna and her husband spend a lot of time outdoors. They own a little hobby farm just outside of Pine Bluff where they raise some cattle, ride horses and spend time with family. She described herself as being very eager and excited to be back in the forestry industry.

“The people are my type of people,” Anna said. “I have a lot in common with the forestry community. I’m eager to learn the new things after being out for several years and I’m eager to help in any way that I can.”

While she was teaching, Anna explained that she had a hard time juggling the certification requirements for being a teacher and a registered forester. At the time she thought she might never come back and let her registered forester status expire. She is currently working to regain that title after joining us at the association.

“We are very excited to have Anna as a team member of AFA,” said association Executive Vice-President Max Braswell. “To my knowledge, we have never had a staff member with a forestry degree. Anna will be an excellent addition to the association and her background will continue to make us the voice of forestry in Arkansas.”

There is still a lot for her to learn as she gets comfortable in her new position. We ask our members for some more patience as the rest of the AFA staff gets her up to speed on everything that falls under her work responsibilities. If you would like to say hello or get in touch with her, you can send her an email at aspark@arkforests.org.

New Publication Helps Young Black Americans Explore Career Paths in the Forest and Conservation Sector

By: Project Learning Tree

The name “Black Faces in Green Spaces” pays homage to Dr. Carolyn Finney, Photo courtesy of Project Learning Tree.

A new first-of-its-kind resource, Black Faces in Green Spaces: The Journeys of Black Professionals in Green Careers, has just been released by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), Project Learning Tree (PLT), and Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS). The SFI-PLT-MANRRS Black Faces in Green Spaces: The Journeys of Black Professionals in Green Careers guide was such an intentional and authentic process. Representation matters: everyone that took part in the project identified as an African American, from the advisory committee to the photographers,” said Dr. Antonia “Mia” Farrell, Co-Chair of the SFI-MANRRS Advisory Committee, Assistant Dean and Director for Diversity, University of Kentucky, and former national MANRRS President. “It is my hope that we can continue to uplift the voices of African Americans in this space, bring awareness to green careers, and ignite young people to know that there are a plethora of career options within the sector.”

The name “Black Faces in Green Spaces” pays homage to Dr. Carolyn Finney, who authored the book Black Faces, White continued on page 3

Jennifer Johnson Recognized with ATFS 2023 National Leadership Award

By: Angela Wells, American Tree Farm System

Jennifer Johnson was awarded the 2023 ATFS National Leadership Award during their National Leadership Conference in January.

The American Forest Foundation’s American Tree Farm System® (ATFS) has announced the posthumous recognition of Jennifer Lambert Johnson of Little Rock, Arkansas as the 2023 National Leadership Award recipient.

This award recognizes the efforts of extraordinary volunteers for their efforts to catalyze on-the-ground conservation initiatives to provide educational opportunities to landowners, and support work towards their state program’s goals.

Jennifer passed away on December 4th, 2022, after a 4-year battle with cancer. She was the director of business for the Arkansas Forestry Association (AFA) and coordinator of the Arkansas Tree Farm Program for over 10 years.

Jennifer’s husband, Chris Johnson, accepted Jennifer’s award on her behalf presented by ATFS Director, Angela Wells, on January 31 at the 2023 National Leadership Conference in Gulf Shores, Alabama.

For meetings held at the AFA Office, please park on the street or in one of the area lots -- do not park in the Arkansas Chamber of Commerce parking lot.

2022 AFA Annual Report Now Available

The Arkansas Forestry Association 2022 Annual Report is now available for all members who would like to see everything we accomplished last year.

The AFA Annual Report is a relatively new addition to information that the association provides. The publication features statistics from every side of our operations. It starts with an update from AFA Executive Vice President Max Braswell on government affairs. His report includes information on hiring Justin Allen, the new forestry caucus, and various tours with government officials.

Communications Coordinator Seth Stephenson’s update is next with information on the multiple communications tools the association utilizes. He also discusses the tour opportunities offered to the Emerging Leaders Program in 2022.

The third section of the report provides some numbers on the Arkansas Tree Farm Program, which includes certified tree farms in the state and the number of acres. Braswell wrote a portion of this section titled “Remembering Jennifer Lambert Johnson” as a tribute to our late friend and co-worker.

Readers will also find information on the numerous activities Director of Forestry Education Rob Beadel provided via the Education Foundation. These reports range from Teacher Conservation Tours to workforce development, a new focus of the foundation.

Those interested in seeing all of that information and more can find it online at arkforests.org or you can call AFA at (501) 374-2441 to request a physical copy.

spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors. The guide is intentional in showcasing a diversity of experiences and careers to show that there is a place for everyone to find a career in the forest and conservation sector—whether it be indoors, outdoors, an apprenticeship, or with a Ph.D. The guide showcases a small portion of the interdisciplinary careers that fall within the sector. It includes a forester, a biologist, a hydrologist, a GIS specialist, a DEI specialist, an environmental educator, an urban forester, and more.

Many Black young adults are unaware of job opportunities in the forest and conservation sector, and unfortunately this stems from continued work to find the members of the association and Tree Farm program.”

ATFS is an internationally-known recognition and certification program that empowers family and private forest owners to keep their forests healthy and sustainable through guidance, tools and a wide community of fellow landowners. It is administered at the national level by AFF and organized into 42 state-level affiliates led by volunteers and partners.

Journeys of Black Professionals in Green Careers, has just been released by the American Forestry Association (AFA) and coordinator of the Arkansas Tree Farm Program for over 10 years.

The guide is intentional in showcasing a diversity of experiences and careers to show that there is a place for everyone to find a career in the forest and conservation sector—whether it be indoors, outdoors, an apprenticeship, or with a Ph.D. The guide showcases a small portion of the interdisciplinary careers that fall within the sector. It includes a forester, a biologist, a hydrologist, a GIS specialist, a DEI specialist, an environmental educator, an urban forester, and more.

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Title of the report is no available.