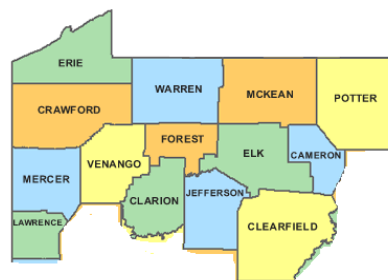




Grant ME#44155546
Year End Report 7/2019 – 6/2020

Mission Statement:

Within the 17 million acres of forested landscape in Pennsylvania lies the Upper Allegheny Plateau, a region recognized worldwide for its high-quality hardwoods. The Allegheny Hardwood Utilization Group, Inc (AHUG) was organized in 1985 for the purpose of promoting this exceptional natural resource asset, and for sustaining and expanding the economic development and employment opportunities within the Pennsylvania forest products industry, with specific emphasis on 14 counties of the Northwest and North Central regions. These counties include Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Potter, Venango and Warren.



Summary:

Program year 2019-2020 was one of change for the Allegheny Hardwood Utilization Group. Long time Executive Director, Susan Swanson retired at the end of 2019 after nearly 20 years of service, and so was at the helm of the organization for the first six months of this program year. She was followed by Amy Shields, former AHUG board member and hardwood industry professional, who began her role as the new Executive Director on January 1, 2020 and led AHUG through the second half of the 2019/2020 fiscal year.

While the first six months of our program year saw the hardwood industry continuing to suffer from the lingering Chinese trade and tariff situation, the very early months of 2020 offered a glimpse of optimism as those tensions began to ease and markets showed signs of improvement. That was soon erased, however, as the COVID-19 pandemic descended upon us and altered the world as we knew it. The remainder of our program year would be heavily dominated by COVID related issues – forcing the cancellation of many important industry events, meetings, trainings and in-person educational programs. But the pandemic also highlighted the significant role that AHUG plays in our region – from working tirelessly alongside industry, legislators and other agencies in an effort to get the hardwood sector back to work in short order following the initial closure of state commerce, to providing new and plentiful opportunities for our industry and our partners to continue their work and their critical communications during this tumultuous time.

AHUG is committed to promoting the economic viability of the full range of hardwood industry manufacturing and ancillary operations, whose continued growth and expansion provide the critical infrastructure essential to the long-term sustainability of the working forest landscape of the Allegheny region. In accomplishing this mission, AHUG focuses its efforts on:

- Marketing & Promotion
- Public Outreach & Education
- Industry Outreach, Support & Training
- Industry Representation
- Research & Development

All of AHUG's services are offered regardless of membership status. As a result, AHUG's activities impacted not only the nearly 100 hardwood companies, industry suppliers, academic and financial institutions, economic development organizations and government agencies who comprise our membership, but also a large number of regional and statewide non-member entities and individuals.

2019/2020 Narrative

Marketing & Promotion:

Promotion of Pennsylvania's hardwood industry and the sustainable management of its natural resources is a fundamental component of the AHUG mission.

- We continue to support the efforts of the Real American Hardwood Promotion Coalition - a collaborative effort of over 25 hardwood associations across the country dedicated to developing a coordinated domestic marketing/information campaign designed to effectively communicate the value, beauty and science-based benefits of real American hardwood products. AHUG's executive director currently serves as a member of the Action Team for this initiative, and was actively engaged during this program year in guiding and disseminating the consumer research that will form the foundation of the messaging and promotion efforts to be set in motion by the Coalition in the upcoming year. Attended the International Woodworking Fair in Atlanta, GA (2019) and the Indiana Hardwood Lumberman's Association trade show in Indianapolis, IN (2020) in support of the RAHPC.
- Participated in Ag Progress Days (2019), manning hardwood booth and interacting with vendors in conjunction with PA Forest Products Association.
- Coordinated with the Hardwoods Development Council, regional economic development partners and industry trade associations to distribute information on trade show opportunities and market leads. A number of important trade events were conducted virtually.
- Participated in the 2019 "Bringing The World To You" trade event, hosted by the Team PA Export Network.
- Increased the social media presence of AHUG by growing Facebook following from nearly zero to over 300 routine followers through weekly postings.

Public Outreach & Education:

AHUG is a principle provider and source of hardwood education for the general public throughout the fourteen-county region. While this area of our program was significantly impacted by COVID-19 in 2020, we accomplished the following:

- AHUG, industry volunteers and the Hardwoods Development Council worked together to present the PA Woodmobile and several Project Learning Tree Programs to approximately 160 elementary students from four school districts in Elk and McKean counties in October, 2019. This brings the total number of students educated through our programming to nearly 17,900.

- Manned the Woodmobile and “Carbon Footprint” educational displays at the PA Farm Show (Jan, 2020) and the Pennsylvania Home Show (Mar, 2020). Spotted Lanternfly information was in high demand at the PA Home Show, as the quarantine area had recently been expanded to include Allegheny and Beaver counties.
- Partnered with the Allegheny Forest Alliance (3/2020) in successfully garnering a \$5,000 matching grant from Lumber Heritage Region to produce an informational video on the history and importance of the Allegheny National Forest. This will be paired with AHUG’s existing hardwood industry video “Forest to Home”, which educates the public on the forest products industry and its relationship to healthy working forests. These will be paired in two high-traffic locations within the AHUG footprint in the coming year.
- AHUG is a member of the PA Project Learning Tree Steering Committee, who worked during this program year on the development of the PA specific module of the PLT resource guide.

Industry Outreach, Support & Training:

Promoting continuous improvement of the hardwood sector and its influencing factors through industry outreach, support and training is key to advancing AHUG’s mission.

- Continued to provide input and engage with landowners (both public and private) in efforts to ensure industry’s continued access to a sustainable supply of the region’s hardwood resources. Important engagements this project year have included the DCNR BOF State Forest Action Plan, Woodland’s Innovation and Strategic Plan Updates.
- Hosted virtual ANF Timber Purchaser’s Meeting, providing the industry with an important opportunity to interact with peers and staff on current timber management activities on the ANF.
- Provided numerous B2B connections and landowner referrals.
- Coordinated First Aid/CPR sessions for Fall SFI Training Schedule.
- Provided ongoing administrative support for the Kinzua Quality Deer Cooperative.
- AHUG coordinated, attended and provided opportunities for industry participation in several meetings related to the Chinese trade and tariff situation – with US Senator Pat Toomey, US Representatives Fred Keller and Glenn Thompson.
- AHUG serves as the Co-Lead for the Allegheny Forest Health Collaborative, joining government and private landowners throughout the region to inform, share best practices and achieve economies of scale in addressing critical forest health issues on the Allegheny Plateau. We also serve specifically on the Communications Committee, which produced and distributed the AFHC 2019 Annual Report. This document facilitates dissemination of information on the progress of the Collaborative’s efforts in addressing forest health issues within the region.

- Coordinated with HDC, HUGS, PSU Extension, PFPA and DCNR in responding to industry concerns on COVID-19. Efforts included an industry needs survey, routine updates on COVID Emergency Relief Programs, and connecting industry to resource providers through direct contact, webinars, email and social media updates.
- Participated in the nationwide five-year review of the US Forest Service Small Business Timber Program.
- AHUG was heavily engaged in priority objectives of the Governor's Green Ribbon Task Force on Forest Products, Conservation and Jobs in 2019/2020 – including Worker's Compensation for Loggers and Working Forest Conservation Easements.
- Attended USDA Spotted Lanternfly seminar in 2020, assisted industry in obtaining online training/permits, and updated industry on expanded quarantine zone and permit requirements.
- Hosted bi-monthly AHUG board meetings and published/distributed quarterly newsletter, Dimensions.
- Participated in numerous webinars to further enhance the AHUG knowledge base and share with industry – including Family Forest Carbon Credit Program, PSU Tick Update, Community Forest Ordinances, Environmental Education Techniques, FISH, IMapInvasives, NEFP Industry Outlook.

Industry Representation:

AHUG's Executive Director held/holds various positions and participates in many endeavors that provide representation for industry input and advancement of the goals and mission of the organization.

- Hardwoods Development Council
- SFI State Implementation Committee, providing coordination and support for the efforts of the PA Sustainable Forestry Initiative.
- North Central Regional Planning/Development's PREP Network
- Lumber Heritage Region
- PSU Ag Advisory Board
- TEAM Pennsylvania's Ag Advisory Board
- Allegheny Forest Alliance
- ANF Resources Advisory Council (on use of Title III funds)
- Roach Bauer Forestry Forum / Sandy Cochran Memorial Scholarship Committee
- Attended various legislative interaction events on behalf of regional industry

Research & Development:

- AHUG has partnered with the ANF Research Station and the University of Missouri on a Birch regeneration study, funded through the Pennsylvania Farm Bill's Commonwealth Specialty Crop Grant program, designed to better understand the prolific nature of Birch regen in PA and its potential application in other species.
- AHUG has worked with the HDC and HUGS to apply for funding to support a Pennsylvania Value Chain Map study, which will strengthen understanding of the full extent of and impact of the hardwood industry in PA.

Events that were planned but cancelled due to COVID:

A number of important regional industry related events had been fully planned and later cancelled due to COVID-19. A significant amount of time and resources were devoted to these efforts, and while they can not be claimed as achievements within the scope of this year's program report – most of these are now “shelf ready” programs that we hope to accomplish in the coming year:


- The Kane Area Logger's Safety Committee was set to host its 52nd Annual Spring Safety Meeting in April, 2020. Programs developed around worker's compensation and mobile applications for the logging community.
- AHUG was prepared to host the 22nd annual Women In Timber Luncheon, with Holly Komoncz, Executive Director of the Lumber Heritage Region, as guest speaker.
- AHUG's largest Project Learning Tree presentation of the year, which normally hosts 400 students in Warren County, PA was cancelled.
- The Roach Bauer Forestry Forum spring meeting was planned for April, 2020 with the PA Game Commission scheduled to present on the topic of CWD.
- The Spring meeting of the Allegheny Forest Health Collaborative provides an important opportunity for landowners across the region to discuss upcoming timber management / land treatment plans. Doing so assists them in sharing best practices, achieving economies of scale in herbicide/pesticide treatments and promotes effective landscape level planning for forest health.








Amy Shields, Susan Swanson & Wayne Bender celebrate Sue's retirement

Develop Brand

Real American Hardwood can differentiate from substitutes:



-  Healthy
-  Natural
-  Lifetime Value
-  Aesthetically Authentic
-  Sustainable

A “sneak peek” at the Real American Hardwood logo and brand messaging



AHUG hosts industry and US Senator Pat Toomey in Sheffield, PA to discuss trade issues



AHUG board member, Scott Weikart – PSU Extension, shares his knowledge with students