

The Link

Newsletter | July 2026



Building a Stronger Industry

by Ian Faight

Executive Vice President, HMA



The month of June may have flown by, but it was full of surprises. If you already peeked at the graphic on the right, you may noticed that we've had a slight change of plans as we look forward to 2027. With that said, I'm pleased to announce that the HMA's 2027 National Conference and Expo will be heading to Savannah, Georgia, **Monday-Wednesday, March 22-24.**

Our home away from home during our stay in "The Hostess City of the South" will be The DeSoto. Located in the historic district, the charming, luxury hotel is perfectly situated to provide attendees with plenty of dining and shopping options, as well as one-of-a-kind tours and a vibrant night life.

More details on registration, hotel reservations, vendor and supplier exhibit opportunities, and available sponsorships will be announced this fall, so keep a look out in your inbox and mailbox. In the meantime, mark your calendar and save the dates.

And while March may seem far away, there's a lot of behind-the-scenes work that goes into planning our National Conference. If you'd like to take part in the action and share your thoughts and provide input to help shape HMA's signature event, please plan on attending our NatCon Planning Call on Tuesday, July 28. You can read more details on the right, or feel free to send me an email at ian@hardwood.org.

Before closing out this month's column, I have one more item to bring to your attention, and that's HMA's Fall Regional Meeting. Details are coming together quickly, so keep an eye open for more information on location, tour sites, registration, and hotel reservations by month's end.

I hope you all are making the most of summer and enjoying some fun in the sun. That's all for now.

Sign Up for HMA's 2027 National Conference Planning Call

HMA's 2027 National Conference and Expo is set for Monday-Wednesday, March 22-24, at The DeSoto in Savannah, Georgia. Now before we get there, we're counting on your participation in our National Conference Planning Call to provide input on potential learning session topics, our event theme, schedule format, and ways we can provide you with a valuable experience in Savannah.

The call will take place on **Tuesday, July 28,** 10-11 am, on Zoom. Join the conversation to talk about business conditions, and let us know what information you need to improve your business, what challenges you're facing, and solutions you've successfully implemented. Your input matters!

If you'd like to participate or share your thoughts in advance, send an email to info@hardwood.org. We'll make sure you receive the call details.



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Welcoming Geoff Nelson to the HMA Staff



The Hardwood Manufacturers Association (HMA) recently named Geoff Nelson as its new marketing and communications director.

In his position, Geoff's primary responsibilities will be developing HMA communications, preparing website and social media content, and working closely on American hardwoods consumer promotion

and professional education initiatives. In addition, he will assist in updating member company and contact records, as well as meeting planning and execution.

"I'm excited to welcome Geoff to our staff," said Ian Faight, executive vice president of the HMA.

"His background in education, collaborative spirit, energy, and creativity will be valuable assets to our Association as we strive to offer more services and benefits to our members, and engage in promotion and education initiatives to increase markets for the

world's greatest natural, renewable, and sustainable resource: American hardwoods."

Geoff is new to the hardwood industry, having spent the last 12 years working in higher education, primarily campus recreation and sports information. Prior to joining the HMA staff, he worked at Seminole State College of Florida as the Coordinator of Recreational Sports, Interim Athletic Director, and Adjunct Professor, where he offered high-quality programming and prepared students for their next steps in life.

In his free time, Geoff is a collector of hobbies and master of none. He enjoys reading, writing, gaming, reviewing movies, trivia nights, and working out. His favorite author is Michael Crichton, and his favorite movie is *Back to the Future*.

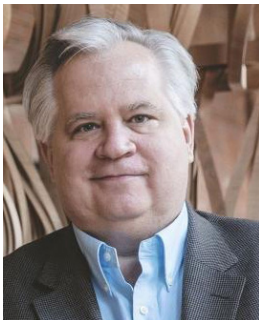
Geoff holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Master of Arts in International Affairs from the University of North Georgia.

Reach out to Geoff at geoff@hardwood.org.

American Hardwood Assured Innovation Set to Deliver Full EUDR Conformance for U.S. Hardwoods

by Mike Snow

Executive Director, American Hardwood Export Council



Recent innovation in American Hardwood Assured (AHA) analysis of remote sensing data across the hardwood producing regions of the U.S. strongly suggests that the platform will—after all—be able to deliver full conformance to the EUDR. We are increasingly confident of being able to deliver a technical fix that will allow AHA to deliver harvest site geolocations,

alongside—or instead of—county geolocations, without adding significant complexity, or cost, to the users. That confidence arises from the fact that we now have access to:

- by far the best technical team available to deal with this issue in the U.S. hardwood sector—combining deep knowledge of U.S. hardwood forests, supply chains, and data sources; with AI, expert risk assessment, and verification procedures.
- a lot more processing power, greatly improved AI, higher resolution satellite data covering a wider range of spectral bands, and improved procedures for analysis and ground truthing than three years ago when we first embarked on this journey.

The AHA platform already being widely used by hardwood exporters precisely quantifies the risk of deforestation at county level in the 37 U.S. hardwood producing states. The primary data source for this assessment is the USDA Cropland Data Layer (CDL), which provides a high-resolution map of the distribution of the full range of agricultural crops and forest types across the U.S. The CDL, which is updated once a year, itself draws on NASA Landsat and European Space Agency Sentinel-2 satellite data supplemented by extensive ground truthing undertaken by USDA. Over the last three years, AHA's technical team has built an AI procedure that precisely quantifies changes to the CDL from one year to the next in all hardwood producing counties, thereby providing a very accurate measure of the risk of forest conversion to agriculture. This has been supplemented by the Expert Eye, AHA's own truthing tool, which allows forest experts to readily and systematically examine areas of dispute using extremely high-resolution satellite imagery. The results from the Expert Eye analysis are in turn used as "training data" for the AI, further improving the accuracy of AHA's deforestation risk analysis.

Continued on next page.

This increasingly accurate county-level deforestation risk assessment is fundamental to the AHA system. It is proving to be technically the most appropriate in the specific context of U.S. hardwood. It also is legally the most appropriate, as it avoids conflict with private property rights in the U.S., alongside other challenging issues of data protection, commercial confidentiality, and proportionality in a sector which is demonstrably negligible risk at jurisdictional and landscape levels. *However, despite the **strong technical and legal case** AHEC has presented to the EU authorities for provision of county-level geolocation, the EU has remained resistant to making any changes to the EUDR legal text or guidelines to acknowledge this approach.*

For this reason, AHA has continued, behind the scenes, to pursue the option of a technical solution. Until now, we have not been sufficiently confident of the outcome of this extraordinary technical work to make an announcement. There are profound challenges to using satellite data to accurately identify often very small-scale, low intensity harvests in innumerable small properties distributed across 150 million hectares of hardwood forest, and differentiating harvests from natural disturbance. No technical service provider has yet been able to deliver anything close to this at scale and at achievable cost in the U.S. hardwood sector.

However, the accumulating experience of the AHA team combined with recent accelerating advances in AI, processing power, and public access to satellite data, are bringing this objective within reach. AHA's technical team now believes it could be possible to accurately identify a significant number of points of harvest within each county by way of an integrated analysis of multiple publicly accessible satellite data sources. Initial tests have proved positive and a full analysis will be run over the summer.

If successful, this would mean that points of harvest (for harvests under 4 hectares) and polygons (for larger harvests), could be supplied as part of the AHA Statement. The workflow would remain unchanged for users of the AHA Platform, who would continue to identify the counties of harvest, as now. However, each county polygon would be substituted by the geolocations of all harvest sites identified in that county. Each geolocation would be "within a single real estate property," thereby fully conformant to the text of EUDR. At the same time, there would no need to supply any information about individual property owners, thereby avoiding potential conflict with data protection laws and private property rights issues.

In June, we had the first opportunity to add the points of harvest element to our presentation of AHA to the Belgian Competent Authority (CA). Whereas in previous meetings with Competent Authorities there had always been acknowledgement that the AHA platform clearly demonstrated legality and negligible risk of deforestation, we were told it lacked data in the correct format to be fully compliant. In front of the Belgian CA, we were clear that our claim of negligible risk always will be determined by the jurisdictional county analysis, but we believe we also could provide points of harvest. We made it clear we would not be providing every single harvest, but that over time, the system would learn to identify harvests more accurately. The head of the Belgian CA said "his first impression of AHA is a very good one, and it seems to be EUDR compliant." At no stage in the 1.5-hour meeting did anyone from the CA team question AHA compliance to EUDR.

The next step once the initial work is complete will be to present our findings and the amended approach to the whole industry in an online workshop at the beginning of September.

This will then give a few months for the new versions of the AHA statements to be entered into the TRACES system by EU importers so we can solicit feedback and ensure compliance. If U.S. hardwoods can achieve full compliance by January 2027, then we believe it will protect our existing market in the EU and create new opportunities.



American Hardwoods: Sustainable and Natural

by Geoff Nelson

Marketing and Communications Director, HMA

In a recent article discussing [*10 Trends Shaping the Future of Architecture in 2026*](#), sustainability and the use of natural building materials were highlighted as two of the most influential forces shaping the built environment. As architects, designers, and consumers continue to prioritize environmentally responsible construction, American hardwoods are uniquely positioned at the intersection of both trends. As a renewable, natural resource with a low embodied carbon footprint, hardwood products offer an effective way to meet both design and sustainability goals.



The sustainability of American hardwoods is well documented. Decades of sustainable forest management practices and ongoing research have shown that hardwood forests in the United States continue to regenerate and expand, while supplying material for a wide range of products. When harvested responsibly, hardwood products serve as long-term carbon storage, retaining the carbon captured by trees throughout their growth cycle—even as younger trees continue to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This cycle of growth, harvest, and regeneration creates a renewable material stream that contributes to a healthier carbon balance.

The environmental benefits of hardwood products become even more apparent when evaluating embodied carbon. Embodied carbon refers to the total greenhouse gas emissions associated with a material's extraction, manufacturing, transportation, installation, maintenance, and eventual disposal. As the construction industry works to reduce its environmental impact, designers are increasingly examining these lifecycle emissions when selecting materials. Wood products consistently demonstrate lower embodied carbon than many traditional building materials. Studies show that wood products can generate significantly fewer greenhouse gas emissions than concrete or steel, while also serving as a carbon sink throughout their useful life.

The growing interest in natural building materials is being driven by both market demand and environmental responsibility. Designers and consumers are more aware than ever of the environmental consequences of construction and are actively seeking solutions that reduce resource consumption and carbon emissions. At the same time, architects are embracing materials that support biophilic design principles, creating spaces that foster a stronger connection to nature through the use of authentic, natural elements. Real American Hardwood's warmth, texture, and aesthetic versatility make it a natural choice for projects seeking both environmental performance and occupant well-being.

As sustainability standards continue to evolve and embodied carbon becomes a more significant factor in project evaluation, American hardwoods offer a compelling solution. Combining renewable sourcing, carbon storage, design flexibility, and timeless beauty, hardwood products align with the architectural priorities that are expected to define the industry well beyond 2026. Rather than being an emerging trend, the use of responsibly sourced American hardwoods represents a proven approach to creating buildings and dwellings that are both environmentally responsible and visually enduring.

To learn more, read [*10 Trends Shaping the Future of Architecture in 2026*](#) by Carter Hartung of Vectorworks.



American Hardwoods™

HMA Promotion \$s at Work

Visit HardwoodInfo.com for more educational content to share with your audiences and potential customers. Editorial features like ***American Hardwoods: Sustainable and Natural*** are posted regularly.

To learn more about the American Hardwood Information Center's promotion and education initiatives, reach out to info@hardwood.org.

The Latest from Capitol Hill

by Dana Lee Cole

Executive Director, Hardwood Federation



Sign On Opportunity: EUDR Letter to President Trump

The EU Parliament recently approved the U.S.-EU trade deal, which includes a provision on bilateral U.S.-EU discussions on the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). Following-up on passage, Andrew Puzder, U.S.

Ambassador to the EU, **published an op-ed** calling for fundamental EUDR reform.

In order to further to convey U.S. forest industry support for removing the unnecessary burdens the EUDR will place on the U.S. forestry supply chain, the National Alliance of Forest Owners is preparing a letter to President Trump, urging his administration to seek improvements to the EUDR in forthcoming discussions with the EU and is sharing industry wide for support. Mike Snow and the AHEC team have reviewed the letter and are supportive.

Click here if you would like to sign on to this letter. The deadline for sign-on is Friday, July 24. Feel free to circulate this letter to your industry peers to help us gather as many signatures as possible.

Senate Releases Farm Bill Text

In June, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee Chairman John Boozman (R-AR) released draft text of his legislation reauthorizing the Farm Bill. The Chairman hopes to markup the bill prior to the August Congressional recesses. The bill largely mirrors the House-passed product (the Farm, Food and National Security Act—H.R. 7567) that was approved April 30 and includes a number of Federation policy priorities. Among them are:

- Reauthorization of the Wood Innovation and Community Wood Grant programs. On WIG, the bill reduces the non-federal dollar for dollar matching requirement to 50%. It also updates priorities for grants to include the use or retrofitting of existing sawmill facilities, the enhancement of carbon reduction strategies and resilience and economic benefits associated with wood products.
- Amends the Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) program to specifically include forestry and forest products. This language essentially captures the Jobs in the Woods Act (JWA), which would provide grants of between \$500,000 and \$2 million to stand up job training and career pathway programs tailored to careers in sawmilling, logging, or other forestry and forest

products sector jobs. RISE is structured similarly to JWA, but does not include our sector. This language rectifies that situation and will provide needed workforce development assistance for mills.

- Includes a binding biomass carbon neutrality provision requiring the Department of Agriculture to assign a greenhouse gas emissions factor of no more than zero to any policy related to combustion of forest-based biomass for energy. The Federation, working with our value chain partner, hopes to expand upon this provision to include an “all of government” approach to this important and legally binding language.
- Reauthorizes the Bioenergy Program for Advanced Biofuels through 2031. This direct payment program that incentivizes wood pellet production as “advanced biofuel” is defined in the law as including wood pellets. Producers simply report their tonnage to USDA on a quarterly basis and receive fairly lucrative payments.
- The bill updates the Forest Service’s Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program to improve national forest data collection and requires, as a data collection method, a timber products output survey and woodland owner survey. The language requires USDA to annually report inventory and analysis of timber within our national forests. Finally, the bill establishes an expert “Blue Ribbon” panel to review FIA to evaluate its effectiveness and provide recommendations for improvement.

The Federation will continue to work on passage of a final Farm Bill.

Rep. Rose Amendment Supporting US Hardwood

Following the meeting with industry leaders during the Hardwood Federation Fly-In, Rep. John Rose (R-TN) submitted an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 8800) directing the Secretary of Agriculture, in coordination with the U.S. Trade Representative, to submit a report to Congress within one year on the importance of the domestic hardwood industry to supply chain resilience, transportation networks, and rail infrastructure, as well as key threats to its long-term viability. This builds upon the work the Federation did a few years ago to ensure that U.S. red oak was approved by the Department of Defense for use in military truck beds. We will work with the Rose team as they move forward.

Hardwood Industry Makes its Voice Heard in D.C.

by Dana Lee Cole

Executive Director, Hardwood Federation

The Hardwood Federation wrapped up another successful Fly-In to D.C. on June 10. Sixty-five industry representatives conducted nearly 100 meetings with Members of Congress, Hill staff, and key members of the Trump Administration.

Members of the Hardwood Federation came in a bit early on Tuesday, June 9, and participated in meetings with Administration officials at the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the US Trade Representative (USTR).

These were excellent opportunities to focus on specific Hardwood priorities, including the pending economic relief package in the Senate. We also made sure to ask that hardwood lumber be included in upcoming negotiations between the U.S. and China, specifically encouraging that Chinese lumber purchase commitments be secured. The U.S. and China will be conducting these negotiations through a bilateral "Board of Trade," which is still being developed. The importance of the U.S. government's continued engagement on the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) also was discussed.

USDA Farm Production and Conservation Undersecretary Richard Fordyce, a longtime supporter of the hardwood community with extensive experience and ties in Missouri, expressed strong support for our relief package proposal and noted the importance of the industry coming together as a united front to advocate for a successful package. He and his team committed to swift implementation, should Congress allocate the funds.



The Hardwood Federation's Board of Directors meets with USDA Undersecretary Richard Fordyce.

Josh Jamison, the Chief of Staff to Natural Resources and Environment Undersecretary Michael Boren (who has oversight over the US Forest Service), echoed this support and also encouraged the Federation Board to raise lumber purchases with USTR and to submit formal comments noting the importance of including lumber on the list of agricultural products to be discussed by the Board of Trade.



USTR Officials discuss trade policy impacts with the Hardwood Federation Board.

Wednesday was Hill Day. Fifteen teams of hardwood leaders descended on a very busy Capitol Hill. Our key messages to Congressional offices were simple:

- Support the \$200 million in economic relief for the hardwood industry currently included in the Senate agriculture relief package language.
- Include hardwood industry friendly initiatives allowing for greater truck weights in the Transportation bill.
- Pass the Farm Bill and include funding for Wood Innovation and Energy grant programs and for forest products related job training, include woody biomass in the Renewable Fuels Standard, and approve binding language recognizing the carbon neutrality of biomass.
- Sign the letter asking that hardwood lumber be added to the Board of Trade discussion topics.
- Encourage the Trump Administration to continue efforts to reduce the burdens of the EUDR.

Feedback from our meetings was generally positive... there's always a few offices that need more work! The Federation followed up with each office our teams met with, thanking them for their time and interest.

Continued on next page.

As we continue to meet with Congress in the coming weeks and months, I am confident that the work Fly-In participants did during their time on the Hill will set the stage for productive interactions going forward.

The third and final component of the annual Fly-In is HFPAC events that recognize key Congressional leaders. This year we focused on smaller groups than we have in the past...in response to the high number of Congressional departures and retirements, as well as to prudently spend the PAC dollars so generously contributed by those of you in the industry.

This year we were pleased to welcome, among others, House Agriculture Committee Chair GT Thompson (R-PA), House Natural Resources Committee Chair Bruce Westerman (R-AR), Congresswoman Shontel Brown (D-OH), (who is poised for Agriculture Committee leadership in the next Congress, and rising star Pat Ryan (D-NY).



Congressman GT Thompson addresses Fly-In Participants.

Our PAC events gave the Members of Congress time to interact with industry leaders and to see firsthand the strength of industry engagement in the political process. We will continue to identify strong hardwood advocates among both Democrats and Republicans and support their election bids.

Mill Tech's Jack Matson commented, "I thought it... remarkable how far the Hardwood Federation has come. When I was first on the hill 25 years ago, most Senators, Congressmen, and Staffers looked at us like we were from another planet. Almost no one knew the Hardwood story and worst of all, they only pretended to care. The majority of the offices that we visited this time around were well versed on the Hardwood issues, almost parroting the message better than we were. The few that didn't know the story were eager to learn and fascinated by the industry."

These sentiments efficiently captured many of the post-event comments we received and is reflective of the Hardwood Federation's continuing goal: to bring awareness and understanding of this uniquely American industry to the highest level of U.S. policy making. Thank you to everyone that participated in the Fly-In, this year and in years past. Every interaction builds on past efforts.



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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