

Jones sparks economic development in forestry

BY MARLEE MOORE
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Thanks to a grassroots push from the Alabama Farmers Federation, the state has a new economic development specialist focused on growing the \$4 billion-plus forest products industry.

Al Jones joined the Alabama Forestry Commission a year ago and in his first two weeks, Jones fielded calls from five potential forest products businesses interested in Alabama and its mass of raw materials available thanks to the state’s 23 million acres of timberland.

“The potential is so much greater than what we’re doing,” Jones said. “I want to see our industry expand, see landowners get more for their timber and put out more products made in Alabama.”

The Federation’s State Forestry Committee originally conceived the economic development position to bring industry to the state, ultimately helping forest landowners better market their timber. According to the Forest Inventory Analysis (FIA), Alabama plants 1.57 trees for every tree harvested, generating a surplus of quality wood.

Multiple departments within the Federation helped make the economic development specialist position a reality. That included external affairs pushing the line item through the legislature during the 2022 regular session and the governmental and agricultural programs department helping draft language for the role.

“Creating this position was a team effort,” said Federation Forestry Division Director William Green. “It started at the ground level with an idea from our members. Al’s work will pay real dividends for those landowners and the next generation of property owners.”

Jones brings decades of economic development experience and enthusiasm to AFC. He previously worked as Alexander City’s community development director following years with the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, where he developed a passion for increasing Alabamians’ quality of life.

“The measure of success to me is the number of jobs created,” Jones said. “If you’re not creating jobs, you’re not making the whole of Alabama that much better.”

As AFC’s economic developer, Jones will work with the Federation, local developers, the governor’s office and partner agencies to recruit new businesses or expansions.

Jones hit the ground running, developing a deep understanding of Alabama forests’ capabilities and the in-depth needs of forest products businesses. That single-minded focus will be a boon for Alabama, AFC’s Dan Chappell said.

“Some landowners manage their forests without income in mind but most landowners depend on some timber revenue to make things happen on their property,” said Chappell, AFC’s Management Division assistant director. “Better markets will give landowners more opportunities to sell their

forest products. In turn, they will reinvest that money in the land and make sure we have sustainable, well-managed forests.”

Jones’ approach to economic development tag-teams relationship building and number crunching. He has gathered reports, graphs and charts detailing timber available for prospective projects.

“Alabama has such an availability of materials,” Jones said. “We provide that information and try to convince prospective industries what we already know: Alabama is the place they need to be.”

PHOTO: Alabama Forestry Commission economic developer Al Jones, left, is pictured with Alabama Farmers Federation State Forestry Committee member David Wright of Dallas County.



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