2013 Legislative Session Wrap-Up

Forestry and Agriculture Finish Strong

The 2013 legislative session yielded positive results across the board for forestry and for the agricultural industry overall. Among other accomplishments, Greenbelt protection was strengthened; regulatory burdens were lifted; market playing fields were leveled. Equally important, no harmful legislation made it through the process.

Alan Shelby, FFA’s executive vice president, credited House and Senate leaders for their hard work and support. “We’re very fortunate to have people in office who understand our issues and who appreciate our importance to the state,” he said. “Between the leadership and our sponsors, we could not have asked for a better team fielding our bills. Many thanks go to them for what they accomplished for forestry and for Florida this year.”

Legislation That Passed

Greenbelt/Ag Property Assessment – HB 1193 by Rep. Halsey Beshears

This legislation strengthens the greenbelt statute by removing the following antiquated provisions that permit a property’s agricultural classification to be removed under the following conditions:
• The landowner changes the zoning of the land;
• Land classified as agricultural is surrounded by development and the county commission determines that it acts as a deterrent to further development; or
• Agricultural land is sold and the purchase price of the land is three or more times the agricultural assessment.

With the removal of these three provisions, the only remaining allowable cause for removal of an agricultural assessment is cessation of the property’s agricultural use.

The bill also removes the ability of a value adjustment board to review the classifications made by the property appraiser, except under the landowner’s request.


This legislation expands the preemption from adopting or enforcing any ordinance regulating a farm or forestry operation beyond adopted BMPs from “counties” to “governmental entities.”


This legislation removes the mandate that a single green building code be adopted for all public construction projects. It requires a green building code to be selected on a project-by-project basis instead. In addition, the bill requires Florida wood products to be considered first when wood is used in public construction projects.

Department of Agriculture – HB 7087 by Rep. Halsey Beshears

This legislation addresses a number of issues related to agriculture and the powers and duties of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS).

Of particular importance to the forest industry, the bill expands the authority of the Florida Forest Service (FFS) to authorize open burning; it also clarifies and reduces liability exposure for prescribed burning for both the FFS and the certified burner.

The bill also directs DACS and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to enter into an agreement authorizing DACS to develop and adopt wildlife best management practices (BMPs). The legislation clarifies that these agencies have exclusive authority to adopt and enforce these voluntary measures.

It also provides for DACS to manage and operate the Babcock Ranch holdings.


Florida’s population growth has taxed our water resources. Florida’s forested lands can be part of the solution through surface water storage and aquifer recharge. This legislation provides for extended consumptive use permits for water utilities, which would enable them to raise bonded revenue to fund the infrastructure needs for alternative water supplies.


This legislation expands the sales tax exemption on machinery and equipment for new or expanding businesses, to all businesses. The exemption becomes effective April 30, 2014 and sunsets on April 30, 2017.

Agriculture – SB 1106 by Sen. Alan Hays

This legislation preempts local governments from regulating agritourism activities on land that is classified agricultural and would provide limited liability protection.

Environmental Regulations – HB 999 by Rep. Jimmy Patronis

This legislation streamlines the environmental regulatory process and eliminates costly redundancies. The bill states that permitted water allocations cannot be changed when considering regional water supply planning; exempts farm ponds that are less than 15 acres with an average depth of no more than 15 feet from permitting requirements; restricts cities and counties in requesting additional information for permit applications; and clarifies elements of the state Environmental Resources Permit process.

Numeric Nutrient Criteria – SB 1808 by Sen. Charlie Dean

This legislation codifies the recent agreement between the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), authorizing DEP to implement state-adopted numeric nutrient criteria standards to address Florida’s water quality needs.

Agricultural Lands – SB 700 by Sen. Jack Latvala

This legislation repeals the statutory requirement that the Department of Economic Opportunity map and monitor ag and forestry lands throughout the state.
FFA 2013 Annual Meeting: “Growing Through Change” September 3-5, 2013, in Ponte Vedra Beach

FFA’s annual meeting is shaping up to be one of the best ones yet! Held at the luxurious Sawgrass Marriott in beautiful Ponte Vedra Beach, the event offers a full slate of educational, recreational and networking opportunities. Review the schedule and read about our session topics and speakers. Then register by filling out the attached form and mailing it to our office or register online on our website, www.FloridaForest.org.

Register Early to Win!
We have 250 great reasons you should register early this year! All “early birds” who register by August 7 will be entered into a drawing for a $250 gift card from Bass Pro Shops! The drawing will be held at the annual meeting. Don’t miss out – register now!

Schedule

Tuesday, September 3, 2013
10:00 AM Trade Show Set-Up
1:00 PM Registration Desk Opens
5:00 PM Forestry Forward – Leadership Session
6:00 PM Icebreaker Reception

Wednesday, September 4, 2013
6:30 AM Registration Desk Opens
6:30 AM Tee-Time Coffee @ Registration Lobby
6:30 AM Trade Show Set-Up
6:45 AM Continental Breakfast @ Golf Course
8:00 AM Golf Tournament
8:00 AM Group Fun Run-Walk
10:00 AM Trade Show and Silent Auction Open

Monday, September 5, 2013
7:00 AM Early Bird Coffee
8:00 AM Awards Breakfast
10:00 AM Trade Show Social/Final Auction Bidding (begins at noon)
1:00 PM Auction Item Pickup
1:30 PM General Sessions:
- WMD Mission and Goals: Dr. Ann Shortelle (SRWMD), Jon Stevenson (NWFWMD), and Hans Tanzer (SJRWMD)
- Wildlife BMPs: Scott Sanders (FWC), Jeff Vowell (FFS) and Doug Rillstone (Broad & Cassel)
- Gainesville Renewable Energy Center: Al Morales (GREC)
4:30 PM Florida Gateway College/UFSFRC Meeting
6:00 PM Low Country Boil

Hotel Information
Sawgrass Marriott Resort & Spa
Ponte Vedra Beach
Room Rate $129 nightly
Phone: 800.457.4653
Group Name: Florida Forestry Association
Reserve online at www.Marriott.com
Group Code: FF4AFFA

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Greencircle Bio Energy, Inc.
Hancock Bank
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Hutson Land & Elkton Green
John E. Anderson
Land & Timber Services Group
Loncala, Incorporated
Miami Corporation
Oldcastle Lawn & Garden
Pinova, Inc.
Resource Management Service
Ring Power Corporation
Robbins Forestry, Inc.
RockStar CD, LLC
Southeastern Wood Producers Association
St. Joe Timberland Company
T & T Trailer Rental
TD Bank
The Forestry Company
Timber Mart-South
Usher Land & Timbers, Inc.
Whitfield Timber Company

Timber Toppers Golf Classic
Suwannee Lumber Company is proud to sponsor our annual Timber Toppers Golf Classic on the beautiful Dye’s Valley course. Sign up for the tournament on the attached registration form for a great golfing experience and networking time with other forest professionals and friends. Tee-time is 8 AM, Wednesday, Sept. 4.

Golf is open to all FFA members and guests; meeting registration is not required to play in the tournament.
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This legislation amends the Florida Fire Prevention Code, exempting non-residential farm buildings from the fire code requirements.

Campaign Finance Reform – HB 569 by Rep. Matt Gaetz
This legislation eliminates Committees of Continuous Existence (CCEs) and increases the amount that can be contributed to a candidate each election cycle, from $500 to $3,000 for statewide and Supreme Court campaigns and $1,000 for all other candidates.

This legislation repeals the Florida Renewable Fuel Standard Act, which required all gasoline sold in Florida to be blended with ethanol fuel.

Budget Issues

Florida Forest Service

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<tr>
<th>Request</th>
<th>Passed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Replace Firefighting Equipment</td>
<td>$5M</td>
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<tr>
<td>Replace Firefighter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication Equipment</td>
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<td>Firefighter Callback Overtime</td>
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<td>Rural &amp; Family Lands</td>
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<td>Protection Program</td>
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<td>DEP Florida Forever Funding</td>
<td>$750 ($20M in new funding, $50M from surplus land sales)</td>
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UF/IFAS
Research & Extension was fully funded with an increase of about 3.4%.

Federal Legislation

Immigration Reform
On Wednesday, June 19, the US Senate adopted the Merkley amendment to the Immigration Bill (S-744) on a voice vote. The amendment expands and intensifies requirements for reforestation contractors to advertise and promote treeplanting employment locally before applying for H-2B guestworker visas.

If it becomes law, this language will add to existing burdens for reforestation contractors using the H-28 Guestworker program. It will obstruct a vital program by adding unnecessary costs, delays, and risks to the business of keeping forest-dependent industries supplied.

Farm Bill
On Thursday, June 20, Congress rejected the proposed farm bill, voting it down on a 195-234 vote. Had the legislation passed, it would have benefited forest owners in several areas. Highlights are below:

- Codified EPA’s silviculture rule, providing certainty that forest roads would not require permits or other point source regulation;
- Improved market opportunities for forest owners with the full Biobased Markets Program fix;
- Increased access to conservation programs by removing the 10% forestry cap on CSP;
- Maintained funding for invasive species programs; and
- Ensured that forest owners can be an active part of regional conservation initiatives and protected owners from additional regulatory burdens.

The next steps for the farm bill are currently unclear. There seem to be two main options at this point: craft another bill for passage or extend the 2008 Farm Bill beyond its September expiration date.

Putnam: Expand Certification Program Recognition
Florida’s Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam has joined with other agricultural departments from across the South to ask the U.S. Green Building Council to expand the sustainable timber programs they recognize so that more southern timber can be used in environmentally-friendly building projects.

“Forests in Florida and other southern states support jobs and generate billions for our economy,” Putnam said. “By opening up the process to allow more timber sales for green building projects, we will help our economy at home and put our growers on a level playing field with others across the nation and globe.”