

# Good Info

■ An impressive lineup of speakers shared valuable insights at the Loggers Technology Summit.

By David Abbott

In August, members of the logging/log hauling community in South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama had the opportunity to participate in the second annual Loggers Technology Summit. Following the successful inaugural series of meetings last summer, Swamp Fox Agency of Moncks Corner, SC, again hosted the Summit, this time with events in Augusta, Ga. (a central location for combined attendance from Georgia and across the river in South Carolina) and Montgomery, Ala.

With a focus on improved safety and productivity, the summit was designed as a platform to “advance the logging and trucking industry by showcasing the latest innovations and facilitating discussions on future growth, sustainability, and efficiency,” according to Swamp Fox. Speakers represented nearly every corner of the log trucking sector, covering a wide range of topics from technology to markets to law.

The first meeting took place August 8-9 at the Marriott Convention Center in Augusta, followed two weeks later by a nearly identical program at the Renaissance Convention Center in Montgomery on August 22-23. American Loggers Council Executive Director Scott Dane spoke on the first night. Swamp Fox Agency director of loss control Dustin Moran served as emcee.

“Logging and trucking may not always get the headlines, but without your hard work and dedication, our daily lives would look very different,” Moran said in his opening.

At both events, Jonathan Sturgill, field service engineer from Detroit/Western Star/Freightliner, explained what safety system innovations the Daimler Truck North America brands offer: collision mitigation, crash avoidance, side guard assistance, lane departure warning, and tailgate warning, to list a few. One Alabama logger testified that his drivers hated these systems when first added to the fleet, but now refuse to drive without them.

Ed Bruser in Georgia and David Pugh in Alabama represented Bendix,



**Auburn University displayed prototype autonomous truck that's been tested on logging jobs.**

which makes brake systems and components for commercial vehicles. Both explained how the Bendix Wingman advanced driver assistance system integrates cameras, radar and brakes to reduce frequency and mitigate severity of crashes. “Driver assistance is NOT driver replace-

ment,” Pugh said. “Drivers are still responsible for the control and safety of the vehicle.”

At both events, Richard Bishop, principal of Bishop Consulting, identified himself as the “token crazy guy.” Bishop has spent decades studying the development of auto-

mated vehicles in transportation systems, a technology that might, in fact, eventually replace drivers, perhaps sooner than many might suspect. Drawing a comparison with elevator attendants—a position that grew obsolete once the public became comfortable with a then-new technol-





Scott Dane, ALC



Brandon Wisenall, Pitts



Jacob Gayle, XACTT



Todd Martin, Southern Loggers Cooperative

ogy—Bishop points out that vehicle automation is actually very mature, not a new technology, as it's been around since the mid-late '90s. With demand driven by the driver shortage, many companies are investing heavily in this area.

"We're past the testing phase," Bishop says. "It's not a science project anymore, by any means. Companies are on the cusp of meaningful development."

At the Alabama event, a prototype semi-autonomous truck from Auburn University's engineering department was on-site for attendees to check out.

"Who would have thought 60 years ago that one day we would have self driving trucks in the woods?" attendee Bill Dunn commented. "But here we are, we made it, we love our jobs and we're gonna make a difference in our industry."

Todd Martin, President/CEO of Southern Loggers Co-op, spoke about the services that organization provides its members in fuel savings. "Can you become a millionaire as a logger?" Martin asked jokingly. "Yes, but if only if you start out as a billionaire."

Brandon Wisenall, territory manager for Pitts Trailers, delivered a presentation on safety-enhancing options his company offers. Likewise, Jacob Gayle, who represented Pitts at all three Technology Summit events last summer, returned for both events this year, this time on behalf of his new company, XACTT, which aims to introduce innovative tech solutions to enhance safety and efficiency in logging, like central tire



Attendees from South Carolina, Georgia...



...and Alabama learned a lot.

inflation and automatic load restraint systems. Also at both events, Alex Dwyer described how Samsara dash cam systems benefit log truckers, especially when it comes to lawsuits.

Speaking of lawsuits, Blair Cash of Georgia's Moseley Marcinak Law Group and Mark Colson of the Alabama Trucking Assn. spoke about the need for tort reform and how personal injury lawyers (everyone has seen the billboards and TV ads),

focused on greed rather than justice, abuse the system and inflate the cost of litigation to increase their own profit. Swamp Fox owner Rick Quagliaroli pointed out that the Southeast is the most litigious region in the country. Colson briefed the Montgomery audience on the Law-suit Fairness for Alabama Act, which seeks to remedy the problem. It alleges that lawsuit abuse has cost Alabama's economy \$7.3 billion in

lost economic spending, \$2.3 billion in lost personal income and 34,714 lost jobs. Colson added that the last major tort reform was passed in 1987 but was undone by the Supreme Court just a few years later.

Bobby Frank, North America sales manager for ResourceWise, offered insights into the current state of the forestry industry market. U.S. softwood lumber production was up in 2022 he said, but prices, though trending up, were not as good as hoped. International demand for pellets continues, Frank reported, and the U.S. remains the largest exporter. Mill closures in 2024 have been worse than in 2023 but investment in the South remains strong, attributed to cheap log costs and deep labor pools. Emerging markets, like sustainable aviation fuel, may offer opportunities but are developing slowly, lacking a developed procurement system and pricing structure. The Biden administration's inflation reduction act, he noted, has done a good job of providing incentives for investment in SAF, creating new revenue streams.

Frank warned that the industry should be ready for EUDR (European Union Deforestation Regulation), a law passed in July 2023 that will affect anyone exporting wood products into EU countries when compliance becomes mandatory starting in January 2025. "EUDR is coming, like it or not, and it will affect the whole supply chain," he said.

Attendees at both events were eligible to receive continuing education credit hours in their home states from the Summit. **SLT**



Alex Dwyer, Samsara



Jonathan Sturgill, Western Star/Detroit



The Summit also offered a good chance to make connections.