Rail freight lobby derails truck weight reform

On February 1, the Florida Forestry Association participated with ten national trucking groups in a “call on Congress” effort to increase the weight limit on the federal interstate system. Much to the satisfaction of truck weight reform advocates, the American Energy and Infrastructure Jobs Act included a provision giving the states authority to increase truck weight on the federal interstate system from 80,000 pounds to 97,000 pounds. The issue had gained urgency since once every six years the opportunity comes along to reauthorize programs and funding to enhance the nation’s transportation infrastructure.

Working with the Coalition on Transportation Productivity (CTP), AgHaul and others, our contention that states should have the option to put more productive, six-axle trucks on interstates, helped secure the support of almost all of the Florida delegation on the Committee: Chairman John Mica, Representative Steve Southerland, and Representative Dennis Ross.

An amendment was offered in the full committee markup, to require a three-year study before an increase in truck weight could be included in the highway bill. It was approved on a 33-22 vote. Congresswoman Corrine Brown (D-FL) was a leading advocate to require the study, thereby derailing truck weight reform. The remaining Florida Representatives on the Committee, Mica, Southerland, and Ross, stood firmly with us and voted against the amendment. Among those celebrating the outcome was the trade association for freight rail companies.

“Two decades ago, the railroad industry succeeded in convincing Congress to impose a nationwide 80,000-pound truck weight limit except where states already had a higher standard,” said Jeff Doran. “Their influence continues today. The rail freight industry is dead-set against efficient truck transportation and under the guise of safety they have financed a multi-million dollar propaganda campaign to keep the US truck freight limits the lowest in the developed world. American businesses will find it harder and harder to compete in the global market as a result of this action,” Doran concluded.

Survey results reinforce importance of government relations

Representation of forestry interests in Tallahassee and Washington DC continues to rank among the most important of member benefits provided by the Florida Forestry Association, according to the results of a survey recently conducted by the PIE Center at University of Florida. Government relations at the state and federal level are also top reasons members continue to remain a member. General support to the forest industry and receiving credible information rounded out the top three reasons members join and renew their annual support.

Two mediums were used to gather the survey data: on-line responses and mail-in forms. On-line survey respondents overwhelmingly prefer Forestry Friday as the communication vehicle to receive their information, where mail respondents favor Pines and Needles newsletter. Almost all of the participants were registered voters and voted in the 2008 presidential election as well as the 2010 state election. Even though the participants voted at a much higher proportion than the general public, they did not view themselves as politically active at the state or federal level and did not feel comfortable contacting elected officials.

“We appreciate our members taking time to give us this valuable feedback,” says Jeff Doran, Association Executive Vice President. “They affirmed our assumptions that an effective government relations effort is of foremost importance, which gives us even more reason to refocus resources in this area. We always strive to better serve the needs of our current and potential members and the PIE Center data will be used to support our quest for continuous improvement,” Doran concluded.

The next step will be using the research to craft a plan to guide the Association over the next three years. The membership survey will be used as a blueprint in the planning effort. This work of a special task group chaired by Lynetta Griner and Mike Bell will get underway in March with a full recommendation to the Executive Committee scheduled for May, 2012.

Are you receiving Forestry Friday?

If not, please send your email address to info@forestfla.org and we will add you to our database to receive all of our email communications immediately.
Where the trees are

Woods Hole Research Center (WHRC) recently worked with colleagues at the US Forest Service and US Geological Survey to create such an inventory (where the trees are) for the United States. A map was built from the National Biomass and Carbon Database (NBCD), released in 2011. It depicts the concentration of biomass (a measure of the amount of organic carbon) stored in the trunks, limbs, and leaves of trees. The darkest greens reveal the areas with the densest, tallest, and most robust forest growth.

Over six years, researchers assembled the national forest map from space-based radar, satellite sensors, computer models, and a massive amount of ground-based data. It is possibly the highest resolution and most detailed view of forest structure and carbon storage ever assembled for any country.

Forests in the US were mapped down to a scale of 30 meters, or roughly 100 feet per pixel. For every hectare of land (4 pixels per acre), they divided the country into 66 mapping zones and ended up mapping 265 million segments of the American land surface. Kellndorfer estimates that their mapping database includes measurements of about five million trees.

The map and additional information can be obtained at http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/IO3D/view.php?id=76697.

Prices fall for woody biomass

The demand for woody biomass in the US over the past three years has decreased because fossil fuel prices have stayed ‘relatively low’, according to a report from Wood Resources International. In particular, the pacific northwest of the US has the lowest biomass prices, a little lower than the south, although the northeast of the country has the highest prices.

Over the past three years, prices for sawmill byproducts, forest residues and urban wood waste have been falling, although it was still higher at the end of 2011 than it was five years prior. The fall in demand is mainly because of steady fossil fuel prices, especially that of natural gas, which means there has been a reduced demand for other forms of energy.

Because of these falling prices, companies are less likely to switch to renewable energy, which is often more expensive. In the regions of the US where the most biomass is consumed, price has been about $10-$20 (€6.5-€13) oven dry metric tonne (odmt) higher than mill biomass throughout last year. Most biomass is consumed, price has been about $10-$20 (€6.5-€13) oven dry metric tonne (odmt) higher than mill biomass throughout last year. Since the beginning of 2010, prices have fallen about 15-20% in the south US, and particularly in the south central states, prices have dropped recently because of improved weather conditions.

New CEO takes reigns at Rayonier

When Paul Boynton headlined the Florida Forestry Association annual meeting last fall in St. Augustine, he was the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and President. In January, the twelve-year Rayonier manager who has served in many roles, took over as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) from Lee Thomas, who is retiring in May. Florida Trend featured Boyton in a full page spread in its January issue. The interview puts working forests in a positive light and helps readers see the forests and the trees.

Boynton joined Rayonier in April 1999 as Director of Marketing and Sales for Rayonier’s Performance Fibers business in Jesup, GA. Boynton became Senior Vice President for Performance Fibers in 2002, and held the post until his promotion to Executive Vice President in November 2009. Boynton oversees Rayonier’s 2.5 million acres of timberland and the world’s leading specialty cellulose fibers business. Rayonier owns or manages 2.5 million acres of timberland.

Rayonier’s business is the 15th largest container exporter in the US with products manufactured from its two specialty mills in Jesup, GA and Fernandina Beach, FL.

Design values approved for 2x4’s

With an effective date of June 1, 2012 to allow time for an orderly implementation, the American Lumber Standard Committee (ALSC) Board of Review announced its approval of the Southern Pine Inspection Bureau’s (SPIB) proposed design value change for only No. 2.2x4 Southern Pine visually graded dimension lumber. In a related Supplemental Ruling, the Board of Review clarified that its decision also applies to all lower grades of 2x4: No. 3, Stud, Construction, Standard and Utility. The Board of Review declined to approve the proposed design values for other grades and sizes of Southern Pine, but was mindful that testing is currently underway on a full matrix sample. These ALSC rulings can be reviewed at www.southernpine.com.

A lot of work going on!

Association members have been busy volunteering their time with committee assignments, most recently including gatherings of the Sustain-able Forestry Initiative State Implementation Committee (SFI SIC), Tree Farm, Landowner, and Forest Nutrient Committees (and task forces), according to staff member Phil Gornicki. “The Florida Tree Farm Commit-tee has much on its plate this year besides the usual business of running the state’s Tree Farm program; it has major responsibilities in planning for and running elements of the National Tree Farmers Convention to be held in Jacksonville, June 14-16 (see Nation’s Tree Farmers to gather in Jacksonville). The Florida SFI SIC is working on a possible revision to the logger education program, the Landowner Committee continues to work on ways to increase Landowner membership in the Association (as well as adding to membership value to landowners), and the Forest Nutrient Task Force is busy implementing a new Best Management Practices (BMP) study aimed at documenting Florida BMP effectiveness in controlling nutrient pollution of our waterways. The SFI SIC also welcomes a new Chairperson this year, Kathy Brooks (Buckeye, FL), so all-in-all, the 2012 forecast is that we’ll be busy,” declares Gornicki.

Natural resource grads among those with steady jobs

A study released by Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce, shows that recent college graduates with the lowest rates of unemployment were those who earned degrees in health (5.4%), education (5.4%), and agriculture and natural resources (7%). Those with business and engineering degrees also fared relatively well. Those with the highest rates of unemployment had undergraduate degrees in architecture (13.9%), the arts (11.1%) and humanities (9.4%), according to the study.

The analysis, which was based on 2009 and 2010 data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, comes amid an increasing debate over the value of college education as an economic investment. Over the past two decades, the average amount of debt a student takes on has roughly doubled in real terms, leading to greater scrutiny of the financial returns of college.

The team conducting the study also quantified the value of various majors in terms of wages. Over a lifetime, the earnings of workers who have majored in engineering, computer science or business were as much as 50% higher than the earnings of those who majored in the humanities, the arts, education and psychology.

Source: Washington Post

2012 Legislative Session gets an early start

Based on the 2010 US Census Data, the state legislature must rebalance the House, Senate and Congressional district boundaries to adjust for population increases and decreases. To accomplish this in time for the upcoming elections, the 60-day Legislative Session has been pushed up two months and officially began on January 10th.

Though many issues have been filed for consideration, the dominant issues will be redistricting and adopting a balanced budget, while trimming state spending by another $2 billion. Leadership remains committed to “living within our means” and no new revenue sources are currently on the table.

Florida Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam outlined a series of energy proposals dealing with renewable energy sources and diversification, in an effort to jumpstart Florida’s renewable energy future. Among the list of recommendations, Putnam called on lawmakers to reinstate a tax exemption on renewable energy technology related investments, repeal the Renewable Portfolio Standard, provide funding for the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to develop a comprehensive statewide forest inventory analysis to ensure forest sustainability, and arguably the most controversial recommendation was to allow utilities to produce up to 1% (or 75 MW) of their power from renewable sources with the ability to recover their costs from the consumer. Putnam’s plan continues to make its way through the legislative process.
UF Biorefinery Plant opens at Buckeye

January 9, 2012 marked the official launch of the Stan Mayfield Biorefinery Pilot Plant in Perry, FL, a cooperative venture between the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and Buckeye Technologies Inc. As 200 guests looked on, State Rep. Debbie Mayfield, R-Vero Beach, stepped up to the big machine and pulled a lever, delivering the first official shipment of feedstock to the biorefinery, which will develop methods for producing fuel ethanol and other compounds from inedible plant material, including wood.

The biorefinery is named for Mayfield’s late husband, a member of the state House of Representatives from 2000 until his death in 2008. A UF graduate, Mayfield was a strong advocate of renewable fuels, environmental protection and economic growth. Mayfield was instrumental in securing a $20 million appropriation from the Florida Legislature to fund the biorefinery, noted UF Senior Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources Jack Payne, as he addressed the audience inside the 18,500-square-foot facility.

The commitment to that partnership was evident in the roster of speakers, which included state Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam, UF President Bernie Machen and Buckeye Technologies Inc. Chairman and CEO John Crowe. Attendees included numerous agricultural leaders and high-ranking officials from state government, UF, Buckeye and other groups involved in the project. Among them was Lonnie Ingram, a UF distinguished professor of microbiology and cell science, who developed a genetically modified bacterium that will be key to the biorefinery’s operations. The bacterium breaks down cellulose, a major component of plant cell walls, yielding simpler compounds used to produce fuel ethanol and bioplastics.

When fully operational, the biorefinery will produce up to 400 gallons of fuel ethanol and 5,000 pounds of organic acids for bioplastics each day. Some of the researchers’ goals include testing a wide variety of feedstocks such as crop residues and yard waste, and finding ways to save money on production costs.

Source: University of Florida, IFAS

Nation’s Tree Farmers to gather in Jacksonville

The 2012 National Tree Farmer Convention will be hosted in beautiful Jacksonville, FL on Thursday, June 14 – Saturday, June 16. The National Tree Farmer Convention is an annual event that brings together families, friends, Tree Farmers, foresters, and natural resource professionals from across the country. For three days, participants gather for hands-on tools and a visit to a local Certified Tree Farm. Attendees will network, attend educational sessions and of course, have FUN! The 2012 National Tree Farmer Convention will be held at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront Hotel. Take advantage of special rates and book your hotel room at www.treefarmsystem.org, or call 1.800.233.1234 (toll free) or 904.588.1234 (local) to speak to a Hyatt representative. Be sure to mention the convention code “2012 National Tree Farmer Convention” when making your reservation.

Information on rates, optional tours, Field Day, and agenda are now posted at www.treefarmsystem.org. Also, be sure to check the Tree Farm website periodically for convention updates.

These statements are posted to satisfy circulation requirements of the US Postal Service.

Temporary relief on two major forest-related issues granted by Congress

In the last few days of the 2011 Congressional Session, two important rewrites were included in the Omnibus Appropriations bill that could have added tremendous cost to wood fiber supply chain. Here’s a quick recap of the activity:

**DOL H-2B wage**

The December 17 passage of the Omnibus Appropriations bill prevents the US Department of Labor from implementing an onerous “Wage Rule” that would have established non-market wage guidelines for migrant guest workers brought to the United States under the H-2B Visa Program. As a result of a tremendous grassroots lobby effort led by Forest Resources Association and other groups in the H-2B Workforce Coalition, the Department of Labor may not enforce, or implement, its new Wage Rule at least until October 1, 2012. It is estimated that this action alone will save $75.1 million in new costs on the country’s wood supply system this planting season.

In addition, legal action is being pursued by the forest sector and others that use H-2B workers (landscaping, seafood-processing, and hospitality industries) to overturn the Wage Rule. The Federal Court for the Western District of Louisiana recently transferred that suit, The Louisiana Forestry Association v. Solis, to the Eastern District Court of Pennsylvania, where a new hearing will be scheduled.

**Forest roads permitting**

Congress also included language in the Omnibus Appropriations Bill declaring that storm water runoff from forest roads and other silviculture activities identified in EPA’s regulations shall not be subject to National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits for the duration of the fiscal year. This action effectively prevents the Ninth Circuit from taking effect in Fiscal Year 2012. The language will expire on September 30, 2012, unless Congress extends the language in the 2013 appropriations bill or through a continuing resolution.

In mid-December, the Supreme Court issued an order seeking the views of the Solicitor General on whether the Court should review the National Environmental Defense Council (NEDC) v. Brown case. These were both significant developments in the Forest Roads campaign.

Pines & Needles

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

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Florida Master Logger

The 3-day Florida Master Logger and all one-day (meets 6 hour requirement) continuing education workshops are confirmed for 2012. Below lists dates, locations and topics. To register or receive more information, contact Debbie Bryant at 850.222.5646 or debbie@forestfla.org.

- Feb 18 @ Branford
- Diesel Emissions Reduction • Improving Log Truck Profitability

Mar 7 @ Bristol
- CSA-Are you ready? • Hazardous Materials • Equipment Fire Prevention

Apr 4 @ Trenton
- Diesel Emissions Reduction • Improving Log Truck Profitability

May 2 @ Bryceville
- CSA-Are you ready? • Hazardous Materials • Equipment Fire Prevention

Jun 26-28 @ Quincy
- CSA-Are you ready? • Hazardous Materials • Equipment Fire Prevention

Jul 25 @ Palatka
- CSA-Are you ready? • Hazardous Materials • Equipment Fire Prevention

Aug 29 @ Marianna
- Diesel Emissions Reduction • Improving Log Truck Profitability

Sep 20 @ Ocala
- CSA-Are you ready? • Hazardous Materials • Equipment Fire Prevention

Oct 3 @ Cantonment
- CSA-Are you ready? • Hazardous Materials • Equipment Fire Prevention

Nov 14 @ Ocala
- Truck & Trailer Safety, Maintenance and Inspections

Dec 12 @ Lake City
- Truck & Trailer Safety, Maintenance and Inspections

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