Congressmen and Senators face the same preconceived ideas of forests and forestry that many citizens have—except they’re working to enact viable policy for a nation of 300 million people! The key to helping lawmakers build sound policy that benefits family forest owners is to help them understand the effects of that legislation and get to know the people whom it will affect.

To start these conversations, AFF is encouraging landowners to invite members to their woods to help them get a better idea of who family forest owners are, what we do, and why our priorities are so important to their districts.

To help you along the process, AFF has created a quick checklist to help you set up a tour. And remember, while the checklist is built for a private tour, you can use the attached steps to invite a member to your already-scheduled field days/workshops/etc. where there will be many additional constituents in attendance! For further assistance, or to have any of your questions answered, email nalex@forestfoundation.org

**Field Tour Checklist**

**Planning the Tour**

- **Who should you reach out to?**
  - Pick your targets based on representation and influence, AFF is happy to help with this!

- **How should you contact the office?**
  - Send an email, and follow up with a phone call to the scheduler if you receive no response

- **What should you talk about?**
  - What is your “ask” (what you want the Member to do for you)? Focus on issues important in your area and nationally? AFF tracks Congressional debates, so we’re happy to help.

- **When should you host the tour? How long will it be?**
  - Consider your time, the Congressional schedule, the weather and conditions, and the Member’s time. A good visit would be 30 minutes to 1 hour. A driving tour with stops is usually easiest.

- **What should the member see while they’re there?**
  - Highlight problems in your woods that could be addressed with, or results from, the programs you want to talk about.
  - Schedule a few stops that highlight any problems you’re facing or any successes on your land. Pick one stop to introduce your ask to the member.
**Day Of**

- Is the weather ok for a tour?
  - Confirm with your point of contact that the tour is still on. Consider bringing along a few bottles of water for attendees if you’re expecting a hot day.

- Give participants the opportunity to introduce themselves
  - Meet in a setting that allows the group to get acquainted before the tour, for example a parking lot, and make sure everyone has the opportunity to introduce themselves.

- Make sure to get contact information for the staffer who handles the policy issues you plan to cover
  - Be sure to provide your information or business card to the staffer accompanying the member, and get (at the same time or in a follow up soon thereafter) the name of the staffer in the Washington office who handles agriculture issues.

- Provide a quick overview of what you’ll cover on the tour before it begins.
  - Make sure the member knows you have a plan for the tour, and that they can expect to remain on time. Offer a restroom stop before you begin.

**On the Tour**

- Using the stops you’d planned earlier, go over your successes or challenges with the member.
- Use the real-world examples to introduce your ask.
  - For example,
    - “We know you have many priorities, but you can see from this project why we think it’s so important that you support the N program. This is a project we started 5 years ago using funding from X that has helped us perform Y beneficial activities, which attracted Z species of native birds back to this land. Without this funding, these native species wouldn’t have been able to return, further shrinking their habitat. We’re trying to get the word out and we’d be happy to assist you in advocating for this program.”
    - “We recognize your work supporting APHIS and want to urge you to continue supporting it-- and here you can see a firsthand example of their work. These are some trees that we’d planned to harvest last year. Unfortunately, we were hit with an infestation of X, an invasive species, which forced us to abandon this harvest in favor of salvaging the trees which were being destroyed. Not only has this set back our management plan, but it also cost us at least $X from our planned harvest, and we weren’t even the only ones affected. This is why we view support of the work that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) does to prevent and combat invasive species as so paramount to the district.”

- Capture photos
  - Make sure to take a few photos during the visit. A popular one, is of your member and you with your Tree Farm sign.
AFTER THE TOUR

- Let AFF know how your tour went.
  - Send us an email at nalex@forestfoundation.org to let us know the details so that we can coordinate follow up with the member’s Washington office.
- Send a written thank you to the Member of Congress and any staffers that accompanied them.
  - Short, personal notes are best. You can address the notes to the district office—the address should be on the member’s official website.
- Send a follow up email to the policy staffer outlining what you discussed with the Member and any asks for action.
  - When following up with the policy staffer, be sure to include a quick recap of what was said and reiterate your ask. (See templates.)
- Share photos
  - These photos can be shared afterwards with the member, providing another opportunity to connect with your member after the visit.
  - You can also share these photos via social media, to help show your family, friends and fellow landowners that you are advocating on behalf of forest owners with policymakers. Make sure to tag your member on social media when sharing as often the members staff will reshare the photo as well.
**Templates**

**SCHEDULING EMAIL**

Dear (Scheduler's Name):

I'm writing to request a meeting with (Senator/Representative) (Last Name). I am a resident of (city/town) and a Tree Farmer in the American Tree Farm System™. My family owns a (acres) acre tree farm which has (pick: benefitted from the XXX program / recently suffered from XXX).

I realize that the (Senator/Representative) keeps a full schedule, but I was hoping that we could meet between (date) and (date). I’d be happy to schedule the tour at (his/her) convenience. We can accomplish the whole tour in under an hour.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer the (Senator/Representative) the chance to see how (his/her) constituents have proactively managed their forests for the benefit of our community by providing many benefits including clean air, clean water, and abundant wildlife habitat.

I will contact your office during the week of (1–2 weeks before the visit) to confirm the details of the appointment.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

**FOLLOW UP EMAIL**

Dear (Legislative Assistant’s Name):

I'm writing to follow up on a recent meeting I had with (Senator/Representative) (Last Name) on (date).

The (Senator/Representative) and I toured my Tree Farm in (city/town) and discussed (highlight the conversations you had on the day of the tour).

I wanted to get in touch with you to inquire as to whether or not the office has (reiterate your request).

I would be more than happy to speak with you and address any questions or concerns you might have, as well as how this would benefit your constituents here in (city/town).

Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

(Your Name)