SHELBY APPOINTED TO RE-OPEN FLORIDA TASK FORCE INDUSTRY WORKING GROUP

Association Executive Vice President Alan Shelby has been appointed to the Governor’s Re-Open Florida Task Force Industry Working Group on Agriculture, Finance, Government, Healthcare, Management and Professional Services.

This Task Force will make recommendations to the Governor’s Re-Open Florida Executive Committee as the state looks to re-open its economy.

“I’m honored to be part of this process,” said Shelby. “Forestry has a $25 billion impact on the state’s economy and helps provide jobs for 124,000 people. We are recognized as an essential industry in the COVID-19 crisis, and I believe we will play an essential role in restoring stability to Florida’s economy.”

LEGISLATIVE SESSION REVIEW

By Jim Spratt, Association Lobbyist

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we well all going direct the other way- in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.”

How correct Charles Dickens was in this excerpt from the classic A Tale of Two Cities.

The 2020 Florida Legislative Session concluded with a vote on the budget on Thursday, March 19.

While there were several bright spots which will be outlined below, the new challenges faced by the impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic and the cascading economic impacts will leave a mark in every segment of the nation’s and state’s economy. These new impacts are salt in the wound to an industry which is still struggling to recover from the devastating impacts of Hurricane Michael.

Below are a few highlights from the 2020 legislative session:

Policy


This significant omnibus legislation was a high priority for the Association all session, if for no other reason than to make sure really bad policy wasn’t added to the legislation. First, the Association wishes to extend a huge thank you to Sen. Debbie Mayfield and Rep. Bobby Payne for guiding the ship in their respective chambers; they spent hours upon hours trying to land this ship and they did a great job. We also thank Rep. Blaise Ingoglia, Rep. Toby Overdorf, Sen. Ben Albritton and Sen. Wilton Simpson for their work on this legislation.

To recap, the bill includes several provisions: (1) transfers the septic tank program from the Department of Health to the Department of Environmental Protection; (2) creates a water quality grant program for local government and utilities to transition septic tanks to sewer and other water quality projects; (3) requires water management districts to update their storm water rules; (4) directs the Department of Environmental Protection and appropriate water management districts to conduct a study of bottle water withdrawals in springsheds; (5) requires the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to conduct BMP implementation verifications every two years with a specific focus on the Indian River Lagoon and Lake Okeechobee watersheds; (6) authorizes the development and cost-share of regional agricultural water quality projects; (7) requires the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to adopt updated Biosolids rules; (8) prohibits any local government ordinance, rule, charter or other action from granting rights to nature or the natural system.

The final provision (8) requires additional explanation because the issue is not widely known. It addresses the growing global movement of “Rights of Nature.” A group known as the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature believes that natural systems should not be treated as property. They hold that nature in all its life forms has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles and that an ecosystem should be able to be named as the injured party, with its own legal standing rights, in cases alleging rights violations.

According to the group’s website, there are currently five counties in Florida, including Alachua and the Santa Fe River ecosystem, with advocacy groups working to have the intrinsic rights of their local ecosystems recognized by law. As such, the inclusion of this provision in the legislation will go far in preventing problems before they start.


Quite simply, these bills didn’t even start moving until the halfway point of session. They were energized by Gov. DeSantis’ comments regarding his desire to have Florida employers comply with E-Verify. Thankfully, in its final form, the bill provides employers two options to verify potential employees: the E-Verify system or the Federal I-9 process.

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This issue lingered until the last week of the 2020 session. Several times the fate of this legislation was unclear. Some days were good news and some days were tense. A huge part of the successful outcome of this legislation was the absolute commitment from every business group to remain in lockstep on this issue. On several occasions, there were opportunities for individual stakeholders to separate from the flock on this legislation. However, we all stuck together, and the outcome could not have been more positive.

Public Records Exemption for Site-Specific Location of Endangered Species
This legislation moved quietly through the process. As passed, the legislation exempts from public records the specific location of state or federal endangered, threatened or listed species. The exemption will sunset in 2025 unless the legislature takes action to make it permanent.

Budget
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services: Rural and Family Lands Program- $8.6 million Florida Forest Service aircraft replacement- $671,000 Fire Suppression Equipment- $7.4 million

UF/IFAS: Workload $3.8 million- This is a huge win for UF/IFAS as this was a fully funded request with a majority of the money being recurring dollars. Workload dollars allow UF/IFAS to fund research and upgrade equipment and facilities as well as potentially plug holes in programs and services.

Separate yet important issues arose in the House of Representative regarding existing UF/IFAS programs, including $1.1 million which funds specific programs and staff within the School of Forestry and Natural Resources. The funding was maintained during the budget conference process.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection: Florida Forever- $79 million Springs Protection- $50 million

COVID-19: The state budget directs $52.5 million in state and federal dollars to purchase necessities related to COVID-19. The 2020-21 budget also directs an additional $300 million into state reserves. State reserve funds can be utilized when the governor has declared a state of emergency in order to provide immediate resources to combat the economic fallout of a natural disaster, health epidemic, or any other state emergency. This additional enhancement brings the total state reserves to nearly $4 billion.

Notwithstanding the policy and budget success of the 2020 session, there is no avoiding the impacts the coronavirus has already had and will continue to have on the state’s economy. As we look forward to the summer months, it is unclear the challenges we will face as an industry and as individuals. The Association is maintaining open lines of communication with state and federal agencies regarding essential businesses, supply chains, employee issues, etc. This may prove to be a long road, but we will get through this together.

THE TORCH IS PASSED
A crowd of about 200 gathered at the Retreat at Bradley’s Pond to celebrate the career of State Forester and Florida Forest Service Director Jim Karels, who retired at the end of February.

Karels passed the leadership torch to his Assistant Director, Erin Albury.

“I’ve known and worked with Erin for many years,” Association Executive Vice President Alan Shelby said. “He is an experienced leader with a solid team, and I am confident in his ability to lead the charge.”

Johnny Sabo, who previously served as the FFS Field Operations Chief, has stepped into the Assistant Director role.

SILVICULTURAL CONTRACTOR OF THE YEAR AWARD
It’s that time of the year to recognize our silvicultural contractors who work hard to provide valuable services to the landowners of Florida!

Take some time to reflect on those who have helped get good work done and help us recognize these valuable members of the forest industry. Please complete the short nomination form at www.flforestry.org/wp-content/uploads/Silvicultural-Contractor-Form-2020.pdf and send to Laura Bosworth at Laura@FlForestry.org.

We will be accepting nominations until May 31.
LAKE BUTLER MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Nearly 100 people gathered at the Hal Y. Maines Community Center in Lake Butler on Wednesday, March 4, for our first membership meeting of the year. The event featured networking opportunities, issue updates from Association Executive Vice President Alan Shelby and Director of Forestry and Regulatory Affairs Laura Bosworth, and a delicious lunch courtesy of ArborGen, Inc., and Farm Credit of Florida. We also appreciate our event sponsors who made it possible for us to come to a new location: Jimmy Bielling, Phillip Pritchett, Austen Roberts and Avery Roberts.

Many thanks to all those who attended, and a warm welcome to our new members who joined at the event!

Unfortunately, our second membership meeting had to be canceled due to coronavirus concerns. Th event was scheduled to be held on March 18 at Coastal Plywood Company’s Magnolia Lodge in Quincy.

“We look forward to these meetings every year,” said Director of Member Services Whitney Hough. “The cancellation was a huge disappointment for everyone, but the health and well-being of our members always comes first for us.”

We are grateful for the continuing support of our site host, Coastal Plywood Company, and our sponsors, Farm Credit of Northwest Florida and ArborGen, Inc.

2020 FLORIDA FORESTRY TEACHERS’ TOUR CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19 CONCERNS

COVID-19 has claimed yet another victim – the 2020 Florida Forestry Teachers’ Tour (FFTT). Scheduled for June 16-19, the tour’s dates were too deeply embedded in the novel coronavirus’s cone of uncertainty for comfort.

The tour brings 45 teachers from across the state to Fernandina Beach to see firsthand how forestry works in Florida.

Participating teachers experience all aspects of forestry practices from the planting and growing processes to the mills and end products. They also learn about chemical by-products created in the process of making paper. In short, they see firsthand the industry’s many efforts to maximize the effective and efficient use of resources.

“The tour is an incredibly effective and powerful tool for sharing forestry’s story,” said Erin Albury, State Forester and Director of the Florida Forest Service. “However, there are currently too many unknowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic gripping our state to confidently ensure we could carry out the tour safely and effectively this year.”

“At the end of the day, the health and safety of our teachers, our hosts and their employees at the various sites visited, and everyone involved in the tour have to be our priority,” said Association EVP Alan Shelby.

“Cancelling the tour was a difficult decision and certainly a disappointment, but we look forward to reconvening in the fall to begin planning for the 2021 tour,” said Jennifer Hart, Deputy Chief of Field Operations for FFS Region II, who heads up the FFTT planning committee.

Much appreciation goes out to all those who have contributed to the 2020 tour:

- Callahan Timber Company
- Coastal Plywood Company
- Dave Norton & Diann Douglas
- Forest Investment Associates
- Four Rivers Land & Timber Company LLC
- Friends of Florida State Forests, Inc.
- Greg & Martina Driskell
- Mizell Development, Inc.
- Phillip Allen
- Rayonier
- Rayonier Advanced Materials
- Register Family Partnership, LTD
- Sapp’s Land & Excavating, Inc.
- Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Inc.
- T. W. Byrd’s Sons, Inc.
- Tom Gilpin
- University of Florida, School of Forest Resources & Conservation
- WestRock

MEMBERS HELPING MEMBERS

As the latest step in our COVID-19 resiliency resources, the Association is excited to announce the launch of our Members Helping Members initiative!

We are asking our members to share valuable information from their field of expertise to help other members navigate these uncharted waters we are facing with the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic repercussions. You can submit videos, trainings, how-to’s, promotions, incentives and other helpful resources!

All resources that are shared will be available on a new “Members Helping Members” page on our website. Submitted materials will keep their original branding so everyone will know the source. PDFs are best for written materials and graphics. Videos will be posted on our YouTube channel and linked to on the new MHM webpage.

Please email your contributions or questions to LeeAnn@FLForestry.org.

We are looking forward to seeing many positive results from this initiative! We will get through this together!

MIT STUDY HIGHLIGHTS BENEFITS OF USING WOOD-BASED BUILDING MATERIALS

In a recently released study done in partnership with Weyerhaeuser, MIT scientists determined that using lumber products instead of cement, iron and steel could significantly cut construction emissions and costs.

Specifically, researchers determined that the CO2 intensity of lumber production — tons of CO2 emissions per dollar of output — is less than 25 percent of cement, less than 50 percent of iron and steel, and about 20 percent less than fabricated metal products. In other words, substituting wood for other construction materials not only reduces emissions, it also reduces the cost of reducing emissions.

The complete report can be found on Weyerhaeuser’s website at https://bit.ly/2xLqRuv.