The 2019 legislative session could be said to be the most challenging in recent history. Florida had its first new governor and new Commissioner of Agriculture in eight years. The Senate President and Speaker of the House were just beginning their first session in their respective positions. A large class of freshman was entering the process.

If that was not enough, a Category 5 hurricane had just lashed the state’s Panhandle five months before session began.

Not knowing what could or should be expected in a landscape painted with so many unknowns, the Association did what it does best. We advocated, educated and communicated. We called our grassroots network into play. Until the ceremonial hankies were dropped to signal the end of session, we were in front of legislators, working to ensure the best possible outcome for our members.

Despite the surprising lack of notable drama or conflict, budget issues sent the session into overtime. It ended on Saturday, May 4, with the passage of a $91 billion budget. Ultimately, we were able to see some good legislation passed and some bad legislation fail.

Following is a brief recap of the bills and budget issues affecting the forest industry:

**Bills That Passed**


The legislation became the omnibus tax package, which included a few provisions to offer some relief for agricultural producers impacted by Hurricane Michael. Specifically, this legislation provides sales-tax exemptions for materials purchased to replace or repair farm fences and non-residential farm buildings. In addition, the bill also extends a sales tax rebate for fuel used to transport agricultural products following the storm. In order to receive the exemption/rebate producers will need to file an affidavit with the Florida Department of Revenue. The exemption will apply to purchases from October 10, 2018, thru June 30, 2019.

The necessary forms for these exemptions can be found on the Hurricane Resources page of the Association’s website, FloridaForest.org.

**State Hemp Program** – SB 1020 by Sen. Rob Bradley

Following the 2017 Farm Bill, there has been a growing interest and investment into the production of hemp as an agricultural commodity. It has been over 70 years since hemp, which is in the same family as marijuana, has been grown for commercial uses. SB 1020, a priority for Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services Nikki Fried, directs the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to promulgate rules governing the growth and production of hemp.

**Bills That Failed**

**Florida Building Code**

As filed, this bill quickly became a priority issue for the Association to oppose. The bill would have updated the Florida Building code to require that the entire envelope of a building be constructed or rebuilt to be impact resistant using only materials that are “non-combustible” and have high-wind resistant and “non-combustible” materials. This legislation never received a committee hearing in either chamber.

**E-Verify**

This proposed legislation would have required employers to use the federal E-Verify system to verify employment eligibility, which can be an expensive and time consuming endeavor. The Association believes immigration reform is a national issue and should be dealt with at the federal level, rather than on a state-by-state basis.

**Water Quality Improvements**

An omnibus environmental regulation/water quality bill contained, in part, the following provisions: codifying a septic to sewer grant program; requiring a septic remediation plan where septic tanks account for more than 20% of the loading to an impaired water body; directing DEP to adopt rules; creating a standing Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) on Biosolids; and adding additional regulatory requirements, including notification procedures for utilities in the event of a sewage spill.

**Advanced Well Stimulation**

Legislation designed to ban fracking and matrix acidization failed.

**BUDGET**

**Hurricane Michael Relief:** The state legislature did not fund any programs to assist agricultural or forest land owners with replanting or clean up from the devastating impacts of Hurricane Michael. While we understand the primary disaster assistance should come from the federal government, it is still extremely disappointing that the legislature did not champion any assistance to reduce wildfire threats or assist these industries to get back on track.

We thank Ag Commissioner Nikki Fried and the Florida Forest Service, Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis, Senators Bill Montford, George Gainer and Doug Broxson, and Representatives Laronne Ausley, Jay Trumbull and Brad Drake for their efforts.

**UF/IFAS:** Within the education silo of the budget, a significant shift in funding priority transferred from Higher Education to K-12 education. The direct impact of the reprioritization included insufficient funding to make UF/IFAS whole. Most importantly to Association members, the legislature didn’t provide the funding for geomatics, horticulture or tropical aquaculture lab. These three programs were additions to the IFAS-based funding years ago and were targeted by then-Governor Rick Scott and vetoed. They have proven challenging to get wrapped back into the recurring UF/IFAS line. UF/IFAS also took a reduction in their workload funding and did not secure the full requested funding for their STEM and 4H budget requests.

**Other budget items of note:**

- $50 M for Springs Restoration Projects
- $29 M for Florida Forever Acquisitions
- $10.8 M for the Blue-Green Algae Taskforce
- $3.9 M for building repairs
- $200 M for Rural and Family Lands Program
FEDERAL DISASTER AID PACKAGE

Earlier this month, President Donald Trump signed the long-delayed disaster recovery package that will send $19.1 billion to states and territories hit by flooding, wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes and other natural disasters in recent months.

Highlights of the bill for the forest industry include the following:

$480 million for the Emergency Forest Restoration Program - for necessary expenses related to the consequences of Hurricanes Michael and Florence, wildfires occurring in 2018, and other natural disasters. Funds to remain available until expended.

$12 million for State and Private Forestry - for necessary expenses related to the consequences of Hurricanes Florence and Michael, as well as 2018 wildfires.

$1 million for Forest Rangeland Research - for necessary expenses for Forest Inventory Analysis and the collection and analyses of post-storm damage by state forestry agencies.

$85 million for the National Forest System - for necessary expenses related to the consequences of Hurricanes Florence and Michael, as well as 2018 wildfires. $21,000,000 shall be used for hazardous fuels management activities.

The USDA has also been given $3 billion in block grants to cover producers’ net exposure to losses. The distribution of these funds to impacted areas across the nation has not yet been decided.

Many thanks to Florida's congressional delegation and to Commissioner Nikki Fried for their leadership on this vital issue.

SHELBY SPEAKS TO FLORIDA DELEGATION/GOVERNOR’S ROUNDTABLE

Prior to the passage of the disaster aid package, Association Executive Vice President Alan Shelby participated in a panel discussion hosted by Florida’s congressional delegation in Washington, D.C.

Among other items of note, he shared the impact that Hurricane Michael has had on the forest industry in the Panhandle and the need for immediate relief. He explained that with the equivalent of 2.5 million log trucks’ worth of wood on the ground as a result of the hurricane, debris management is a serious issue for both reforestation efforts and the mitigation of increased wildfire threats.

He also stressed that reforestation is needed to ensure the future sustainability of the consuming mills, the local economies and their way of life.

In addition, he discussed the negative impacts the Chinese retaliatory tariffs are having on forestry exports in the Southeast and noted that the tariffs should be removed.

Fellow panelists were Ag Commissioner Nicki Fried, Florida Farm Bureau President John Hoblick and Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association President Mike Joyner.

After the disaster aid package was signed, Shelby joined Governor Ron DeSantis, United States Department of Agriculture Sonny Perdue, Ag Commissioner Fried and other state agricultural and political leaders for a roundtable meeting at the Governor’s Mansion to discuss its implementation.

“The discussion clearly showed that forest landowners in the Panhandle have not been forgotten,” said Shelby after the meeting. “We are more than ready to move forward after the hurricane, and now we have the resources to help make that happen.”

FOREST RECOVERY ACT BILL INTRODUCED IN U.S. SENATE

The Forest Recovery Act legislation which would allow any individual or business growing trees with the intent of selling them to deduct up to the fair market value lost as a result of a catastrophic event, such as a hurricane or fire, was introduced in the U.S. Senate last week (S.1687).

The House version of the bill (H.R. 2607) was introduced earlier this year.

Many thanks to Representatives Neal Dunn, Brian Mast, John Rutherford and Ted Yoho and Senator Marco Rubio for cosponsoring this important legislation!

FORESTRY FORWARD

Forestry Forward, the Association’s leadership development program, is currently accepting applications for its next class, which starts in October.

This program is a great opportunity for learning about different aspects of the forest industry, meeting industry leaders and becoming more involved in the Association.

To learn more about Forestry Forward, including how to apply for Class 12, visit our website!

WANT MORE BUCKS?

Saving money is always a good thing! Partnering with Outdoor Underwriters, Inc., the Association offers our members special reduced rates for liability insurance for hunting leases and timberland.

Contact Mike Branch (850.222.5646 or Mike@ForestFla.org).

SUSTAINABLE FORESTER AWARD NOMINATIONS

Audubon Florida is seeking nominations for its Sustainable Forester Award, which will be presented at the Florida Forestry Association’s Annual Meeting:

Criteria: Florida Based Forester, Forestry Family or Forestry Business, with demonstrated improvements in bird and wildlife habitat and water resources through forest management practices.

Easy Nomination: Letter with photographs and supportive documentation of sites managed and improved results. Please include contact information for the nominated forester and the nominator. Supportive letters appreciated but not necessary. Please limit to five pages or less.

Deadline: July 20, 2019
Send to: Adrienne Ruhl, aruhl@audubon.org, Audubon Florida
For more information, please contact Audubon Florida at 850.222.2473.
Join your friends and business associates at the beautiful Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort for three days of networking, learning and celebrating another year in the amazing forest industry! The resort offers gorgeous views of the incomparable Emerald Coast, fabulous food and shopping within easy walking distance, and a host of other offerings that is sure to make this year’s event one of the best ever!

The state’s largest forestry trade show is held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting, featuring exhibits by the industry’s cutting edge equipment and service providers. Don’t be left behind – schedule time to meet with all the representatives to find out the latest and greatest developments for forestry professionals in today’s marketplace!

As always, our Silent Auction will be a main attraction. You will be the envy of your friends and associates when you walk away with the top bid on any item in our slate of auction offerings! If you have something you’d like to donate to the auction, please contact Whitney Hough at 850.222.5646 or Whitney@ForestFla.org.

The schedule outlines all the events as well as our session topics and speakers. A registration form is available under the Annual Meeting tab on our website (www.FloridaForest.org) or by calling the Association office (850.222.5646).

Register now for the best rates!

## HOTEL INFORMATION

**Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort**  
9300 Emerald Coast Pkwy W  
Miramar Beach, FL 32550

**Reservations:** 1.800.320.8115  
**Group Code:** 244226

To reserve online, please visit the Annual Meeting section of the Association’s website, www.FloridaForest.org.

**Room rates:** Studio - $155; One BR - $175  
Reserve by July 29, 2019, for this guaranteed room rate.

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### 2019 TIMBER TOPPERS GOLF CLASSIC

Do not miss this year’s Timber Toppers Golf Classic! The resort’s golf courses have earned it a designation as a top golfing destination! Use this registration form to sign up and hit the Links Golf Course for an invaluable networking experience with other forest professionals and friends! Tee time is 8 AM, Wednesday, August 21, 2019. Golf is open to all members and their guests; meeting registration is not required to play in the tournament.

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### SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

**Tuesday, August 20, 2019**

- 10:00 AM–6:00 PM Trade Show Set-Up/Silent Auction Open
- 1:00 PM–6:00 PM Registration Desk Open
- 1:00 PM–3:00 PM Forestry Council Meeting
- 3:00 PM–5:00 PM Prescribed Burn Working Group (members only, please)
- 5:30 PM–7:00 PM Registrant Reception/Exhibitor Meet & Greet

**Wednesday, August 21, 2019**

- 6:30 AM–6:00 PM Registration Desk Open
- 6:30 AM–8:00 AM Early Bird Coffee
- 6:30 AM–10:00 AM Trade Show Set-Up
- 6:45 AM–7:45 AM Golf Registration & Tee-Time Coffee
- 8:00 AM–1:00 PM Golf Tournament
- 10:00 AM–7:00 PM Trade Show & Silent Auction Open
- 10:00 AM–12:00 PM Roundtable/Breakout Sessions
  - Project Learning Tree (PLT)
  - Jessica Ireland and Elise Cassie, PLT
  - Forest Landowner Taxes
  - Tom Harrison, Lanigan & Associates
- 12:00 PM–2:00 PM Lunch on your own
- 12:00 PM–2:00 PM UF SFRC Alumni Luncheon
- 2:15 PM–3:45 PM General Session
  - Hurricane Michael Recovery
  - Jim Karrels, Florida Forest Service
  - Gatoeye (Drone LiDar mapping technology)
  - Dr. Eben Broadbent, UF/IFAS
- 4:00 PM–5:00 PM Board Meeting
- 5:30 PM–7:00 PM Welcome Reception/Exhibitor Meet & Greet
- 8:00 PM–12:00 AM Entertainment

**Thursday, August 22, 2019**

- 6:45 AM–12:00 PM Registration Desk Open
- 6:45 AM–8:00 AM Early Bird Coffee
- 8:00 AM–10:00 AM Awards Breakfast
- 10:00 AM–4:00 PM Trade Show & Silent Auction Open
- 10:30 AM–11:30 AM General Session
  - Safety in the Woods – David Dumas, WestRock
- 11:30 AM–1:30 PM Lunch on your own
- 11:45 AM–1:15 PM Master Logger Luncheon
  - Loss Control – Bruce Hooker, North American Timber Program
- 1:30 PM–2:30 PM General Session
  - Economic Forecast – Marshall Thomas, F&W Forestry Services, Inc.
- 2:30 PM–4:00 PM Trade Show Social & Silent Auction Final Bidding
- 6:00 PM–8:00 PM Closing Dinner & Entertainment
- 8:00 PM–9:00 PM Auction Item Pickup & Trade Show Teardown

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