PINES AND NEEDLES

Spring 2016  Volume 71, Issue 1

LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

Florida's legislative session came to a close on Friday, March 11, 2016. A more congenial session than last year's, it was a very positive and productive time for the forest industry. Among the issues passed by the legislature is a tax package that, among other things, makes permanent a sales tax exemption on manufacturing machinery and equipment, which was scheduled to sunset in 2017. This item was part of Gov. Rick Scott’s tax reduction proposal; the Association worked in coordination with the Governor’s Office to publicize our support.

Several bills important to the forest industry successfully passed both chambers. Legislative highlights include the following:


This legislation expands the scope of agritourism to include civic, ceremonial and training and exhibition activities. It also prohibits local governments from enforcing existing regulations on agritourism activities on land classified as agricultural under Greenbelt and clarifies that agritourism does not affect the land’s Greenbelt status as long as the land’s primary use continues to be a bona fide agricultural purpose.

This legislation has been signed by the Governor.


This legislation provides that once an original application for an ad valorem tax exemption for property subject to a perpetual conservation easement has been granted, the property owner is not required to file a renewal application until the use of the property no longer complies with the restrictions and requirements of the conservation easement. This legislation has been signed by the Governor.


This legislation creates a new exemption from the Florida Fire Prevention Code (FFPC) and national codes for pole barns, which are nonresidential farm buildings in which 70 percent or more of the perimeter walls are permanently open and that allow free ingress and egress. This legislation has been signed by the Governor.


This legislation develops a statewide long-term plan to protect, preserve and restore Florida’s water supply and natural resources, without increasing costs, limiting water supplies, or increasing regulations on forestry and ag producers around the state. The Governor signed this landmark legislation into law early in the session.


This legislation allows the use of land set-asides and land use modifications not otherwise required by state law or permit, including constructed wetlands or other water quality improvement projects, that reduce nutrient loads into nutrient impaired surface waters to generate water quality credits for trading. It also provides that the limitation on the granting of a variance from the requirements of the Florida Algal and Water Pollution Control Act does not prohibit the issuance of moderating provisions or requirements under state law, subject to any necessary approval by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. This legislation has been signed by the Governor.


This legislation prohibits counties and municipalities from levying a special assessment for the provision of fire protection on lands classified as agricultural under Florida’s greenbelt law. However, counties and municipalities can levy special assessments if the land contains a residential dwelling or nonresidential farm building valued at more than $100,000. This legislation has been signed by the Governor.


This legislation includes language specifying that an allowable surface use of land subject to a conservation easement may include agricultural activities, including but not limited to silviculture, forest management and livestock grazing, if such activities are a current or historic use of the land placed under the easement and the activities are conducted in accordance with the applicable best management practices adopted by DACS. This legislation has been signed by the Governor.


This legislation allows landowners to place their property in a conservation easement and in return use adjacent acreage of state-owned land for low-impact agricultural activities, such as forestry. This legislation has not yet been presented to the Governor.


This legislation into law early in the session.


This legislation grants school districts more flexibility regarding construction requirements, including allowing the use of wood for interior non-load bearing walls. It also mandates an OPPAGA study to identify current school construction requirements that can be eliminated or modified to reduce costs. Our goal is to show that wood is a comparable and more cost effective building material than steel and concrete and allow its use in school construction. This legislation has not yet been presented to the Governor.


This legislation extends the maximum allowable length of a semitrailer from 53 to 57 feet. This legislation has been presented to the Governor.
Taxes – HB 7099 by Rep. Matt Gaetz
This general tax package includes a permanent extension of the current sales tax exemption for manufacturing equipment and machinery, which was set to expire April 30, 2017. This legislation has not yet been presented to the Governor.

Budget – Gov. Rick Scott signed the $82 billion state budget into law on Thursday, March 17, 2016, vetoing about $256.1 million in projects across the state. An appropriation for five million dollars for a reforestation cost-share program was among the victims of the Governor’s veto pen. However, the following items of interest to the forest industry were funded:
- Firefighter Pay Increase – $2,000 per firefighter
- Florida Forever Acquisition – $50 million
- Passive Dispersed Water Storage – $4 million
- Reforestation Cost-Share Program – $5 million
- Rural and Family Lands Program – $35 million
- Springs Restoration – $50 million
- Total Maximum Daily Loads – $8.6 million
- Wildfire Protection/Suppression Equipment – $4 million

Additionally, our friends at the University of Florida’s Institute of Food & Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) report that they had a very good year, walking away from session with all of their priority issues fully funded. According to Senior Vice President Jack Payne, they received an increase of $4 million for workload funding, which will be used to meet increasing demands for research and extension activities that benefit the state’s foresters, farmers, and fisheries. Payne extended his thanks to Association leadership and members for their help and support.

Many thanks go to all the legislators and their staffs whose hard work and dedication made our success possible. Much appreciation also goes to all our members who visited with legislators and did such a great job telling the forestry story! Your membership matters!

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS
Our “Membership Matters” meetings were a big hit this year, drawing big crowds in both locations – the Austin Cary Learning Center in Gainesville on March 3, 2016, and Neal Land & Timber camp in Scott’s Ferry on March 10, 2016.

As anyone at either meeting will attest, the food was as fabulous as the fellowship! These annual get-togethers provide a fantastic opportunity for our members to visit with old friends and meet new ones, as well as to learn about emerging issues of importance to the forest industry.

Many thanks go to our sponsors, Farm Credit of Florida and Neal Land and Timber.

SOUTHERN PINES GROWTH, YIELD AND CARBON BALANCE INTEGRATED MODEL
The Florida Forest Service (FFS) has announced the release of the Southern Pines Growth, Yield and Carbon Balance Integrated Model, created by the University of Florida and sponsored by FFS. This model allows users to simulate growth and yield of planted loblolly, slash and longleaf pines for any one, two or all three species simultaneously. The model output represents Total Merchantable Volume outside or inside bark, in cubic feet or green tons per acre, partitioned into sawtimber, chip-and-saw and pulpwood. The model can be used to aid tree planting, thinning and harvesting decisions, both for private and public forests.

The model can be found on the FFS website under the “Hot Topics” section: www.FloridaForestService.com

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Jarek Nowak (850.681.5883 or Jarek.Nowak@FreshFromFlorida.com).

F.A.A. BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS
Do you have someone you would like to recommend for consideration to serve on the Association’s Board of Directors? If so, please send their name, title, company and contact information to Whitney Hough (850.222.5646 or Whitney@ForestFla.org).

RIGONI NAMED REGIONAL LOGGER OF THE YEAR
M.A. Rigoni, Inc., has been chosen as the Logger of the Year for the Southeast, the Forest Resources Association announced at its recent regional meeting in Gainesville, FL. “We are very proud for the Rigoni team,” said Alan Shelby, Executive Vice President of the Florida Forestry Association. “They are a top-notch operation that takes pride in their work and represents the forest industry well.”

The Perry-based company is a longtime member of the Association and accepted the state level of the award at its Annual Meeting in August 2015. They will now go on to compete for the national award.

COMBAT MARINE OUTDOORS
M.A. Rigoni, Inc. recently organized a week of hunting and fishing for eight wounded veterans and their guests. Two of the participating veterans brought their daughters; five brought their sons; and one brought his 70 year old father. Rigoni’s Rodney Schwab, who has been involved in Combat Marine Outdoors for three years, also arranged for a special day to be spent telling the forestry story. The group visited a harvesting operation and toured a biomass plant.

“This was an incredible experience,” said Florida Forestry Association’s Director of Operations and Regulatory Affairs Mike Branch, “not just for the veterans and their families, but for everyone who was able to be part of it.”

WEYERHAEUSER/PLUM CREEK COMPLETE MERGER
Weyerhaeuser Company has announced the completion of the merger with Plum Creek Timber Company, Inc. The combined company owns more than 13 million acres of diverse and productive timberlands and operates 38 wood products manufacturing facilities across the country.
TEACH A TEACHER
The 2016 Florida Forests Teachers’ Tour (FFTT) is an annual event that gives the forest industry the opportunity to tell forestry’s story to educators from around the state. Teachers take back the information and insights they learn in this four-day hands-on experience and incorporate them into their curriculum during the school year. This year’s tour will be held June 21-24, based in Fernandina Beach, FL.

Sponsors are vital to the success of this program! Each $500 sponsorship allows one teacher to participate at no cost to him/herself beyond travel to and from Fernandina. To become a sponsor, contact Whitney Hough (850.222.5646 or Whitney@ForestFla.org) or simply send your check, payable to the Florida Forestry Foundation, to P.O. Box 1696, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

Thank you to all of our sponsors to date:

BUILDING FUND, ROUND 2

Renovations at your Association headquarters continue to progress. As with many building projects, there have been some unexpected twists in the tale. Despite these, the office is looking sharper all the time, wearing its new roof, paint, deck and windows with style.

In addition to the major overhauls, you will also find a new sign out front (everyone needs to know who can claim this showcase!), redesigned landscaping and some needed interior upgrades as well (our carpet was older than our newest staff member!).

As you can guess, there is still more work to be done. We are grateful for the outpouring of support that we have received for this project up to this point ... and we are hopeful that support will continue to grow!

Please consider contributing to this worthwhile effort. Whether it’s your first contribution or your second, we will be very appreciative to receive it.

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact Debbie Bryant (850.222.5646 or Debbie@ForestFla.org).

REP. GRAHAM TOURS TREE FARM
Rep. Gwen Graham (D-Florida) recently toured Bubba and Maria Greene’s Tree Farm in Madison, FL. Part of a five-day farm tour across her congressional district, the event allowed Rep. Graham to have a hands-on experience with Florida’s working forests. Members of several facets of the forest industry participated and discussed forestry issues with the Representative.

FORESTRY FORWARD VISITS SWAMP LOGGING OPERATION
Members of Forestry Forward, the Association’s leadership development program, visited a swamp logging operation on February 11, 2016, to show the group how Best Management Practices are put into action.

The site is owned by Four Rivers Land & Timber Company LLC; T.W. Byrd’s Sons, Inc., performed the harvesting.

SAVE ON HUNTING LEASE INSURANCE
Partnering with Outdoor Underwriters, Inc., FFA offers reduced insurance rates for hunting leases.

For details, visit the Association’s website at www.FloridaForest.org or contact Mike Branch (850.222.5646 or Mike@ForestFla.org).

FFS WINS NATIONAL AWARD
The Florida Forest Service (FFS) has received the Wildfire Mitigation Fire Service Leadership award for its record-breaking prescribed fire program. During the previous year, FFS treated more than 246,000 acres of state forests with prescribed fire, the highest number ever reported by a state forestry agency in United States history.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 13, 2016
10 AM
Steering Committee Meeting
Association Office
Tallahassee, FL

April 21, 2016
10 AM
Executive Committee Meeting
Association Office
Tallahassee, FL

June 8-9, 2016
8 AM - 5 PM
Master Logger 2-Day Workshop
(Initial Training)
Lake City, FL

July 12, 2016
10 AM
Executive Committee Meeting
Location TBD

July 14, 2016
8 AM - 12 PM
Master Logger CLE Training Workshop
Quincy, FL

August 30-September 1, 2016
Annual Meeting
Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort
Amelia Island, FL

August 31, 2016
4 PM
Board of Directors Meeting
Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort
Amelia Island, FL

October 13, 2016
8 AM - 12 PM
Master Logger CLE Training Workshop
Cross City, FL

November 15, 2016
8 AM - 12 PM
Master Logger CLE Training Workshop
Gainesville, FL

December 8, 2016
8 AM - 12 PM
Master Logger CLE Training Workshop
Lake City, FL

December 15, 2016
8 AM - 12 PM
Master Logger CLE Training Workshop
Blountstown, FL

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Liability and fire insurance are also available.

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