



LEGISLATIVE SESSION WRAP UP MARCH 15, 2016



The 2016 legislative session was much more congenial than last year's. At its close on Friday, March 11, 2016, several bills important to the forest industry had successfully passed both chambers. Legislative highlights include the following:

Agritourism – *HB 59 by Reps. Neil Combee and Jake Raburn; SB 304 by Sen. Kelli Stargel*

This legislation expands the scope of agritourism to include civic, ceremonial and training and exhibition activities. It also prohibits local governments from enforcing existing regulations on agritourism activities on land classified as agricultural under Greenbelt and clarifies that agritourism does not affect the land's Greenbelt status as long as the land's primary use continues to be a bona fide agricultural purpose. This legislation has been signed by the Governor.

Conservation Easements – *SB 190 by Sen. Travis Hutson; HB 501 by Rep. Kionne McGhee*

This legislation provides that once an original application for an ad valorem tax exemption for property subject to a perpetual conservation easement has been granted, the property owner is not required to file a renewal application until the use of the property no longer complies with the restrictions and requirements of the conservation easement. This legislation has been presented to the Governor.

Fire Safety – *HB 431 by Rep. Jake Raburn; SB 822 by Sen. Kelli Stargel*

This legislation creates a new exemption from the Florida Fire Prevention Code (FFPC) and national codes for pole barns, which are nonresidential farm buildings in which 70 percent or more of the perimeter walls are permanently open and that allow free ingress and egress. This legislation has been presented to the Governor.

Water Policy – *SB 552 by Sen. Charlie Dean; HB 7005 by Rep. Matt Caldwell*

This legislation develops a statewide long-term plan to protect, preserve and restore Florida's water supply and natural resources, without increasing costs, limiting water supplies, or increasing regulations on forestry and ag producers around the state. The Governor signed this landmark legislation into law early in the session.

Environmental Control – *HB 589 by Rep. Cary Pigman; SB 1052 by Sen. Alan Hays*

This legislation allows the use of land set-asides and land use modifications not otherwise required by state law or permit, including constructed wetlands or other water quality improvement projects, that reduce nutrient loads into nutrient impaired surface waters to generate water quality credits for trading. It also provides that the limitation on the granting of a variance from the requirements of the Florida Air and Water Pollution Control Act does not prohibit the issuance of moderating provisions or requirements under state law, subject to any necessary approval by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. This legislation has been presented to the Governor.

Special Assessments on Ag Lands – *HB 773 by Rep. Ben Albritton; SB 1664 by Sen. Kelli Stargel*

This legislation prohibits counties and municipalities from levying a special assessment for the provision of fire protection on lands classified as agricultural under Florida's greenbelt law. However, counties and municipalities can levy special assessments if the land contains a residential dwelling or nonresidential farm building valued at more than \$10,000.

Agriculture – *HB 749 by Rep. Jake Raburn; SB 1310 by Sen. Travis Hutson*

This legislation includes language specifying that an allowable surface use of land subject to a conservation easement may include agricultural activities, including but not limited to silviculture, forest management and livestock grazing, if such activities are a current or historic use of the land placed

under the easement and the activities are conducted in accordance with the applicable best management practices adopted by DACS. This legislation has been presented to the Governor.

Farm Vehicles – SB 1046 by Sen. Travis Hutson; HB 411 by Rep. Halsey Beshears

This legislation provides a statewide commercial driver's license (CDL) exemption for farmers and helps modernize Florida's transportation laws so they mirror the MAP 21 legislation passed by Congress in 2012. This legislation has been presented to the Governor.

State Lands – HB 1075 by Rep. Matt Caldwell; SB 1290 by Sen. Wilton Simpson

This legislation allows landowners to place their property in a conservation easement and in return use adjacent acreage of state-owned land for low-impact agricultural activities, such as forestry. This legislation has not yet been presented to the Governor.

School Construction – HB 7029 by Rep. Bob Cortes; SB 1166 by Sen. Don Gaetz

This legislation grants school districts more flexibility regarding construction requirements, including allowing the use of wood for interior non-load bearing walls. It also mandates an OPPAGA study to identify current school construction requirements that can be eliminated or modified to reduce costs. Our goal is to show that wood is a comparable and more cost effective building material than steel and concrete and allow its use in school construction. This legislation has not yet been presented to the Governor.

Transportation – HB 7061 by Rep. David Santiago; SB 1392 by Sen. Jeff Brandes

This legislation extends the maximum allowable length of a semitrailer from 53 to 57 feet. This legislation has been presented to the Governor.

Taxes – HB 7099 by Rep. Matt Gaetz

This general tax package includes a permanent extension of the current sales tax exemption for manufacturing equipment and machinery, which was set to expire April 30, 2017. This legislation has not yet been presented to the Governor.

Budget – The legislature approved a roughly \$82 billion budget. Of note in the budget are the following items:

- Agricultural Best Management Practices and Water Supply Planning -- \$20 million
- Firefighter Pay Increase – \$2,000 per firefighter
- Florida Forever Acquisition -- \$50 million
- Passive Dispersed Water Storage -- \$4 million
- Reforestation Costshare Program -- \$5 million
- Rural and Family Lands Program -- \$35 million
- Springs Restoration -- \$50 million
- Total Maximum Daily Loads -- \$8.6 million
- Wildfire Protection/Suppression Equipment – \$4 million

Additionally, our friends at IFAS report that they had a very good year, walking away from session with all of their priority issues fully funded.

Many thanks go to all the legislators and their staffs whose hard work and dedication made our success possible. Much appreciation also goes to all our members who visited with legislators and did such a great job telling the forestry story! Your membership matters!