



Update on divisions

- **Forestry Division**

- The division has facilitated the Department's purchase of approximately 1,849 acres of land for \$6,946,700 in the Hot Spring Recharge Area since 2018 to provide protection for the headwaters of the hot springs.
- In FY21, the division responded to 787 fires on 14,438 acres and wrote 1,188 forest management plans covering 90,288 acres for Arkansas landowners.
- The Division operates the Department's 24/7 Dispatch Center that coordinates logistics for the Department's emergency response efforts and prescribed burns and provides a wide range of reporting functions.
- Four Forestry Division employees are currently assisting the U.S. Forest Service on fires in the western United States. These staff members are on personal leave while providing this service. The Department expects a request from the Forest Service for additional personnel soon.
- Joe Fox, State Forester, is serving as the President of the National Association of State Foresters.

- **Livestock and Poultry Division**

- The division provides surveillance, testing, and monitoring across the state for animal disease prevention and response. Staff continually train and monitor for major foreign animal diseases, including those involving Avian influenza, African swine fever, and Foot and Mouth Disease.
- The division administered the Arkansas Meat and Poultry Processing Grant Program and disbursed \$10.4 million in CARES Act funding to 31 Arkansas meat processors in late 2020 to expand processing capability across the state. The division is also working to implement a State Meat Inspection Program within the Department.
- Division personnel provide livestock market reporting services at 10 livestock markets across the state.
- The division issued two permits for airborne eradication of feral hog efforts in FY21 and is actively engaged with the Feral Hog Eradication Task Force efforts,
- Livestock and Poultry Division inspectors spend more than 3,600 hours at fairs annually conducting compliance checks and visual inspections of animals to prevent the spread of animal diseases.

- **Natural Resources Division**

- More than \$154,400,000 was approved in funding for 63 water and wastewater systems in FY21.
- The division provides state level planning, management, and protection of Arkansas's groundwater resources for human, environmental, and economic benefit. The division has a long history of working with the Bayou Meto Water Management Project and the Grand Prairie Irrigation Project to protect Arkansas's aquifers.
- Through the administration of the Arkansas Unpaved Road Program, the division works with local entities to implement projects to protect streams, lakes, and rivers from erosion and sediment delivery caused by unpaved roads. \$326,222 was provided to 5 counties in FY21.
- The division provides support for Arkansas's 75 conservation districts, including more than \$2,200,000 for technical assistance and district projects and programs in FY21.

- **Plant Industries Division**

- Since 2017, the number of pesticide misuse complaints and investigations has increased significantly, primarily due to an increase in dicamba-related claims. In 2020, 514 total pesticide misuse cases were filed, including 218 alleged dicamba. From January to July 16, 2021, 418 pesticide misuse cases have been filed, including 292 alleged dicamba cases.

- The division works with industry partners and the public to prevent the spread of invasive species. Plant Industry Division staff recently worked with industry partners to help eradicate the first known infestation of Cogongrass, one of the worst invasive species in the world, in Arkansas.
 - The division provides inspection and grading services for Arkansas’s peanut industry, a sector of Arkansas agriculture that has experienced significant expansion over the past decade. Peanut acreage increased from 11,000 acres harvested in 2012 to 38,000 harvested acres in 2020. The division will provide services at five buying points and at the state’s first shelling facility, located in Jonesboro, in 2021.
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Significant Department Projects

- **Arkansas Levee Task Force:** The Department served on Governor Hutchinson’s Levee Task Force in 2019. The Department administered \$10 million in grants for 16 levee repair and improvement projects.
 - **Arkansas Economic Recovery Task Force:** The Department was a member of Governor Hutchinson’s Economic Recovery Task Force in 2020-2021 and served as chair of the Agriculture, Grocers, Education, and Service Sectors Committee.
 - **Arkansas American Rescue Plan Act Steering Committee:** The Department is a member of Governor Hutchinson’s Arkansas American Rescue Plan Act Steering Committee and serves as chair of the Water and Other Infrastructure Projects Working Group. A plan is being developed to address water and wastewater systems, flood mitigation (levees, drainage, stormwater), and irrigation project needs across the state.
 - **Regional and National Leadership:** Secretary Ward served as the 2020-2021 President of the Southern Association of State Departments of Agriculture and hosted the annual conference in Arkansas in June 2021, bringing more than 120 attendees from southern states to Arkansas. He is also serving as the current Chair of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture’s Committee on Natural Resources and the Environment.
 - **New Laboratory Building Proposal:** The Department has contracted with an architecture firm to develop a feasibility study and cost estimate for a new laboratory building to replace outdated laboratories in the Department’s headquarters, several of which are in spaces never designed for laboratories. This potential project would also allow for renovation of existing office space to accommodate the co-location of Department employees with duty stations in Little Rock.
 - **Personnel Alignment:** The Department is working to better align personnel to enable the Department to meet the needs of Arkansas’s agricultural industry, the state’s largest industry. The Department has submitted a plan to surrender positions that are no longer suitable for current responsibilities in exchange for positions that meet current responsibilities and industry needs.
 - **Shared Services:** Implementation of shared services has enabled the Department to operate as one team as opposed to inefficient silos and provide improved service to the public.
 - The Department has consolidated the management of all labs within the Department, resulting in increased efficiency and better utilization of equipment and resources which enabled the Department to implement a new testing program for Arkansas’s aquaculture industry without additional staff or state funding.
 - The Department’s law enforcement capabilities were broadened to serve all sectors of the agricultural industry with agriculture-related crimes.
 - The development of a legal team for the Department has resulted in increased review of all rules, contracts, agreements, and others to ensure compliance and the elimination of outdated rules. The Department did not have an in-house attorney until 2017.
 - Consolidation of office locations, email servers and other IT functions, and marketing and communications functions has improved communication and efficiencies across the Department and improved service to the public.
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Transformation Examples

- **Actions to Reduce Costs:** Below are examples of actions taken by the Department to reduce costs. The cost reductions total \$511,670.27 and are being used to absorb more than \$583,534 in costs due to additional duties that were either legislatively mandated for the Department, required to meet industry needs, or necessary for improved service to the public.
 - **Co-location of Fiscal and Human Resources:** Relocating six employees to the Department headquarters reduced annual lease payments, eliminated parking garage fees, and enabled the Department to forego backfilling a buyer position. **Savings: \$83,932**
 - **Relocation of Natural Resources Division:** The Department relocated 57 employees to a space closer to the Department's headquarters. This relocation resulted in annual lease savings and further increased efficiencies and streamlined services. **Savings: \$142,21.81**
 - **Consolidation of Communication Contracts:** The Department consolidated mobile phone contracts across all divisions. **Savings: \$159,074.56**
 - **Consolidation of Forestry Districts:** The Forestry Division eliminated one of its eight districts and reassigned the duties to staff in two other districts. **Savings: \$82,745**
 - **Storage Cost and Space Reduction:** The Department reduced leased storage space costs by consolidation, digitizing paper records, and properly disposing of unnecessary equipment and other items across all divisions. **Savings: \$82,745**
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Staffing

<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>
610	595	596	586	578	563	586

Legislative Initiatives

- **Grain Dealer Licensing:** In response to the Turner Grain bankruptcy in 2015 and its impact on the agriculture industry, the Department implemented a new licensing program for grain dealers and a hotline for producers to report late payment issues. In FY21, 24 grain dealer licenses were issued.
- **Feral Hogs:** The Department has served as co-chair of the Feral Hog Eradication Task Force since its creation in 2017. The Department created a Feral Hog Program Coordinator position in 2019 to lead the Department's feral hog eradication program efforts, including the development of a feral hog resource handbook and the administration of a \$3.4 million federal grant for feral hog eradication.
- **Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program and the Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act:** Since 2019, the Department has hired a Farm to School program coordinator, implemented a Farm to School program, and assumed responsibility for administering the Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act. The Department was recently awarded a competitive Farm to School grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- **Grain Grading Program:** Pursuant to the Arkansas Grain Grading Act of 2019, the Department implemented a grain grading program that created a grading standard to help control grading variability. The program certifies grain dealers that employ grain samplers and graders and provides a grain grading complaint process for producers. In FY21, 27 grain grading certifications were issued.
- **State Meat Inspection Program:** In accordance with Act 418 of 2021, the Department is drafting rules for a new State Meat Inspection Program within the Department and is advertising for a State Meat Inspection Program Coordinator. The Department will also be submitting a state plan to the U.S. Department of Agriculture as required by federal law.
- **Fair-Funding Program:** In accordance with Act 700 of 2021, the Department has developed fair-funding guidance for funding recipients and will initiate funding disbursement on July 28, 2021. The new

program increases funding for county fairs and eliminates the 4.5% admission surcharge fees that fairs were required to pay and the antiquated points system previously used to award funding.

- **Forestry Scholarship Program:** Pursuant to the Arkansas Foresters for the Future Scholarship Program Act of 2021, the Forestry Division will use special revenue to fund a scholarship for one student per classification (up to four students) in a certified forestry program at a state sponsored university. The Department signed a MOU with the University of Arkansas at Monticello to provide up to \$30,000 (for four students total, after the fourth year). The first recipient has been selected and will be announced soon.
- **Arkansas Milk Stabilization Board Act:** The Department is drafting rules in compliance with Act 521 of 2021 that gives the Arkansas Milk Stabilization Board jurisdiction over Arkansas milk prices and requires that Arkansas milk producers receive Class 1 prices for milk produced and sold within Arkansas.
- **Codification of the Buffalo River Conservation Committee:** Act 785 of 2021 codifies the Buffalo River Conservation Committee (BRCC) and designates specific members of the committee, including the Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Agriculture. Secretary Ward has served as Chair of the BRCC since its creation by Governor Hutchinson in 2019. The BRCC meets quarterly and has provided \$503,907 for six projects within the Buffalo River watershed to date.