2023 Annual Meeting Report

The AFA held its Annual Meeting on Thursday, December 14th, at Olmstead Manor in Ludlow, PA.

Following dinner, there was a virtual presentation by Kris Abell from the Governor's Invasive Species Council, and a discussion of the accomplishments and future of Pennsylvania's new PRISM pilot program.

Acting Forest Supervisor, Vince Keeler, and Deputy Forest Supervisor Bob Heiar were present and gave an update on 2023 ANF management efforts. This included a number of "no bid" sales, which AFA members pointed out were due to stewardship requirements, in addition to low market prices. A discussion of forest age class issues and the timber sale plan for 2024, which is expected to be about 35-40 MBF. This will be considerably less than the ASQ of 54.1 MBF. Heiar explained the reduced volume is due to unfilled staff vacancies limiting their capacity to offer more sales. AFA member foresters expressed concern that this will be a further setback on the forest achieving its 2007 Forest Management Plan goals.

Agenda items during the business meeting included a summary of the organization's efforts in 2023 by outgoing President Amanda Hetrick. The Executive Director gave an overview of her efforts in 2023, which focused on township presentations, legislation and agency policy changes, an increased social media presence, and development of the AFA's new merchandise program. John Saf reported on the Health Collaborative's Glossy Buckthorn project and efforts to secure funding (see article on pg. 4).

A discussion was held on several issues of concern regarding state and federal actions affecting forest management and community economic stability (see articles on pages 2, 3 & 6).

Board and officer elections resulted in the addition of Dan Weaver (Pres. And Exec. Dir. Of Pennsylvania Independent Oil & Gas Assoc.) to the Board, replacing outgoing Board member Becky Lucia. Officers for 2024—2026 include President: Paul Webster; Vice President: Tyler Martin; Secretary: Amanda Hetrick; and Treasurer: Michelle Bogacki.

Potential programming and events for 2024 were proposed in a handout, tabled until the January Board meeting due to time constraints.

March 2024

Board of Directors

Officers:

Paul Webster—Pres.
Tyler Martin—VP
Amanda Hetrick —Sec.
Michelle Bogacki—Treas.

For a full list of AFA Board Members, please visit our "About" page.

Executive Director:
Julia McCray
814-657-8290
afaexec@gmail.com

Next Meeting:

April 18, 2024
2:30 pm
East Forest School
Marienville, PA.

What's Your Email?

Help us keep you up-to-date on news about the AFA's efforts, calls-to-action, and issues affecting forest health and the economic stability of our communities.

Email is the quickest, most efficient way for us to communicate with you. If you haven't been hearing from us, it's because we don't have your email address, or your provider is blocking our messages as "spam".

Contact our Executive Director (see above right) to join our email list.

Join or Renew Today!

It's time renew your AFA membership. Not a member yet? Join and support our efforts today!
Use the application at the end of this issue or go to our website: www.alleghenyforestalliance.org

Thank you for your support!

Advocacy: Issues and Efforts

NACs: Round #1 Defeated!

In December, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) proposed allowing the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) to **offer the control of American land, ecological processes and resources to elite investors and foreign entities**. A scheme created by the NYSE and a private corporation called the Intrinsic Exchange Group (IEG).

The AFA submitted a comment letter (**see our website**), as did State Rep. Kathy Rapp, State Senator Scott Hutchinson and several local schools, communities, and counties. PA State Treasurer Stacey Garrity and 21 other state treasurers requested an extension of the 21-day comment period. Wyoming Rep. Harriet Hageman attempted to defund the SEC's proposed Rule then wrote a letter to the SEC, signed by 31 members of Congress (including Glenn Thompson), requesting a comment period extension and answers to several probing questions.

The SEC withdrew the proposed Rule on January 17th after 3,986 citizens, legislators, and other elected officials spoke up against this plan. If you commented on the SEC's NAC Rule, we thank you for your efforts!

However, the IEG has revised its message, is seeking the agriculture industry's support, and the New York Times is now **stumping for them**. Also, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a **hearing** on Feb. 15th to **examine the Administration's plan to create "Natural Capital Accounts"**, monetizing natural processes (resources, air, water, etc.) on federal lands. See page 3 to learn about the Bureau of Land Management's plan to allow "conservation easements" on federal lands.

Creating New "Old-Growth"

On December 20th, the USFS published its **Land Management Plan Direction for Old-Growth Forest**, which would direct a system-wide update to 128 forest management plans mandating the creation of more old-growth on every forest.

A total of 5,742 public comments were submitted, including the **AFA's letter of opposition**. One of our many concerns was that this change to all forest plans would lead to centralized National Forest System management, circumventing the local collaborative process for plan updates and amendments. This would leave local stakeholders disenfranchised and suffering losses in timber harvest shared revenues.

In fact, the NFS Deputy Chief "jumped the gun" with a **letter to regional foresters** on Dec. 18th, instructing them to submit all plans for vegetation management projects to him for approval until the old-growth plan direction was approved.

The AFA also teamed up with the Multiple Use Alliance (MUA), a coalition of counties in western states on this issue. We contributed to the cost of and joined in **MUA's comment letter** prepared by an **attorney** experienced in federal land management policy and statutes who has successfully argued before the Supreme Court. AFA could not afford this caliber of legal experience on our own. Our contribution to the legal fees was funded by donations from AFA members, area businesses and organizations, and we thank them for their support!

There will be another comment opportunity in May/June when the Environmental Impact Statement is released. We will issue a notice and provide a template comment letter to edit for your own comments. Make sure we have your email address and be ready to act on this critical issue!

Carbon Capture and Storage on Our Nation's Forests?

Another of three agency proposals published at the end of 2023 was a USFS Rule change to **allow carbon capture and storage of liquid CO_2** beneath our national forests. This would be accomplished by making a specific exception for CO_2 in their policy prohibiting permanent or exclusive use authorizations.

The environmental and human risks associated with CO_2 storage using **injection wells**, the unproven technology, the limits of subsurface capacity and suitability vs ongoing production, **legal issues**, and the politicized "science" being used to support both the need and solutions are all causes for concern.

This is a land use not provided for in the statutes creating our national forests and guiding their management. Like the other NAC and Old-Growth proposals at the end of 2023, it failed to provide adequate notice to stakeholders (national forest host communities and residents) and had a short comment period.

A total of 1,899 comments were submitted. The **AFA's comment letter**, submitted on January 2nd, focused on these issues. It is suspicious that the three proposed actions were issued over the holidays. While there was not time to provide our members and supporters with a comment letter template, we expect there to be an additional comment opportunity. If so, we will send out an alert and provide a template letter for your own comments.

Advocacy: Issues and Efforts

Another Route to NACs? BLM Planning Conservation Leasing

The BLM's April 2023 proposed **Conservation and Landscape Health Rule**, would allow conservation lease proposals to compete for BLM managed lands alongside other lease uses such as water, grazing and drilling. While **BLM** manages very little in the Eastern U.S., it controls 1 in every 10 acres in the U.S. and 30% of the Nation's minerals.

This Rule is one of several (from various agencies) connected through the Administration's desire to "lock-up" public lands from uses they deem to be unsustainable in the name of climate change, while selling control of those lands.

One of our partner organizations, the American Stewards of Liberty and the Multiple Use Alliance, submitted comprehensive comments calling in question the legal authority of BLM to make the proposed changes. It also calls out the agency on attempting to "improperly modify the statutory definition of 'sustained yield' to incorporate 'ecosystem resilience'."

The proposed Rule claims the FLPMA (Federal Land Planning Management Act) gives conservation equal status under "multiple use" and "sustained yield". It defines conservation as "protection and restoration", and allows conservation leases for these purposes as well as "land enhancement" activities.

While the proposal says conservation will not be prioritized above other uses, it also says it will "give priority to the designation and protection of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)" and would modify the criteria for designating areas as ACECs. Additionally, conservation leases would "promote both protection and restoration on the public lands".

This Rule also proposes to allow "**compensatory mitigation**" projects through these leases. For example, atoning for a "permit, right-of-way grant, lease, or other land use authorization" (**i.e. renewable energy project**) on federal lands with **one or more conservation lease projects** elsewhere on those lands. It seems nature will be replaced by wind and solar.

These leases "would not override valid existing rights or preclude other, subsequent authorizations so long as those subsequent authorizations are compatible with the conservation use." So, once "conserved", always "conserved"?

Over 216,400 comments were received on the **Public Lands Rule**, though we don't know how many were against it. The BLM is considering those comments and making changes. The final Rule is expected to be published in late winter 2024.

Join Our Defense Effort!

It was many Americans speaking up and standing together that won the NAC battle. But it's not the end of this one, nor the last we will face. We need your help to continue our efforts to protect our public lands from "green schemes".

Join the AFA today to support our efforts!

Fighting Back on Green Schemes

States are fighting back against NACs, creation of "Natural Capital Accounts", and conservation leases. Nebraska and Kansas have proposed **legislation** that bar:

- NACs forming / operating, conducting business, acquiring assets, easements, or other interests in their state
- Their state and any political subdivision to conduct transactions, investments, or business with NACs
- The sale, lease, or encumbrance of state land to NACs
- Public funds—including state-controlled investments and retirement systems—from engaging with NACs

The AFA is asking the ANF region's State Representatives and Senators to propose and work to pass similar legislation in PA. It's hard to imagine such bills making it to and being signed by Governor Shapiro. But, at the very least, it will raise public awareness and send a message to DC bureaucrats.

Other Advocacy Efforts in 2023

The AFA was busy in 2023 with advocacy efforts. In addition to the NAC, Old-Growth, and Carbon issues, AFA also submitted comment letters for the following ANF projects:

- Porcupine Run (supporting salvage and regeneration, but urging use of non-merchantable large wood for stream additions)
- Madlick (supporting project but urging use of non-marketable large wood for stream additions)
- Invasive Plant and Interfering Vegetation Treatment (supporting plan and 2007 Forest Plan amendments)

We will continue to advocate for common sense policy and legislation relating to the ANF and community interests.

Buckthorn Treatment Project

First proposed at the May 2022 **Allegheny Forest Health Collaborative** (AFHC) meeting, the AFA kicked off the effort to move this Collaborative project forward in December 2022.

The AFA's Amy Shields and John Saf took the lead in mobilizing the AFHC to address this invasive plant. Over the past several months, April Moore, Non-Native Invasive Program Manager for the ANF, has been spearheading the effort to secure funding for the project, preparing multiple grant applications with the help of other AFHC members.

Local land managers say that a successful large-scale treatment project will take at least six years and cost more than $30 million dollars to complete. The treatment cost per acre will be about $300 and it's estimated that 50,000 acres are affected, increasing annually. Other project costs will include scoping, mapping, research, education/outreach, and project management.

Scoping and research will be first, to determine the true extent of the invasive and the private lands to be included. Treatment planning will determine the best methods for this species and when/where treatments will be used. An outreach effort will make the public aware of and educated on the threat this plant poses to our forests. Watch for education event details soon.

A **concept paper** was created to detail the threat posed by Glossy Buckthorn and the AFHC's plan to develop a landscape level strategy to mitigate the spread and gain control of the epicenter of the outbreak in the southeast corner of the ANF.

Looming Budget Cuts?

U.S. Forest Service Chief Randy Moore **posted a letter** to agency employees on Feb. 8th telling them to expect budget cuts from Congress in 2024.

Though federal employees received a 5.2% cost of living adjustment this year, Moore is expecting cut backs. Gaps are expected in salaries, information technology, and other line items.

It's unknown how this predicted budget cut would affect staffing and management activities on national forests. But, a hiring freeze and deferred management/ treatments would be a further setback for ANF health and productivity. The ANF has been struggling to fill staff vacancies and will be offering fewer timber sales this year due to manpower limitations. USFS budget cuts this year mean community budget cuts next year.

ANF Leadership Changes

On February 26th, **Bob Heiar was appointed as the new Acting Forest Supervisor on the ANF**. He replaces Vince Keeler, who was on temporary assignment while Jamie Davidson is serving as Acting Deputy Regional Forester for the Eastern Region.

Heiar enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps after high school, holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry and Recreation Management and a Master of Public Administration degree.

Bob has been with the Forest Service since 2003 in a variety of leadership positions. His first assignment was at the White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire. From 2016 to 2023, Heiar served as the Descanso District Ranger on the Cleveland National Forest in California. He came to the ANF as Deputy Forest Supervisor in July 2023.

While Heiar temporarily fills the role of Forest Supervisor, **Myah Coleman has been named Acting Deputy Forest Supervisor**. She previously served as an appropriations liaison for the Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, a senior legislative affairs specialist for the Transportation Security Administration, a special assistant for the Department of Health and Human Services, and as a legislative advisor for a member of the House of Representatives.

Coleman holds a bachelor's degree in political science and international studies and a Master of Public Administration with a focus on public policy.

Daniele Gualtieri is the new Marienville District Ranger on the ANF, replacing Rob Fallon who retired from the USFS in December of 2023.

Gualtieri was a Naval Photographer for over six years before joining the Army National Guard as a Japanese Linguist stationed in Monterey, California. Before joining the USFS in 2015, she was an English as a second language coordinator and teacher in the Guam Public School System. She has served in several leadership positions in the Forest Service, most recently as the Center Director at the Boxelder Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center in South Dakota. Gualtieri holds a BA in Japanese from San Diego State University and a MA in School Administration and Supervision from the University of Guam.

NEW! AFA Merchandise

Great gifts for friends, family, employees, or colleagues!

Our new line of merchandise is a way you can help us spread our forest stewardship and stable communities messages. It also helps raise awareness of the AFA and the work we do, and helps fund those efforts.

Watch for a new design this Spring that illustrates the differences between managed mature forests and "protected", unmanaged "old-growth" forests. Get your AFA merchandise today and help us spread these messages!

AFA Slogan T-shirt

Design on front
Logo on sleeve

Long-Sleeve 100% Cotton T-Shirts
M—XL$27; 2XL $28; 3XL $29

Buckthorn, WANTED Eradicated T-Shirt

Design on back
Logo on front

Twill Cap $24

Knitted Beanie $22

Buckthorn, WANTED Eradicated Hoodie

M—L—XL $38
2XL $39

Design on back
Logo on front

Order online at: https://allegheny-forest-alliance.square.site/

Or use the order form at the end of this issue.

Forest Health Events

The AFA is beginning to plan two Forest Health events for the Fall of 2024. One for Warren and Forest counties, and another for Elk and McKean counties. Students, elected officials, and residents will be invited.

The first such event was held in 2019 in Warren County. It illustrated the health issues associated with deferred management on the ANF, compared to healthy conditions on a neighboring privately owned stand managed for sustainable timber production.

Part of this year's events will focus on explaining the challenges the ANF staff faces in its management responsibilities today.

Watch for more details in future newsletters.

No Net Loss of Private Land

The AFA has been looking at ways to combat the growing threat of private land loss to public land growth, which is permanently eroding local tax bases.

One tool, on a local level, is for counties to revise their Comprehensive Land Use Plans with data and language that addresses the problem and establishes an opposition to increases in or establishment of new public lands in their county.

Forest County, which is 51% public lands, took this approach in 2013. The **Warren County Planning Commission** is now recommending their County Commissioners do the same. This was prompted by citizen concerns over the transfer by PGE of 2,195 acres in Spring Creek Township to the PGC in a oil-for-land deal. Public lands are 32% of Warren County.

Senator Scott Hutchinson **questioned the PGC** (see minute 45.50 in the linked video) on its land acquisition goals during a recent Game & Fisheries Committee hearing. The AFA has had a discussion with Rep. Kathy Rapp on this topic and will continue to investigate legislative solutions.

Legislation of Interest

PA House Bill 913 (Oct. 2023) - "An act authorizing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the local (excluding counties) government units thereof to preserve, acquire or hold land for open space uses," further providing for local taxing options.

H.R.7054—Carbon Dioxide Removal Leadership Act of 2024 - "To require the Secretary of Energy to remove carbon dioxide directly from ambient air or sea water.

H.R.3397—WEST Act of 2023 - "To require the Director of BLM to withdraw the "**Conservation and Landscape Health**" proposed Rule which prioritizes conservation leases.

H.R.7544 - "To prohibit the conditioning of any permit, lease, or other use agreement on the transfer of any water right to the United States by the Secretary of the Interior and the Sec. of Agriculture.

H.R.6492—EXPLORE Act - "To improve recreation opportunities on, and facilitate greater access to, Federal public land."

H.R.7494—Protect America's Lands Act - "To amend the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 to prohibit exchanges from effecting transactions in securities issued by natural asset companies."

S.3856—Timber Harvesting Restoration Act of 2024 - "To require certain forest supervisors of units of the NFS to submit to the Chief of the Forest Service a harvesting improvement report."

H.R.7424—Renewable Roadsides Act - "To direct the Sec. of Transportation and Sec. of Energy to conduct a study on development of facilities for solar generation, storage, transmission/distribution on Federal land adjacent to the National Highway System.

ANF Project Comment Opportunities: January–March, 2024

Keep informed of and comment on proposed projects on the ANF!

Use the link below to view the current Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) Report for the ANF. **https://www.fs.usda.gov/sopa/forest-level.php?110919**

As we publish this newsletter quarterly, we suggest that you check the SOPA link frequently for updates between issues.

North Kane EA: Vegetation treatments, timber harvest, wildlife habitat improvements, aquatic habitat improvements, non-native invasive plant treatments, transportation activities; McKean County. ***Proposal in development.***

Nationwide Plan Direction for Old-Growth: *See article on page 2.* ***Opportunity to comment on the Environmental Impact Statement is expected sometime in May.***

The Forest Service receives many comments from organizations (and their supporters) who seek to preserve the ANF rather than manage it responsibly for multiple use.

Please add your voice to that of the AFA to balance the scales in public comment opportunities!

See our guide on how to make helpful project comments.

YES, I Share the AFA's Vision!

"Supporting sustainable forestry, environmental stewardship, and multiple-use management of the Allegheny National Forest and other public forestlands in Northwestern Pennsylvania."

Enclosed is my membership contribution* of: □ $50 (individual) □ $100 (professional) □ $250 (business)

□ $1,000 (Major Donor) □ $2,500 (corporate sponsor) □ $_____ (Other)

Name _____ Business/Organization _____

Address _____ City_____ State_____ ZIP_____

Phone (_____) _____ E-mail _____

Mail to: **Allegheny Forest Alliance, P.O. Box 719, Kane, PA 16735**

****AFA is a 501(c)(6) organization. Consult your tax preparer regarding deduction of membership and/or contributions.***

AFA Merchandise Order Form

Indicate number of each size for each product you are ordering.

Item prices include shipping costs. Allow 2 weeks for delivery.

AFA Slogan T-Shirt: ___ Medium ___ Large ___ XL	Total ordered:	___ x $27 each	= $_____
		___ 2XL x $28 each	= $_____
		___ 3XL x $29 each	= $_____
"WANTED" T-Shirt: ___ Medium ___ Large ___ XL	Total ordered:	___ x $27 each	= $_____
		___ 2XL x $28 each	= $_____
		___ 3XL x $29 each	= $_____
"WANTED" Hoodie: ___ Medium ___ Large ___ XL	Total ordered:	___ x $38 each	= $_____
		___ 2XL x $39 each	= $_____
AFA Logo Twill Cap (one size, adjustable back strap)		___ x $24 each	= $_____
AFA Knitted Beanie (one size)		___ x $22 each	= $_____
		ORDER TOTAL	**= $_____**

Name/Business _____

Address _____

City_____ State_____ ZIP_____

Phone (_____) _____ E-mail _____

***Make Check payable to:* Allegheny Forest Alliance**

***Mail to:* AFA Order Processing, 20180 Neilltown Road, Pleasantville, PA 16341**