MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Nearly 150 members of the Florida Forestry Association gathered for food, fun and fellowship at two regional meetings in February. The first meeting was held Feb. 5, 2015, at the University of Florida’s Austin Cary Forest Learning Center in Gainesville, FL. Members who had not seen the facility since its reconstruction marveled at its transformation into a true showplace for the forest industry. Sponsored by Farm Credit of Florida, the event also featured a delicious barbecue dinner and good discussions on issues affecting forestry.

The second meeting was held Feb. 16, 2015, at the Nokuse Plantation’s E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center in Bruce, FL. A privately owned preservation and restoration area, the Center is rarely open to the public; attendees at the membership meeting were provided the additional treat of a guided tour of the facility. Sponsored by ArborGen Inc. and Farm Credit of Northwest Florida, the event also featured a delectable lunch, informative speakers and time for networking and catching up among friends.

FORESTRY FORWARD 2015

Congratulations to the 2015 Class of Forestry Forward, the Association’s leadership program: Trey Byrd (T.W. Byrd’s Sons, Inc.), Travis Davidson (Columbia Timber Company), Matthew T. Dykes (American Forest Management, Inc.), Mark Hammond (American Forest Management, Inc.), Eric Handley (Usher Land & Timber, Inc.), N. Jordan Huntley (Callahan Timber Company), Austen Roberts (Swift Creek Land & Timber), Braden Scott (Farm Credit of Northwest Florida), Zak Seymour (Farm Credit of Florida) and Aleko Stathopoulos (Suwannee Lumber Company). Forestry Forward is chaired by David H. Hand (RockTenn).

This program provides up and coming members a segue to leadership roles in the Association. Current year participants have access to Board and committee meetings, legislative events, educational sessions and tours, and unique networking opportunities.

For more information, please visit the Association’s website at www.FloridaForest.org/Programs/Forestry-Forward.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS!

The success of any organization is highly dependent on an engaged membership. An easy and effective way to be active in FFA is through our committees: Government Relations, TREEPAC, Environmental, Steering and Communications.

To learn more about the Association’s committees and their missions, please visit the Association’s website at www.FloridaForest.org/Programs/Committees.

MASTER LOGGER CLASS SCHEDULE

**Annual Update**
- April 1, 2015 – Milton
- July 15, 2015 – Quincy
- October 14, 2015 – Perry
- November 5, 2015 – Gainesville
- December 10, 2015 – Lake City

All classes begin at 8 AM and end no later than noon.

**Two-day Workshop**
- June 17-18, 2015
  - Florida Gateway College
  - Lake City, FL

For more information, please visit the Association’s website at www.FloridaForest.org/Programs/master-logger.
STATE OF FLORIDA

ISSUE 2 - Reforestation Cost-Share Program

The Florida legislature kicked off its annual regular session on Tuesday, March 3, 2015. Gov. Rick Scott gave his fifth State of the State address, focusing on the state’s “exceptionalism” and stressing its low unemployment rate, low debt and low taxes. He highlighted several of his priorities for the session, including increased funding for schools and job training and reduced taxes.

House Speaker Steve Crisafulli, R-Merritt Island, unveiled his priorities for the House, framed as “Five Solutions for a Stronger Florida.” His plan leans heavily on tax relief, education and student testing and the distribution of Amendment 1 funds for water and land conservation. Senate President Andy Gardiner, R-Orlando, said that his chamber will focus on Medicaid expansion. He commended the Senate for the progress they have already made with high stakes testing, implementation of Amendment One, and reforming the Department of Corrections.

The Florida forestry association were in Tallahassee on March 18, 2015, to meet with their representatives and senators and to attend a legislative reception hosted by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Florida Farm Bureau Federation. The Association will have an exhibit.

Below are the Association’s legislative priorities, as recommended by the Governmental Relations Committee and approved by the Executive Committee:

ISSUE 1 – Sales Tax Exemption on Equipment Parts

2005 legislation repealed the state sales tax on farm and forestry equipment. While this has resulted in a tremendous savings for ag and forestry producers, replacement parts for this equipment remain taxable. As a conduit to keep Florida’s agricultural and forest landowners competitive, the legislature should exempt from sales tax replacement parts for farm and forestry equipment.

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

ISSUE 2 – Reforestation Cost-Share Program

Currently reforestation rates are at historic low levels (296,000 acres in 1986 – 118,000 in 2013). Reforestation cost-share programs have been effectively used to stimulate reforestation rates among private forestland owners. Historically, reforestation cost-share programs were available to assist private landowners with reforestation costs; many of these programs have been discontinued or have limitations that make them unfeasible for reforesters. The reforestation cost-share program 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 springheads, areas of critical environmental concerns or impaired watersheds with established TMDLs or associated BMPs;
• 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 $20,000 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;
• 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 – Gulf County Greenbelt Issue

Recently, the Gulf County Property Appraiser chose to use a different timber assessment methodology. This change has resulted in increased property tax bills for many forest landowners. Currently, FFA is working with local landowners, their legal counsel, and the Department of Revenue to identify potential solutions, including amendments to Florida Statutes and Administrative Code relating to agricultural land assessment.

Florida Forestry Association Position:
The Association supports the fair and just valuation of Florida’s timberlands.

ISSUE 4 – Immigration Reform

Over the past few years, there has been legislation to require 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 5 – Trucking Weights

Fuel prices, foreign competition and increased traffic on highway infrastructure have fueled an outcry for increased trucking 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 6 – 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 BMPs.

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 7 – Budget Issues

Florida Forest Service – Budget Priorities

| Firefighter Pay increase | $ 1.7 M |
| Firefighting Equipment replacement | $ 6.39 M |
| Rural and Family Lands Program | $25.0 M |
| Overtime Salary Adjustment | $ 1.0 M |

Overtime Salary Adjustment $ 1.0 M
Firefighting Equipment replacement $ 6.39 M
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Overtime Salary Adjustment $ 1.0 M

For weekly legislative updates, please visit the Association’s website at www.FloridaForest.org.
REFORESTATION TRENDS

The Florida Forest Service has tracked reforestation trends in Florida since 1950. Below is a chart depicting Florida’s historical reforestation trends through the 2013-14 planting season. Reforestation ticked down slightly in 2013 by about 4,000 acres compared to the prior year. With average lower planting densities, this represented a decrease of roughly 6.7 million trees. The current rate remains less than half the acres planted on average during the decades of the 1970’s and 80’s. A significant decline started in the early 1990’s and appears to have bottomed out in 2008-2009.

The chart also depicts planting by major landowner groups. Historically, the forest industry was the leading tree planting group in Florida. Non-industrial private landowners (NIPF) became the leading tree planters in Florida beginning around 2007.

FLORIDA FORESTS TEACHERS’ TOUR

Sponsors are still needed for the Florida Forests Teachers’ Tour! This tour 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 23-26, 2015, in Fernandina Beach, FL. Forty-five teachers are selected each year. 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 sign up as a sponsor, please contact Vickie Allen at 850.222.5646 or Vickie@ForestFla.org.

SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY

Rex Lumber Company is awarding scholarships for the Fall 2015 semester at Chipola College for students pursuing an Associate of Science degree in Engineering Technology specializing in Advanced Manufacturing: Pneumatics, Hydraulics and Motors Certification. For more information, please visit the Association’s website at www.FloridaForest.org/Resources/Scholarships.

ENVIRONMENTAL LAW MANUALS AVAILABLE

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 at 850.222.5646 or Vickie@ForestFla.org.

SAVE ON HUNTING LEASE LIABILITY INSURANCE

Partnering with Outdoor Underwriters, Inc., FFA offers reduced liability insurance rates for hunting leases. The new minimum premium rate is now only $150! For details, visit the Association’s website at www.FloridaForest.org/programs/land-liability-insurance, or contact Phil Gornicki at 850.222.5646 or Phil@ForestFla.org. Timberland liability and fire damage insurance for standing timber are also available.

BROOKS SINK AQUIFER RECHARGE PROJECT

On Thursday, January 29, 2015, a project kickoff ceremony was held in Bradford County to celebrate a joint endeavor by Rayonier and the Suwannee River Water Management District: the Brooks Sink aquifer recharge, which will contribute significantly to the flow of the Santa Fe River and associated springs.

“We have long recognized that North Florida’s abundant, renewable working forests - the dominant land use in the region - hold the key to solving many water resource challenges including water quality and springs protection, flood control, alternative water supply and aquifer recharge,” said Doug Long, Vice President, U.S. Operations, for Rayonier. “We are so pleased to work with the Suwannee River Water Management District through this creative and cost-effective public-private partnership to restore historic water flows to Brooks Sink, recharge underground aquifers and improve the flow of the Santa Fe River and local springs.”

EASEMENT APPLICATIONS

Applications are being accepted for USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service Agricultural Conservation Easements Program (ACEP), which provides financial and technical assistance for farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to establish conservation easements. The program funds easements for wetlands and agricultural lands. Wetland reserve easements restore, protect and enhance wetlands on privately owned and tribal land. Eligible lands include farmed or converted wetlands that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored.

For more information, contact your local NRCS office.

BUILDING FUND UPDATE

We have had a resounding response to our Building Fund drive and are already at the halfway mark towards our goal of $60,000! FFA’s long needed building improvements have begun: new shingles have been installed on the building, gazebo and cook shed. Project manager Debbie Bryant reports that roof leaks are a thing of the past and the building looks much better to boot!

We are now moving onto additional projects, and we are excited to watch the progress. For more information on FFA’s building makeover, as well as a list of contributors, please visit the Association’s website at www.FloridaForest.org/about-us/building-fund.

Donations are still needed and very much appreciated. If you would like to contribute to this very worthy cause, please contact Debbie Bryant at 850.222.5646 or Debbie@ForestFla.org.