FEDERAL UPDATES

WATERS OF THE US: A national association has asked that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Army Corps of Engineers suspend enforcement of the Waters of the US (WOTUS) regulation until legal complaints against it are resolved. The request came after the US District Court for the district of North Dakota granted a temporary injunction in favor of 13 states that brought suit in North Dakota against EPA and the Corps. After the court ruling, EPA said that it would not implement the rule in the states involved in the suit.

Florida has joined several other southern states in suits in the Sixth Circuit and the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals. Decisions are pending in both cases.

WOTUS, Part Two: According to a report by Politico, the Obama Administration is asking the Supreme Court to decide whether a jurisdictional determination by the US Army Corps of Engineers under the law constitutes a final agency action, and can thus be challenged in court. If the administration is not successful in its appeal of US Army Corps of Engineers v. Hawkes Co., Inc., et al., it would create a split in opinions by lower courts and could open the door for landowners to seek judicial review of findings by the government that a water body is subject to federal permitting. While the suit was brought under the old law, any decision would apply to jurisdictional decisions made under the Clean Water Rule as well.

FOREST ROADS: EPA has agreed to submit a settlement agreement to the Ninth Circuit Court, setting a compliance schedule for implementation of a previous Court order regarding runoff from forest roads. The schedule requires EPA to 1) publish a notice in November of this year asking for public comment on the effectiveness of existing state and certification programs to control stormwater runoff from forest roads and 2) issue a decision in May 2016 on whether it will proceed with regulations.

2014 forest roads legislation prohibits a permit requirement and citizen lawsuits but does not prohibit regulations. Our federal counterparts are working with the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement (NCASI) to prepare a robust defense of existing programs demonstrating that federal regulation is not necessary. They will present findings to EPA well before the November publication.

WATERSECURITY AS A BUSINESS CHALLENGE

A new report by the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences names forestry and forest products manufacturing as Florida’s largest agricultural commodity. According to the “Economic Contributions of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Food Industries in Florida in 2013,” forestry grabbed the top spot with more than $9 billion in industry output impacts. Forest products also led the state’s agricultural exports with $6.14 billion.
2015 ANNUAL MEETING

The Association’s 2015 Annual Meeting was held August 25-27 at the Edgewater Beach and Golf Resort in Panama City Beach, FL. With well over 200 registrants and 40 exhibitors, this year’s gathering featured tremendous networking opportunities along with top-notch speakers addressing current topics of interest to the forest industry. Highlights of the event also included the Timber Toppers Golf Tournament, Florida’s largest forestry trade show, two receptions and a karaoke night.

The closing dinner offered special entertainment that lived up to its name: “historical and hysterical!” Association VIPs who will remain nameless performed a surprise choreographed dance number to the hit song “Uptown Funk.”

Several members were honored at the Awards Breakfast:

Silvicultural Contractor Award: Guest Forestry Services, Inc.

Burt Guest began Guest Forestry Services, Inc., in 2001 with one V-blade bulldozer, one tree planter, a great big vision and prayer. The company now operates nine bulldozers/planters, two farm tractor planters and five skidders for site prep and understory herbicide application. In 2013, Burt expanded his services to include aerial herbicide applications via helicopter and now also owns and operates Ag Copters, Inc.

Together the companies employ 13 full time employees. Guest Forestry Services employs an additional 18-20 seasonal workers during the tree planting season.

Although Burt and his wife, Mikki, who serves as the office administrator for the operation, live in Plains, GA, with their two sons, approximately 65-70% of the companies’ services take place in Florida.

Tree Farmer of the Year: John and Elizabeth Alter

John and Elizabeth Alter own and manage nearly one thousand acres in northeast Jackson County. The land includes their home site and 18 Tree Farm stands, as well as profit-generating pasture lease for beef cattle, cultivated land for row crops, and a 100,000 square foot fenced plot with a wireless communications tower. They also hold hunting leases on the forested areas.

On the 600 acres assigned to pine plantations they grow long leaf, slash, and loblolly. They also enjoy 116 acres of wetlands that support abundant wildlife.

A passionate advocate for forestry, John serves on the National Public Affairs Committee of the American Tree Farm System, Florida Forestry Association’s Communications Committee and its Board of Directors, and the Governing Board of the Northwest Florida Water Management District.

Logger of the Year: M. A. Rigoni, Inc.

M. A. Rigoni, Inc. was launched in 1960 by M. A. “Matt” Rigoni, a forester-turned-logger who brought much innovation and professionalism to the industry. Gary Brett and Rodney Schwab, production managers at the company in 1995.

Having experienced significant growth in the last two years, Rigoni’s production force is currently made up of three company chipping crews and six contract logging crews, which combined produce approximately 600 truck loads per week.

M. A. Rigoni, Inc., employs 41 workers. The company enjoys a stable and skilled work force, including eight Master Loggers. Rodney’s two sons are also on the company’s roster: Richard works with procurement and business development; Chad is a production manager.

Audubon of Florida Sustainable Forestry Award: Glenn Osteen

Glenn Osteen is a third generation forester, managing nearly 200,000 acres of working forests in Dixie and Lafayette County.

Glenn worked with Suwannee River Water Management District to create an early working forest conservation easement on 32,000 acres of the historic California Lake watershed above the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge and the Big Bend Wildlife Management Area. Today this project is a model for working forest standards proposed on 46,000 acres of adjacent forests.

Glenn symbolizes the unique role and responsibilities of Florida’s rural foresters who represent far more than an ownership within their communities. They protect special places and maintain jobs and significant forest products that enrich both the environment and the economy.

Legislator of the Year: Sen. Bill Montford

As Chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Sen. Bill Montford oversees all legislation affecting the forestry and agricultural industries. A native of the Panhandle and a respected voice in the legislature, he unwaveringly demonstrates his support of Florida’s working forests.

A proven leader and a true friend of forestry,
Legislator of the Year: Rep. Jake Raburn

In his second term in the Florida House, Rep. Jake Raburn is undoubtedly a rising leader within the legislature. This year he introduced legislation creating sales tax exemptions for repairs and replacement parts of forestry and ag equipment. These exemptions were successfully enacted in July 2015 and will ultimately result in millions of dollars of savings for the forest industry.

Rep. Raburn’s support makes a lasting impact on our industry.

Dr. Wayne Smith

Dr. Wayne Smith began as Assistant Professor, UF School of Forestry, and became recognized for academic, scholarship in forest soils/nutrition, biogeochemical cycling, and biomass energy/waste utilization. He co-founded the UF Cooperative Research in Forest Fertilization Program (CRIFF), leading to operational fertilization in southern pine forests, and the Intensive Management Practices Center (IMPAC) to assess impacts of forest management on resource values in a watershed.

Wayne directed three IFAS interdisciplinary centers, authored 149 papers, edited seven books, and served as editor of Biomass. He was Director, School of Forest Resources and Conservation (1995-2003) and then Professor/Director Emeritus. He earned the UF Distinguished Service, UF/CAFS Alumni of Distinction, MSU Alumni Fellow and FFA Lifetime Achievement awards.

Society of American Foresters (SAF) Florida Division Chair, 2003; FL SAF C. Huxley Coulter Award, 2002; Southeastern SAF (SESAF), Chair 2007; SESA Practice of Forestry Award, 1998; SAF Fellow, 2006; National SAF Convention Program Tri-Chair, 2009

Meet Our New Staff Member!

Whitney Hough has joined the FFA staff as our Office Administrator. Not only will she be the cheerful voice you hear when contacting our office, she will also manage our membership records and invoicing and manage the Master Logger database. A native of Tallahassee, Whitney is a graduate of FSU. She resides here with husband Jason and their 7-month old son Colt.

“Whitney offers a great skill set,” said FFA Executive Vice President Alan Shelby. “We are excited to have her become part of the team.”

FLORIDA’S 2015 OUTSTANDING TREE FARMER OF THE YEAR TOUR

In association with Working Forests Week, the forestry tour and awards presentation for the 2015 Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year will be held Friday, October 23, 2015.

John and Elizabeth Alter’s Alter-Bevis Farms
Jackson County, FL
5246 Hwy 71 (a mile south of Malone, FL)
Friday, October 23, 2015
9:00 am – 2:00 pm CST

This event is free but pre-registration is required. Please call the UF/IFAS Jackson Co. Cooperative Extension Service at 850.482.9620 to reserve your spot today!

Deadline to register: noon on Friday, October 16, 2015.
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