**WORKING FORESTS WEEK**

Florida’s inaugural Working Forests Week, held October 18-24, 2015, exceeded expectations!

More than 40 events were held across the state, including two as far south as Miami-Dade. Highlights included an official proclamation by the Florida Cabinet, school presentations, tours, speeches to local civic groups and a variety of earned media.

John and Elizabeth Alter of Alter-Bevis Farms, the 2015 Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year (OTFOY), hosted a tour of their Tree Farm on Friday, October 23, to cap off the week. After the tour, participants were treated to lunch and a short awards ceremony for the Outstanding Tree Farmer and the Tree Farm Inspector of the Year.

"Working Forests Week demonstrated one of the reasons working forests work so well," said FFA Executive Vice President Alan Shelby. "The people involved in the industry are hardworking and passionate. They know forestry has a great story to tell, and they are excited to share it."

Plans for the 2016 Working Forests Week (October 22-26) are forthcoming. If you want to be part of the planning, please contact Lee Ann Fisch: LeeAnn@ForestFla.org or 850.222.5646.

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**MEMBERS RECOGNIZED**

Past president and longtime Association member Marvin Pritchett received posthumous recognition as a Great Floridian by Gov. Rick Scott and the Florida Cabinet on Tuesday, December 8, 2015.

“Anyone who knew Mr. Pritchett knows that he was a great man and a great Floridian,” said Association Executive Vice President Alan Shelby. “He did a lot for our industry and for the people in his community. It’s very appropriate to see him honored in this way.”

John Holzaepfel and Eric Hoyer have been named as Fellows by the Society of American Foresters. The honorary title is bestowed in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the Society and to the forestry profession. Holzaepfel and Hoyer both work with Natural Resource Planning Services, Inc., are past recipients of the C. Huxley Coulter Award for outstanding contributions to the profession of forestry and are active leaders within the industry.

Richard Schwab of M.A. Rigoni, Inc., has been named president of the American Loggers Council, a national organization that represents timber harvesting professionals in 30 states. Schwab also serves as president of the Southeastern Wood Producers Association.

M. A. Rigoni, Inc., of Perry, FL, has been selected as the Forest Resources Association’s (FRA) Southeast Region Outstanding Logger Award winner for 2016! Gary Brett and Rodney Schwab will be presented with this award at FRA’s regional meeting in Gainesville, FL, on March 16, 2016, and will also move on to the national competition.

Project Learning Tree (PLT) has recognized Rex Lumber as its 2015 business partner of the year for its outstanding dedication, support and service to the environmental education program.

According to PLT, Rex Lumber has provided generous support since 2012, enabling the program to reach more educators and youth throughout the state.
NEW MEMBERS

The Florida Forestry Association welcomes all the new members who joined in 2015! Your membership matters!

Alpo Tree Service
Basquet, Bill
Bell, Jacob
Berry Brothers Farm
Berry, Mike
Bloodworth, Doc
Bolleson, Christopher
Bradley, James
Broughton, Kyle
Brown, Blythe et al.
Barklew, Luke
Burnham, George L.
Burnham, Samuel T.
Buller, Gene
Byrd, Troy
Carter, Cannon
Cannon, James A.
Carr, Dylan
Carroll, Kent
Chaney, Jamie
Clary Logging, Inc.
Cook, Jr., Robert P.
Coutie, Megan
Carr, Ben
Darling, John
Davis, Chuck
DC Timber
De Jesus, Camille
Deep South Timber
D&M Timber, LLC
Dornish, Vanessa
Durham, Ahmet
Durance and Associates
E & S Logging
Eaton, Jonathan Edward
Edward, Steve
Emerson, Hilary
Ehr, Brad
Environmental Services, Inc.
Ennar, Espy, Julia
Farris, Terry
Faulkner, Keith
Farr, Ray
Farr, Moms Hunt Club
Faulkner, Phillip
Garber, Paul
Garbent, Kent
Gray, James Eric
Greig, Adam
Geiger, Richard
Gent, J. Raymond Joseph
Goldin, Carl
Godfrey, John
Gonick, Philip
Gray, Jeremy
Griffis, Ryan A.
Grossman, Anthony T.
GWB Back 40, LLC
Harden, Jon
Hardin, John
Harms, Ken
Heather Island, Inc.
Hedden, Geoffrey
Hernandez, Anthony
Hill, Melissa K
Hunt, Alex
J&G Farms & Logging, LLC
Jackson, Barry
Jackson, Rex
Jopp, Alan
Jennings, Stephanie
Johnson, Chris
Johnson, Donald
R & R Logging
K&D Trucking, Inc.
King, Ken
Kling, Lorelle
Kleyn, Lynn
Knight Software, Inc.
Kopelman, Sara
Konishi, Michael
Lanier, Monty
Lander, James Ryan
Lan, Jeffrey W
Lawn, William H.
Lui, Tao
Lott, Cyrus
Lucky 13
Lynn, Steven W.
Magnolia Strategies
McGee, Roshawn
McGill
McQueen Family Timber Farm
McInerney, John J/TF
Mia Hunt Group
Morris, Ray
Moyo, Jr., Obosse
M&L TALLOW Ag & Timber
Nature Coast Timber, LLC @ Panama City
Nelson, Travis
New Beginnings
Transportation, LLC
New River Timber
Consulting, LLC
Norman, Joe
Norton, Travis N.
Nusser, IL, Art
Oak Tree Hunt Club
Odum, Ben
Olivier, Lucas
P & R Logging
Parey, Norah
Pemberton, LLC
Pendleton, Donald E.
Perry Logging
Pope, Russell
Pullen, Randall
Quality Log Homes, LLC
Ovnen Hunt Club
RAM Trucking & Logging
Reaves, Ricky
Regester, Charles
Roby’s Hunting Club
Roberts, Austin
Ross, Esmirme
Ross, III, Randall H.
Rotunda, Bradley W.
Sapp, Jason
Sapp, Jr., Jeffrey
Sapp, Sharon K
Scott, Braden
Shady Grove Dairy Farm, Inc.
Simmons, Charles
Simon, Brent E.
Simons Tree Farm
Singleberry, Scott
Smetana, Michael
Smith, Carlton
Smith, Charles
Smith, Justin
Smith, Kenny
Smith, Taff
Smith’s Logging
Southern Forest Recyclers, Inc.
Southern Timber Hunt Club
Stambaugh, Edward
Star Lake Hunt Club
Stone, Debrah
Sweet, Joe
Swift Creek Land & Timber
T.A.L. Club
T&P Hudson
Tate, Charles
Thomas Holdings, LLC
Tiner, Ren
Total Petroleum, LLC
Turner, Don
Varré Perry Logging
VanWagner, Ryan
Vance Ranch, LLC
Waits, Aaron
Waldon, Charles
Walton, Ben
Ward, Yutan
Ward Brothers Farms, LLC
Winter, Kyle
Witness Tree Land and Timber LLC
Woodend, Michael
Yu, Yun
Young’s Contracting

PLUM CREEK AND WEYERHAUSER MERGE

Plum Creek and Weyerhaeuser announced a merger creating the country’s largest and most geographically-diversified timber REIT with 13 million acres of sustainably managed forests and 38 wood products manufacturing facilities.

Rick Holley, CEO of Plum Creek, will become the non-executive chairman of the board, and Doyle Simons, president and CEO of Weyerhaeuser, will serve as the new company’s president and CEO. The combined organization will operate under the Weyerhaeuser name.

The transaction was unanimously approved by the boards of directors of both companies and is expected to close in the late first quarter or early second quarter of 2016.

MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

The Association will host two regional membership meetings in March 2016. These events are designed to give our members the opportunity to network with other forestry professionals and fellowship with good friends on a local level.

Thursday, March 3, 2016, @ 5:30 PM (EST)
Austin Cary Forest Learning Center, Gainesville, FL
Reservation deadline: February 19, 2016

Thursday, March 10, 2016 @ 11:30 AM (CST)
Neal’s Camp, Scott’s Ferry, FL
Reservation deadline: February 26, 2016

At both meetings, the floor will be open for discussion. Participants can address issues of concern and interest, as well as provide invaluable input to Association leadership and staff.

Current members are encouraged to bring prospective members who can also experience the benefits of membership. For those who are new to the Florida Forestry Association, this is an excellent opportunity to meet like-minded professionals and share the value of being a member.

DWINELL NEW DIRECTOR OF AG WATER POLICY

Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam has named Steve Dwinell as the new Director of the Office of Water Policy.

Dwinell has a Masters degree from the University of Florida in Agricultural Entomology. He started his career as an Extension Agent in Hamilton County before moving to the Department of Environmental Protection to work in the Bureau of Groundwater Protection. He began his career with the Department as an Environmental Administrator in the Bureau of Pesticides and has been the Assistant Director of the Division of Agricultural Environmental Services since 2000.

Dwinell can be reached at Steve.Dwinell@FreshFromFlorida.com or 850.617.1704.

TIMBER THEFT TASK FORCE

Florida Forestry Association President Mike Bell appointed the Florida Timber Theft Task Force to review Florida’s timber theft laws. In the assistance of the Florida Forest Service and the legal office of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the task force compared Florida’s laws with those of other Southeastern states. Though a few minor differences were noted, no compelling reasons were identified to warrant changes to current state law or established procedures.

“After thorough review and discussion of Florida’s timber theft laws and procedures,” said Association Vice President Michael Dooner, who chaired the task force, “no areas of major concern rose to the level of warranting statutory revision.”

The task force did, however, make a recommendation to ask the Florida Forest Service to develop, with the assistance of task force members, a web-based educational outreach tool for landowners and loggers, outlining best practices when selling and harvesting timber.

These statements are posted to satisfy circulation requirements of the US Postal Service.
Florida's House and Senate will begin their 60-day regular session on January 12, 2016.

The Florida Forestry Association’s Board of Directors will hold a joint meeting with our Working Forest Partners on the morning of Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2016, in the Tallahassee City Commission chambers. That afternoon members will be free to visit with their legislators. Events will wrap up that evening with a legislative reception hosted by Commissioner Adam Putnam and the Florida Farm Bureau Federation in the capitol courtyard.

Below are the Association’s legislative priorities and position statements for the 2016 session, as approved by the Association’s Governmental Relations Committee:

ISSUE 1 – Sales Tax Exemptions

The 2015 legislature expanded the sales tax exemptions for ag and forestry to include parts and repairs of power farm equipment used in agricultural production and a partial exemption of specific trailers owned by the farmer. The 2016 legislature is revisiting the sales tax issue to expand its application to include trailers used in agricultural production but not owned by the farmer.

Florida Forestry Association Position:
The Association supports legislation that repeals the state sales tax on trailer production but not owned by the farmer.

ISSUE 2 – Reforestation Cost-Share Program

Reforestation rates have been in decline over the last 30 years and hit a historic low of 48,000 acres planted in 2008 (296,000 acres in 1986 – 118,000 in 2013). Reforestation cost-share programs have been effectively used to stimulate reforestation rates among private foreland owners. Historically, reforestation cost-share programs were available to assist private landowners with reforestation costs; many of those programs have been discontinued or have limitations making them unfeasible for reforesting timberlands. Reforestation cost-share programs should offer landowners flexibility in pine species selection and planting density based on site-specific conditions to maximize both economic and environmental benefits.

A state-funded reforestation program should:
• Be administered through the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ (FDACS) Florida Forest Service;
• Place a priority on forestlands located in springsheds, areas of critical environmental concerns or impaired watersheds with established TMDLs or associated BMAPs;
• Provide a 50/50 cost-share program that includes site preparation, tree seedlings and planting costs;
• Require that reforestation includes pine, cypress and hardwood species planted at densities best suited for the subject property, but at a rate not less than 500 trees per acre;
• Require that planting eligibility be limited to a minimum of 10 acres, at a cost-share rate of 50% up to a maximum of $150 per acre/year, and a maximum of $15,000 per landowner/year;
• Require all participants to implement water quality Silviculture Best Management Practices as adopted by FDACS;
• Require that these cost-share practices be maintained for a minimum of 10 years to demonstrate a committed investment in the management of healthy forest cover and sustained ecosystems;
• Allow prescribed burning and exotic plant removal, up to a maximum of $15,000 per landowner/year; and
• Not be used to plant any exotic tree species.

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

ISSUE 3 – Natural Resource Protection

Competition for Florida’s natural resources creates unique challenges for water users and the environment. 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 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 and working to address our state’s water and natural resources, such as TMDLs and Basin Management Action Plans; the establishment of minimum flows and levels; Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water quality; the state’s recently adopted Imperiled Species Rule and its associated Species Action Plans; and Integrated Conservation Strategies that include Wildlife Basins.

Florida Forestry Association Position:
The Association supports efforts to restore and improve Florida’s natural resources and believes the solution can be found through implementation and funding of existing and new programs, including reforestation cost-share programs and compensation for ecosystem services.

ISSUE 4 – Trucking Weights

Fuel prices, foreign competition and increased traffic on highway infrastructure have fueled an outcry for increased trucking weights across the nation. The Association has been – and continues 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 5 – Farm Vehicles

The State of Florida has reached a crossroads where federal funding is in jeopardy unless the state updates its Highway Safety and Motor Vehicle Regulations to mirror the Federal Map 21 rules. This includes specific rules relating to farm vehicles. Drivers of those covered vehicles who are exempt from CDL requirements would be able to travel intra-state without mileage limits and would be exempt from hours of service requirements. This would also allow interstate travel within 150 miles of the farm. These provisions are only extended to the farmer, their family or a direct employee and do not apply to drivers for hire.

Florida Forestry Association Position:
The Association supports updating Florida laws to be consistent with the Federal Rules and Regulations relating to Map 21.

ISSUE 6 - Immigration Reform

Over the past few years, there have been legislative proposals requiring employers to use the federal E-Verify system to verify the legal status of its workers.

Florida Forestry Association Position:
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.

ISSUE 7 – Budget Issues

Florida Forest Service – Budget Priority
Firefighter Pay increase $ 2.39 M
Firefighting Equipment replacement $ 5.87 M
Rural and Family Lands Program $25.0 M
Reforestation Cost Share $ 3.0 M