May 2023

Three AFA Initiatives Now Law After Legislative Session
By: Max Braswell, AFA Executive Vice President

The 94th Arkansas General Assembly adjourned sine die on May 1 completing 90 days in session. The Arkansas Forestry Association completed its proactive legislative agenda by successfully passing its three priority bills, supported several other pieces of legislation that became law and worked diligently on two other high profile issues to gain amendments that better position the timber and forest products community than when the bills were first filed.

In December, the AFA Executive Committee voted to pursue four potential pieces of legislation during the 2023 regular session. Three of those issues actually turned into legislation, while the fourth became a regulatory issue. They were: prescribed fire liability; a federal waiver to allow log trucks to access the interstate for a specific distance at the state legal weight limit; a State Plant Board bill that would include a position to represent the timber and forest products sector; and a carve out for forest products manufacturers to more efficiently and economically acquire a solid waste permit for wood residuals. The wood residuals issue is a regulatory issue that AFA and a select group of wood products manufacturers have begun working on with the Arkansas Department Environmental Quality. The other three have been signed into law by Governor Sarah Sanders.

Act 695 creates the Arkansas Prescribed Burning Act. The bill's primary sponsors were Sen. Matt Stone, R, Camden, and Texarkana Log a Load for Kids Holds First 2023 Fundraising Event

Texarkana Log a Load for Kids held a sporting clay shoot for Arkansas Children's. This year's event raised $16,000 that will go to help fulfill Log a Load's commitment to fund a Heart Institute at Arkansas Children's.

Texarkana Log a Load for Kids holds a sporting clay shoot for Arkansas Children's.

Students take turns looking through a forester's prism during the UACCM Farm Fair.

The Arkansas Forestry Association Education Foundation's Rob Beadel spoke about green careers to over 100 students and educators in early May.

The Farm Fair, A Job Fair for Agriculture, was held at the University of Arkansas Community College at Morrilton on May 11. It invited local students to come and talk with various agriculture professionals about their jobs.

There were 16 tables set up in Tyson Hall, each with an organization or career theme. Students were broken up into 14 groups and given 10 minutes at each table. They were encouraged to ask questions and take information home to share with their parents.

Beadel was joined at his table by representatives from Green Bay Packaging, which has mills in and around the area. Beadel began conversations by discussing the idea of green careers with kids. He emphasized that those jobs could be anything within the green sector ranging from accountants to technical engineers. Students were given a website to visit where they could take a free personality quiz to learn which green career best suited them.

AFAEF Teaches Green Careers at UACCM Farm Fair

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Three AFA Initiatives Now Law, con’t.

Rep. Howard Beatty, Jr., R-Crossett. The goal of the bill is to increase the amount of prescribed fire on private timberland by creating a reasonable simple negligence standard for landowners when prudent prescribed burns are implemented. Previously, Arkansas stood alone in the Southeast in not having statutes to address liability related to prescribed burning.

Senator Stone was also the primary Senate sponsor of Act 711. Rep. Mindy McMillon, R-Arkadelphia, carried the bill in the House. It will require the Director of the Arkansas Department of Transportation to 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. It would then take Congress acting on the request and including it in Federal legislation. By passing the bill, the Arkansas Congressional delegation will see that this is an important issue and has the support of the Arkansas General Assembly. The Act is backed by studies and pilot programs that have found that allowing state–legal–log trucks access to federal interstate highways improves overall safety and efficiency of timber transportation while reducing pavement damage costs and carbon emissions.

One of the first issues of the session to gain traction became Act 135, which amends the method of how board members are selected to the State Plant Board. The bill moved quickly through the legislature after input from a variety of stakeholders including AFA. The Act returns the timber and forest products sector to the 19-member panel and contains language provided by AFA as it pertains to the definition of the criteria used for selection of the representative. Our specific interest in the bill is to ensure that any candidate selected by the Governor and approved by the Senate, is a person who is actively or principally engaged, currently or previously, in the timber or forest products sector.

You may remember that nine positions were removed from the Board when the Arkansas Supreme Court ruled that the selection process was unconstitutional. One of the positions representing the forest sector, forestry and conservation, AFA provided recommendations of qualified candidates to serve to represent the sector’s interests. In some ways this was a landmark case for how boards and commissions will be selected going forward in Arkansas. It brought to the surface other boards and commissions’ selection process that were likely to be deemed unconstitutional. The Supreme Court’s decision on the State Plant Board, along with the Governor’s objective to create a new state government efficiency, contributed to the filing of SB 403 by Sen. Blake Johnson, R-Jonesboro. The bill, which became Act 691, will create significant changes to certain agriculture boards and commissions. The Arkansas Forestry Commission will be one of four surviving boards and commissions under the new structure with the duties of the Board of Registration for Foresters transferred to AFC.

Agriculture lobbyists and others were made aware of the bill a week before it was filed. No agriculture organizations knew of the details of the bill beforehand. Almost immediately, AFA brought possible concerns about the BORF to the attention of the Secretary of Agriculture and the Governor’s office, which afterward grew into multiple face-to-face meetings over the course of several weeks. Input from the registered forester community, Association of Consulting Foresters, Ouachita Society of American-foresters and members started to flow into the Agriculture Department, which opened the door for a possible amendment.

This outreach was effective in getting an amendment to the bill that adds an ex–officio member to the Arkansas Forestry Commission who will be a faculty member of the UAM College of Forestry, Agriculture and Natural Resources, clarifies that at least three members of the Arkansas Forestry Commission will be registered foresters – this is in addition to the ex-officio member and the State Forester, who must be a registered forester; clarifies that the AFC shall create a subcommittee and that the registered foresters who serve on the AFC will serve on the subcommittee; and allows the AFC Chairman to designate additional registered foresters to serve on the subcommittee on an ad hoc basis.

This is only a portion of Max’s legislative update. If you would like to read more on “big picture” topics of discussion during the session, you can find a full version of each report focusing on the work he did at the Arkansas capitol during the legislative session at arkforests.org. 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.

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Teexarkana Log a Load Event, con’t.

There were multiple people who took home some top spots during the shoot. Team Sutton won Top Sporting Clay Team and Steve Powell won Highest Overall Average, only missing two shots out of 100. Jill Brook was deemed the highest adult female shooter of the afternoon. Matthew Thomas and Claire Morse won male and female youth highest score respectively.

“Seeing the continual support after year from local businesses, sporting clay teams, and volunteers is very rewarding as one of the coordinators of this event,” Clontz said, “I see this tournament continuing to grow year after year.”

Clontz explains that the Texarkana Log a Load chapter is already looking to the future for the next fundraiser. They would like to extend their outreach to more sporting clay teams including those from colleges and other local businesses to participate.

Clontz thanked Megan Flores with Arkansas Children’s, Rocky Creek Outdoors, and the Texarkana Log a Load for Kids Chapter for a successful and seamlessly run event.

Keep an eye on future Arkansas Forestry Association publications and our online calendar at arkforests.org for future Log a Load for Kids events to help them help children here in the Natural State.

AFA Board of Directors Meet at DeGray Lake Resort State Park for Spring Board Meeting

The night concluded with Jon Harrison who took the stage to discuss his VIP Way. This technique brings in the right employee for the right work environment and to drive excellent results. His talk included details on how to reintegrate the workforce and the impact of disengaged employees and leaders have on society as a whole.

Our board gathered the following morning for the official spring board meeting. Justin Allen and Senator Matt Stone began with reports on some of the legislation that passed during Arkansas’s recent legislative session. This included multiple acts that focused on education, prison reform, and restructuring state organizations.

AFA’s Executive Vice President Max Braswell then presented the board with an update on the progress of implementing the association’s long-range plan, which the board approved last year. Dr. Matt Pelkki introduced his talk with figures on logger education and development. He then introduced Seth Stephenson, AFA’s communications coordinator, who began the staff reports with a rundown of the various work he has been conducting. Stephenson updated各位 on the “Voices of Forestry” podcast and the Emerging Leaders Program, which held its first event in early April. The AFA Education Foundation’s Director of Forestry Education Rob Beadel was up next. He showcased the number of events and participation since the last meeting. Beadel explained that he is diligently working on providing forestry education around the state as well as focusing more on workforce development.

Anna Sparks, the association’s newest member, then had the opportunity to introduce herself. Along with providing the information we had to share. We talked to so many students at one time with the reports focusing on the work he did at the Arkansas capitol during the legislative session. Stephenson preceded AFA staff reports with a rundown of the various work he has been conducting. Stephenson updated various students with the information we had to share. We talked to so many students at one time with the reports focusing on the work he did at the Arkansas capitol during the legislative session.

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