2014 Legislative Priorities

The 2014 state legislative session begins Tuesday, March 4. Legislators have already spent several weeks in Tallahassee holding committee meetings in preparation. Water is making its mark as a major issue to be addressed this year, as are other headline grabbers such as medical marijuana and several proposed tax breaks.

FFA’s Executive Committee has approved the slate of legislative priorities as recommended by the Governmental Relations Committee. Below are synopses of the issues and FFA’s position on each:

**ISSUE 1 – Sales Tax Exemption on Equipment Parts**

**Issue:** 2005 legislation repealed the state sales tax on farm & forestry equipment. While this has resulted in a tremendous savings for ag and forestry producers, replacement parts for this equipment remain taxable. To make ends meet during these tough economic times, producers have had to maximize the useful life of their equipment, which has increased the need and demand for replacement parts, which remain taxable.

**Florida Forestry Association Position:** The Association supports legislation that repeals the state sales tax on replacement parts for farm and forestry equipment.

**ISSUE 2 – Ag Lands Practices Act**

**Issue:** The 2003 Ag Lands Practices Act prohibits a county from adopting best management practices or where such activity is regulated by the state. However, wetlands protection ordinances adopted prior to 2003 are specifically excluded from this preemption.

**Florida Forestry Association Position:** The Association supports legislation that preempts a local government’s authority to enforce a wetlands protection ordinance adopted prior to 2003.

**ISSUE 3 – Trucking Weights**

**Issue:** Rising fuel prices, foreign competition and increased traffic on highway infrastructure have fueled an outcry for increased truck weights across the nation. We have been, and continue to be, a vocal supporter of a permanent increase in truck weights on federal highways. In 2010, the state legislature approved an increase in truck weights up to 88,000 pounds, on non-Interstate highways.

**Florida Forestry Association Position:** The Association supports federal legislation to permanently increase truck weights for transporters of ag and forestry products on federal interstate highways.

**ISSUE 4 – Natural Resource Protection**

**Issue:** Population growth has taxed Florida’s natural resources. Lakes, waterways and aquifers have experienced dramatic drops in water levels, and there are major areas of saltwater intrusion along the coastline. Springs from central Georgia to southern Florida are experiencing reduced or intermittent flows, and wells throughout the state are drying up. There are a number of legislative proposals being discussed to address Florida’s water quality and quantity issues. While the Association is generally supportive of these efforts, it notes that these and related problems arose over many years, and we can’t expect them to be resolved overnight. Further, a number of programs are already in place to address our state’s water and other aural resources. These include, but are not limited to, TMDLs, Basin Management Action Plans, minimum flows and levels, Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water quality, the recently adopted Imperiled Species Rule and associated Species Action Plans, and Integrated Conservation Strategies, including Wildlife BMPs.

**Florida Forestry Association Position:** The Association supports efforts to restore and improve Florida’s natural resources and believes the solution can be found in existing programs.

**ISSUE 5 – Budget Issues**

**Florida Forest Service – Budget Priority**
- Firefighter Pay Increase $1.42 M
- Overtime Pay $1 M
- Replace Firefighting Equipment $5 Million
- Rural & Family Lands Protection Program $10 Million

**ISSUE 6 – Reforestation Cost-Share Program**

**Issue:** Currently reforestation rates are at historic low levels (296,000 acres in 1986 – 117,000 acres in 2011). Reforestation cost share programs have been effectively used in the past to stimulate reforestation rates among private forestland owners. During the 1960s and extending into the 1990s, several reforestation cost share programs were available to assist private landowners with reforestation costs. Most of those programs have been discontinued, or presently have limitations making them less useful for reforesting timberlands. A reforestation cost-share program offering landowners maximum flexibility in pine species selection and planting density would serve as a much-needed incentive for increased tree planting.

**Florida Forestry Association Position:** The Association supports legislation creating a state funded reforestation cost-share program.

**ISSUE 7 – Amber Strobe Lights on the Rear of Log Trailers**

**Issue:** In an effort to increase visibility and safety when unloaded, some log carriers have mounted flashing amber strobe lights to the rear of the log trailer. Recent citations have been issued, citing the law does not provide an exemption for this type of light on these trailers.

**Florida Forestry Association Position:** The Association supports legislation allowing a log trailer to display a flashing amber light on the rear of trailer.
ACTION PLAN – 2013-2014
Specific action steps to implement the Strategic Plan and the committee activities required to get the job done.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS Committee • Edward Cole, Chair; Alan Shelby, Staff
Goal: To be the voice of forest landowners, forest products producers, consuming mills and all forest interests in governmental affairs.
Actions:
* Advocate governmental policies that strengthen and expand opportunities for landowners, loggers and wood conversion facilities.
* Monitor and track legislation favorable/unfavorable to Association members.
* Invite legislative and agency leaders to annual meeting.

TREEPAC Committee • Dan Simmons, Chair; Alan Shelby, Staff
Goal: To raise sufficient funding to help support and influence the election of state legislative candidates that support and understand the forestry community.
Actions:
* Raise $50,000 (29% increase) for the 2013-2014 election cycle through voluntary contributions associated with annual dues invoice and a direct mail solicitation.
* Recognize top TREEPAC contributors through publications and a poster at the annual meeting registration desk.
* Coordinate delivery/bundling of campaign contributions when possible.
* Meet with and interview legislative candidates to assist staff in making recommendations.

STEERING Committee • Jim Cottingham, Chair; Debbie Bryant, Staff
Goal: To ensure fiscal sustainability through member dues as well as non-dues income and to inspire interest in Association activities.
Actions:
* Grow the membership.
  - Identify prospective members (including canceled members) and engage Board members to assist with follow up.
  - Conduct two regional meetings targeting members and/or prospective members.
  - Develop a strategy to increase Annual Meeting attendance.
  - Include the Forestry Forward group in efforts of the Steering Committee.

ENVIRONMENTAL Committee • David Harrelson, Chair; Phil Gornicki, Staff
Goal: To monitor emerging environmental issues that may impact the forestry community.
Actions:
* Conduct two information exchange forums to keep Committee members updated on emerging environmental issues.
* Proactively follow issues of importance and notify Governmental Relations Committee when “call to action” is appropriate.
* Monitor progress of ongoing study investigating BMP effectiveness in preventing water quality degradation from forest fertilization.
* Monitor development and implementation of new forestry BMPs related to wildlife protection.
* Monitor implementation of new ERP permit exemption for forestry: Notice of Exempt Protection.

COMMUNICATIONS Committee • Michele Curtis, Chair; Lee Ann Fisch, Staff
Goal: To build and maintain an effective communications program to reach Association members, government, news media, the public and prospects with relevant forestry messages.
Actions:
* Communicate the success story of FFA.
  - Identify tangible benefits of belonging to FFA for each segment.
  - Focus media and member outreach to correspond with legislative agenda and membership recruitment efforts.
  - Develop member benefit communication tools on tangible benefits of belonging.
  - Submit editorials on relevant issues in appropriate media outlets.
  - Increase FFA’s social media presence.
  - Utilize Facebook and Twitter as a tool for communication and awareness.
* Continue discussions and develop a strategy for a joint magazine publication with FFA, FFSS and UF/IFAS, when the magazine contract expires in Oct. 2014.
* Create and offer Association branded products (window decals, mouse pads or rain gauges) to members attending various functions, to help raise FFSS profile.
* Encourage and explore incentives for members to receive information electronically.
* Implement BIPAC program and monitor its effectiveness of BIPAC.
* Create interactive activities for Forest Discovery Center school tours.

OTHER SERVICES PROVIDED
* Administer the Master Logger training program.
* Administer the Florida Tree Farm Program.
* Provide staff support to the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.
* Administer insurance program for Outdoor Underwriters.
* Maintain and distribute environmental law manual.
* Conduct Annual Meeting.
* Recruit ten new members for Forestry Forward.
* Recruit sponsors and assist with administration of Florida Forests Teachers Tour.
* Develop new advertising opportunities to generate additional non-dues revenue.

AT FFA, MEMBERSHIP MATTERS.
The success of any association depends upon an active and engaged membership. Three easy steps will put you on the path to making a difference for your Association and your industry:
1) Check the circle beside the committee(s) of your choice and fill out the contact information.
2) Return this form to FFA by mailing it to the address at the bottom OR email your committee choice and contact information to Vickie@ForestFla.org.
3) Attend the next committee meeting. We expect committees to meet no more than twice each year; in some cases, members will be able to participate through conference calls.

It’s quick. It’s simple. It makes a difference.

NAME ____________________________
ADDRESS __________________________
CITY, STATE and ZIP __________________________
EMAIL __________________________
TELEPHONE __________________________

COMMITTEE(S) OF CHOICE
- GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
- STEERING
- ENVIRONMENTAL
- COMMUNICATIONS

Email: Vickie@ForestFla.org
Mail: Florida Forestry Association
P.O. Box 1696
Tallahassee, FL 32302

Best Management Practices for Wildlife
In December 2013, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ Best Management Practices Technical Advisory Committee (BMP TAC) voted to move ahead with the formal rule-making process for a new set of wildlife BMPs for forestry. The adoption process, which could include a public hearing if requested, should be completed within the next few months. The draft is now available.

The sole purpose of the wildlife BMPs is to serve as an alternative to the need to obtain an incidental take permit for a specified set of state imperiled species. They are practical, easily understood and easily applied and will only be used as voluntary measures at a landowner’s discretion. The wildlife BMPs for forestry will exist as a completely separate document from the current silviculture BMP manual for maintaining water quality.

For a copy of the draft BMPs, contact Phil Gornicki (850.222.5646 or Phil@ForestFla.org).

w w w . F l o r i d a F o r e s t . o r g
Florida Forests Teachers’ Tour

The 2014 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 17-21 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. Sponsors as of this printing include Ackerman LLP, Phillip Allen, Callahan Timber Company, Coastal Plywood Company, Cochran Forest Products, Foley Timber and Land Company, Forest Investment Associates, the Rayonier Foundation, Southern Forestry Consultants, Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Inc., and T.W. Byrd’s Sons, Inc. More sponsors are needed to ensure funding for all 45 teachers! To sign up as a sponsor, contact Vickie Allen (850.222.5646 or Vickie@ForestFla.org).

Environmental Law Manuals

The updated FFA Environmental Law Manual, a comprehensive compilation of federal, state and regional regulations affecting forest management practices, is now available for $225 (tax included). The manual is an invaluable aid to landowners and managers who need to know the regulations they must comply with on a daily basis.

To place an order, contact Vickie Allen (850.222.5646 or Vickie@ForestFla.org).

Rattlesnake Survey

The National Council for Air and Stream Improvement, Inc. (NCASI) has completed its initial survey period to collect data on observations of the Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake. Survey submissions are still encouraged from the forestry community, according to survey administrator Dr. Ben Wigley.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has been petitioned to list the eastern diamondback rattlesnake as a threatened or endangered species. As the Service reviews the status of the eastern diamondback, NCASI – a non-profit research center that provides technical information on environmental issues for the forest products industry – is gathering data to improve understanding of its distribution and habitat associations.

NCASI collected survey responses through December 31, 2013, to analyze results and provide a report to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Although the official survey response deadline has passed, NCASI is still encouraging survey submissions from the forestry community to ensure these critical habitats are adequately covered in the report. Wigley indicated that no action to list the snake from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is expected in the near term so the online survey will remain up and running.

“From the initial data we have gathered, it seems that the forestry community is encountering this snake in a variety of forest types, but mostly in planted and natural pine forests,” Wigley said. “An open or thinned forest canopy seems to be an important characteristic of the locations where the eastern diamondback is seen.”

If you would like to continue to help in the efforts to gather more information on the snake, please contact Dr. Ben Wigley, Manager, Sustainable Forestry and Eastern Wildlife Program at (864) 656-0840.

The bill requires the approval of the president before it can be implemented.

Farm Bill Passes Congress

After many delays, the Farm Bill finally passed the US Senate and House of Representatives. Some of the components of the bill affecting the forest industry are highlighted below:

- Protection from unnecessary federal permit requirements on your forest roads;
- Improved access to conservation resources;
- Greater market opportunities;
- Reforms to the USDA Forest Inventory & Analysis program to make its data more useful for practical supply projections; and
- Strengthened support for programs that combat invasive pests and pathogens.

The bill requires the approval of the president before it can be implemented.

Welcome to the Club: President Lynetta Usher Griner poses with previous recipients of the Woman of the Year in Agriculture award.

FFA President Honored as Woman of the Year in Agriculture

FFA President Lynetta Usher Griner was honored as the 2013 Woman of the Year in Agriculture at a luncheon at the Florida State Fair on Monday, Feb. 10, 2014. The award was presented by Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services Adam Putnam.

The Giners visit with Mike Joyner, who is the current Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture, a former FFA employee and a longtime family friend.

Family matters: The Griners are joined by their son, Korey, and Lynetta’s sister, Karen White. Lynetta’s father, E.T. Usher, also attended the luncheon but was unable to come onstage for photos.

Board Recommendations

Anyone who would like to recommend a fellow FFA member for consideration as a possible addition to the Association’s Board of Directors is encouraged to contact Vickie Allen (850.222.5646). Please have the following information available: Member’s name, place of employment, title, phone number, mailing address and e-mail address.

We invite comments and suggestions. Let us know what you think by writing us at: PO Box 1696, Tallahassee, Florida 32302; by phoning us at: (850) 222-5646; or by faxing us at: (850) 222-6179.

Pines & Needles (ISSN 1091563x) (USPS 014-757) is published bimonthly by the Florida Forestry Association, 402 East Jefferson Street, Tallahassee, Florida 32301. Subscriptions through membership only at an annual cost of $55 per member. Postage paid at Tallahassee, Florida. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Pines & Needles, P.O. Box 1696, Tallahassee, Florida 32302.
These advertisers make this publication possible. Please support Pines & Needles by doing business with them!