

The Link

Newsletter | March 2026



From the Desk of HMA's President

by Matthew Netterville
President, HMA



It's hard to believe it's been two years since I took over the presidency of HMA. It has been an honor doing so, and as I've said many times, it's been a bucket list item for me personally. I am proud of what we have accomplished and I am pleased to report that HMA has a strong membership and continues to be strong financially. HMA has continued to do the things we do best: our Regional meetings and mill

tours, National Conference, industry collaborations, as well as our consumer promotion through hardwoodinfo.com and architect and designer education through CEUs.

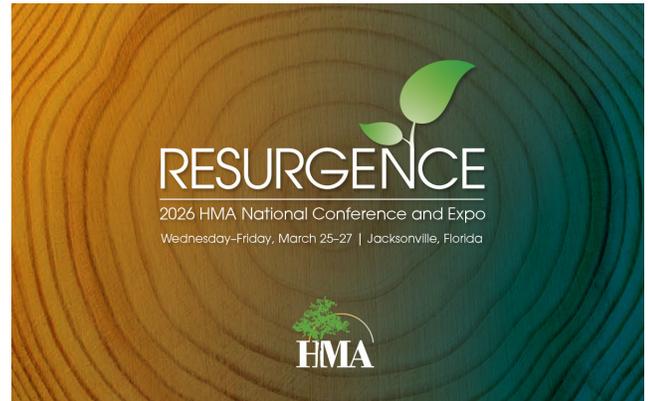
I hope that our industry can stand together and promote our products to continue being a strong, historic industry. We must all keep open minds of how to accomplish this. HMA is always listening on what we can do better to serve our members.

As I wind down this time in leadership of HMA, I remember what all HMA means to me:

- The networking that I have been given by being a part of HMA has more value to me than I could ever explain. Being able to have friendships with different people all over the country has been so important to me and my businesses.
- Education from Regional Meetings and tours; I never leave a meeting without taking something back home with me and using it at my own operations. And it's typically something so simple that it's crazy that I never thought of it.
- Educational sessions at our National Conference. Ian always puts together an overly impressive itinerary.

As our National Conference in Jacksonville, Florida, approaches, March 25-27, the theme of *Resurgence* comes to life. What's a better title for a fresh, new year than this? Our industry truly needs a resurgence and I invite you all to come attend, learn, and hopefully take back useful information to your team and build forward.

Once again, thank you for allowing me to be your president and I hope to see you all in Jacksonville.



Conference Registration

Join HMA members, non-members, and the industry's top suppliers in Jacksonville for educational learning sessions, excellent networking opportunities, and of course, to spend a few days of winter in sunny Florida.

Registration is quick and easy online at HMAmembers.org.

- HMA and SCMA members, and promotion contributor registration is \$650.
- Non-member registration is \$800.

Use promo code **NatCon2026** to receive a **\$50 discount**.

Hotel Reservations

Spend some time on the scenic river at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront (225 E Coastline Dr, 32202).

Rooms are available at a discounted rate of \$199/night. Book your stay at tiny.cc/natcon2026 or call **800.233.1234** and mention group code G-HWMA.

Limited rooms are available, so book your stay today!



RESURGENCE

2026 HMA National Conference and Expo

Wednesday–Friday, March 25–27 | Jacksonville, Florida



NatCon Learning Session Previews



Importance of ITR Economics' Outlook for 2026 and Early 2027

Michael Feuz, Economist & Senior Consulting Speaker at ITR Economics, will be with us to provide insights to help decision makers anticipate and navigate the complex economic landscape that lies ahead. Given that ITR has leading indicators that are already suggesting that the mild

business cycle rising trend that will be present at the start of 2026 will potentially fade for some industries during the second half of the year and on into 2027, it is crucial for businesses to stay informed and be proactive.

Furthermore, the ability to anticipate weak periods and set plans to act accordingly can be the deciding factor between merely surviving or thriving. As industries face varying impacts, specific insights into which sectors are more likely to falter will be invaluable to business owners.

Navigating the Steps to Secure Your Business' Future

The hardwood industry is an historic one with generational family businesses. But as one generation prepares to transition into retirement, what happens when the next one doesn't plan on continuing the family's legacy? Do you look to sell or set up a new company structure? How do you determine the true value of your business as you take the next steps in succession planning?



Melissa Bizyak, Partner – Business Valuation & Litigation Support Services, Grossman Yanak & Ford LLP, will be with us to discuss these topics and more.

Cyber Security: Are You Covered?

In the ever-increasing digital business world that we live in, businesses in all industries face constant threats from hackers—and they're getting more sophisticated by the day. Does your business have the proper cyber insurance to help you recover from a loss?



Woody Stanchina, Vice President, National Forest Products Practice for Marsh McLennan Agency, will discuss the cyber risk landscape, common threats, real life examples of claim scenarios, and how your business can defend itself. He also will share risk management and prevention strategies to help mitigate an event before it can happen, insurance solutions, and have a Q&A.

Hardwoods in the Heartland: Bridging the Gap Between Farm Policy and the Hardwood Industry

There's a lot going on in our Nation's Capital—and perhaps the most pressing issues for the hardwood industry relate to the ongoing trade wars. Are there any prospects of relief for struggling companies?

With us will be **Dana Lee Cole**, Executive Director of the Hardwood Federation, and **John Weber**, Principal at Monument Advocacy. Together, they will brief the audience on a developing strategy the team is working on to provide federal relief to agricultural and rural industries—including hardwood—that's being administered by the USDA and discussed by Congress.



NatCon Learning Session Previews



The AI Revolution

Artificial intelligence is moving from concept to production reality in hardwood manufacturing.

Patrick Lepage, Technical Sales Director for Technologies at Comact, will be with us to explore how the company's AI-powered TrimExpert, Smart Vision, and integrated robotics are transforming defect

detection, trim decisions, and board handling. By combining advanced vision systems, real-time decision algorithms, and automated execution, mills can increase grade recovery, improve consistency, and reduce reliance on manual intervention. Join us to understand how mills can adopt these high technologies step by step.

The Backbone of American Infrastructure: How the Hardwood Industry Can Better Support the Railroads

Ask any HMA member and they'll tell you that the market for grade lumber continues to be a challenging one for mills. Is there a brighter outlook for industrial products, like railway ties? One thing's for sure, America's railroads have historically run on hardwood. Hardwoods still have many applications on railroads today beyond cross-ties, such as switch-ties, signal ties, switch machine ties, road crossings, diamond crossings, yard retarder ties and bridges. What are the railroads looking for from hardwood tie producers?



We will welcome members of the Railway Tie Association (RTA) to NatCon for a panel discussion to share perspectives directly from the railroads. Join us to hear from **Michael Skeen** and **Kristine Storm**, railroaders and longtime members of RTA's Executive Committee, alongside Executive Director **Nate Irby** as moderator (pictured left to right).

Unlocking Grant Opportunities Through the U.S. Forest Service Wood Innovations Program

Federal and state grants continue to play a vital role in supporting innovation and infrastructure in the hardwood manufacturing industry. In his presentation, Jozana Grant Services' CEO **Joel Dulin** will introduce attendees to the U.S. Forest Service's Wood Innovations program, highlighting the three primary grants that make up the program: the Wood Innovations Grant, the Community Wood Energy Grant, and the Wood Products Infrastructure Assistance Grant. Joel will share practical insight into what each grant supports, how the application process works, and what evaluators are looking for in successful submissions.



Drawing on 8.5 years of experience in the wood manufacturing industry, Joel will present real-world examples of successful projects and offer actionable tips for crafting competitive applications. He will also provide insider knowledge on how to position a project to align with U.S. Forest Service priorities and increase the likelihood of funding.

Beyond the Wood Innovations program, Joel's presentation will explore the broader landscape of grant and incentive opportunities available to the hardwood sector. Attendees will learn about other federal programs, state-level funding initiatives, and select private foundation grants that are relevant to hardwood manufacturers.

Throughout the session, clear and accessible language will be used to explain eligibility, funding structures, and program goals. Attendees will leave with a deeper understanding of how to leverage public and private funding to support business growth and innovation in the hardwood industry.

Stop by the NatCon Expo

In addition to thought-provoking learning sessions, HMA's National Conference is well known for the opportunities to network and visit with the industry's leading suppliers during our receptions and Vendor Expo Café. Spend time visiting with our exhibitors and learn about their products, technologies, and solutions that will help improve your company's operations—and bottom line.

Thank You to Our National Conference and Expo Sponsors

Before we head down to Jacksonville for HMA's 2026 National Conference and Expo, we'd like to give a shoutout to the generous companies who have stepped up as sponsors.

Your extra financial support is truly appreciated and enables us to offset the costs of HMA's signature event

Thank you, all!



CONTINENTAL
UNDERWRITERS



Golfers, Last Call to Hit the Greens in the Sunshine State

We're days away from HMA's fourth annual National Conference Golf Tournament, which will take place at **Bent Creek Golf Course, Wednesday, March 25**. The course's championship layout takes golfers through a certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary with towering trees, creeks, and swales.

Sign up today and get some fresh air with your industry colleagues! Tee times begin at 9:15 am. The cost is \$100 for golf, cart rental, and lunch. Limited spots are available. Register at HMAmembers.org.

Sponsorships also are available! Funds raised will support the work of the Hardwood Federation.



Shout Out to Our Sponsors



The Latest from Capitol Hill

by Dana Lee Cole

Executive Director, Hardwood Federation



USDA Announces Forest Products Grant Program Funding

The U.S. Forest Service **announced** that applications are being accepted for their Wood Innovations, Community Wood, and Wood Products Infrastructure Assistance grant programs.

Priority will be given to proposals that support crucial links between

resilient, healthy forests, strong rural economies, and jobs in the forestry sector. Funding will support projects that develop innovative wood products; increase the use of wood in commercial and residential construction; expand wood energy programs; and modernize, retrofit or increase capacity of wood products manufacturing facilities.

Eligible applicants include businesses and for-profit entities, Tribes, local and state governments, institutions of higher education, and public utility, fire, conservation, and school districts. For more information on this funding announcement, visit the Forest Service Wood Innovations **webpage**.

Section 122 Impacts on Wood

Following the Supreme Court's decision to strike down the Trump Administration's tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, the President and his team moved swiftly to announce a 10% temporary import duty (which is anticipated to go to 15%) under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 which will remain in place until July 24, 2026. Forest Economic Advisors summarized how wood products from Canada are impacted by these changes as compared to other countries in a **recent article** including helpful charts detailing which tariffs apply and duty rates. Key points from the article include:

- Lumber is subject to Section 232 and therefore is not subject to Section 122.
- Canadian plywood, OSB, engineered lumber, and mass timber products that are USMCA compliant—which covers nearly all Canadian production—are not subject to Section 122.
- Offshore plywood, OSB, engineered lumber, and mass timber products are subject to Section 122 because they are neither USMCA compliant nor covered by Section 232.

House Ag Committee Passes Farm Bill

On March 4, the House Agriculture Committee marked up and reported the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026. The Committee vote was 34–17, with 7 Democrats joining all Republicans on the committee to pass the legislation.

Several Hardwood Federation priorities are in the marked up bill, including renewals for the Wood Innovation and Community Wood grant programs, job training dollars for the wood products industry, and codification of biomass as a carbon neutral source of energy.

Also notable during the mark-up process were comments made by Chairman GT Thompson noting the importance of the U.S. hardwood industry and his work to secure economic relief dollars for the sector. While the legislation received bipartisan support in committee, its future is uncertain as it moves forward in the legislative process. Margins in the House are extremely tight and there is little interest in bipartisan cooperation.

Biomass as a Renewable Fuel

The Hardwood Federation and a number of other hardwood associations and companies signed a **letter** to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lee Zeldin advocating for modernizing the treatment of woody biomass under the national Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS) so that liquid fuels derived from forest biomass could qualify under the mandate.

The current definition disqualifies virtually all fuel from woody biomass from eligibility. Under the existing statute enacted in 2007, only trees sourced from plantations growing on land cleared prior to December 19, 2007 (date of enactment) would qualify. Fiber from federal land is also not eligible, nor is any slash from private land that may include whole trees. Sawmill residuals also face eligibility challenges if the sawmill owner cannot trace all the fiber back to qualifying tree plantations.

The letter was led by the National Alliance of Forest Owners. Forest landowner advocates are looking to move biomass definitional language as part of a broader effort underway by ethanol advocates to extend E-15 blended gasoline sales year-round. We will keep you apprised of developments.

Hardwood Federation Boards of Directors Prepare for 2026

by Dana Lee Cole

Executive Director, Hardwood Federation

On Monday, February 2, 2026, members of the 2026 **Hardwood Federation Board of Directors** and the **Hardwood Federation PAC Board of Directors** met in Indianapolis. Both Boards reviewed 2025 political advocacy and engagement activities as well as fundraising, outreach, and administrative efforts.

A top priority for the Hardwood Federation boards and staff in 2025 was our effort to persuade the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide relief to the industry due to losses caused by trade and economic uncertainties. The Boards received a full update of progress, current status, and plans to move forward. Establishing a legislatively approved funding program and mechanism for hardwood producers was never viewed as an easy task...nor one that would happen overnight.

The Federation staff and our partners and Monument Advocacy have worked closely with members of the industry, USDA officials, and Congressional leaders to craft language earmarking funds for a hardwood specific program that would be included in the greater agriculture financial support package currently under consideration in the Senate. These funds would be outside of the funds announced by the Trump Administration in December (Farmer Bridge Payments). The first \$11 billion of the \$12 designated were earmarked primarily for row crops. The remaining \$1 billion was recently allocated to specialty crops with existing programs. We are pushing to be included in a Senate-proposed additional \$15 billion to support the agriculture community.

We have cleared the first hurdle...getting agreement on language and securing champions in both the House and Senate. This has required compromising with both the Administration and Congress on scope and intent, but never on commitment to long term viability of the industry.

The next challenge is ensuring our language is included in the larger package (as noted above, currently projected at \$15 billion) and that the funding remains in any legislation that moves forward. This will be our focus in the first months of 2026 and potentially for the greater part of the year depending on how fast Congress decides to act. There is significant competition for relief funding from multiple agricultural sectors, including softwood producers and landowners, but we are continuing to make the point that hardwood companies are facing unprecedented challenges on multiple fronts and action is needed to ensure the viability of the industry

and those they employ. Although we have made significant progress, nothing is assured, but we will remain laser focused on this very important issue for the industry.

Establishing a program will give the industry a long-term relief mechanism that can be adapted and refunded to meet future needs. If we are successful, it is important to remember that it will be one more step in a continuing journey...not the end. Once a program is established, it puts to bed the historic argument that there is no "easy way" to trigger relief and that there is no precedent for helping processors. What we are attempting is certainly not easy, but as we all know, few worthwhile things are.

The Hardwood Federation is incredibly grateful to the companies and industry leaders that have signed letters, sent e-mails, written op-eds, called their members of Congress, and provided our D.C. team with support and guidance. We anticipate there will be a continuing need for the industry to engage and reach out. Stay tuned for our next call to action!

In addition to the above, the Federation Board members reviewed other policy priorities for 2026 including increased truck weights through the reauthorization of the Transportation Bill, increased use of hardwoods in the built environment, supporting revisions to the Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS) to include woody biomass, and potential for passing a 2025 Farm Bill. The Farm Bill is particularly important and it provides funding for essential wood products initiatives including Wood Innovation Grants and Wood Energy programs. See the below articles for more information on Transportation, the RFS and Farm Bill. The Boards also discussed fundraising and budget needs for both the Federation and the HFPAC in 2026, including how current industry challenges impact these efforts. As always, we will keep you updated as the process unfolds.



Strengthening Your Sales Culture

by Tony Cimorelli

Director of Marketing and Communications, The Baillie Group

All of us in the hardwood lumber industry know that generating new revenue is a top priority.

From our experience we have found that to achieve this, companies need to foster a **thriving sales culture** composed of skilled and experienced salespeople.

Internally we count on our Hardwood Lumber Traders, a.k.a. our sales team, to keep our lumber moving, our customers happy, and our pipeline of sales opportunities growing. So, we are continuously looking for ways to improve and strengthen the sales culture they operate in so they can have the best chance of flourishing.

Recently, we started focusing on a few key areas in an attempt to build (or bolster) our sales culture. Maybe one of these thoughts would be helpful to you.

Manage to Clear-cut Goals

There should be nothing “murky” about what’s expected of the sales team. Sales managers should practice open communications about the company’s goals and frequently review and update those goals as circumstances demand. Engaging in regular team meetings and ensuring that the sales team is aligned with other departments (sawmills, yards, traffic, marketing, etc.) helps tip the odds of success in your favor.

Practice Transparency and Provide a Sense of Purpose

A growing sales culture depends upon transparency. Open communication between departments helps to ensure alignment and drives a sense of purpose within the team that can help your salespeople remain committed to high-level of customer satisfaction while also meeting the objectives of the company.

Recognize and Reward Sales Achievements

Like any other employee, members of your sales team want to be recognized for their hard work.

“Some people are motivated by tangible incentives, but most of us also appreciate the opportunity to be recognized,” notes Swifftree. It’s up to management to build a sales culture “where people know that their accomplishments will be seen, and **your top earners will stick around.**”

Keep Producing Value-added Sales Content They Can Use

A key element of the sales process is enabling prospects to find you and familiarize themselves with your company’s offerings. Many times, this surfaces as content you provide on your website, blogs, social media posts, case studies, and so on. Keep your sales team armed with new, fresh, relevant content to help them share the benefits of doing business with your company.

Be Smart with the Hiring Process

A sales team comprised of only novice or under-performing members is unlikely to achieve a company’s sales goals. That’s why taking a smart approach to hiring is so essential. “**Use a structured hiring process.**” advises Fresh Perspective Sales. “Assess candidates with online tests, pre-screened calls, role plays, and case studies of actual sales situations you face.” A systematic approach is usually more conducive to achieving success in hiring (and training) talented salespeople.

Strong communications, transparency, straightforward goals, and support from department leaders all contribute to a sales culture that will grow and prosper in the years to come.

What else have you found to be helpful as you have been strengthening your sales culture?



The Link is published each month exclusively for members of the Hardwood Manufacturers Association. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the HMA; HMA staff welcomes comments and questions.

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