



## 2017 Legislative Priorities

### **ISSUE 1 – Healthy Forests Program**

Maintaining healthy and sustainable working forests is vital to Florida's environment and natural resources. While forests provide jobs for thousands of Floridians, the often unrecognized benefit of healthy forests is their environmental contributions to both water quality and quantity, as well as to the flora and fauna which make their homes in the forests.

As Florida's urban and coastal areas continue to expand, the pressure on inland forests continues to increase. We already see the impacts with a rise in land conversion and a drop in the reforestation rates over the last 30 years. In 2008, reforestation rates hit a historic low with only 48,000 acres of forestland planted. In 2015, 126,000 acres were planted, which, while a significant upsurge, still remains far shy of the almost 300,000 planted in 1986.

The Healthy Forests initiative would allow the Florida Forest Service (FFS) to provide Best Management Practice (BMP) cost share to timberland owners. This program, which is similar in nature to BMP cost share for other agricultural commodities, would authorize FFS to provide a 50% cost share match for BMP activities which mitigate erosions, improve aquifer recharge, remove invasive species, etc.

#### **Florida Forestry Association Position:**

***The Association supports legislation creating the Florida Healthy Forests program.***

### **ISSUE 2 – 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 that these and related problems arose over many years and cannot be resolved overnight. Further, a number of programs are already in place 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/ BMP cost-share programs and compensation for ecosystem services.***

### **ISSUE 3 – 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. Sales tax on trailers used in the production of forestry and agriculture, but not owned by the farmer, was not part of the 2015 exemption.

#### **Florida Forestry Association Position:**

***The Association supports legislation that repeals the state sales tax on trailers used in logging and other forest service industries.***

### **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 – 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 6 – Workers’ Compensation Reform**

In 2003 Florida adopted sweeping reforms to the state's workers’ comp system which resulted in immediate and substantial reductions in worker’s compensation premiums. These changes were designed to provide predictability for employers without sacrificing benefits to injured workers. In 2016 the Florida Supreme Court ruled on two separate cases on the application of Florida's law and ultimately found provisions of the law unconstitutional. As a result, in December 2016 Florida employers were hit with a 14.5% premium increase and many believe another increase of equal or greater amounts could happen within one year.

#### **Florida Forestry Association Position:**

***The Association supports changes to Florida's workers’ compensation law which strikes a reasonable balance between rate predictability for employers and benefits for injured employees.***

### **ISSUE 7 – Amendment 1 Funding**

In 2014 Florida voters approved an amendment to Florida’s Constitution entitled Florida’s Land and Water Legacy. This initiative requires 33% of documentary stamp revenues collected by the state to be specifically used for the conservation, preservation and protection of Florida’s land and water resources. Forestry operations are low intensity land uses which encourage aquifer recharge and provide a natural buffer and filtration system for stormwater runoff. Healthy working forests also provide essential habitat for many wildlife species.

#### **Florida Forestry Association Position:**

***The Association supports the use of Amendment 1 funding to achieve land acquisition goals, while placing a priority on less than fee acquisitions that support healthy and vibrant working forests and allow the land to remain in production.***

### **ISSUE 8 – Payment for Ecosystem Services**

As Florida’s population continues to grow and strain our water resources, working forests can be part of the solution. Florida’s Forests provide a variety of essential ecosystem services like water filtration and aquifer recharge, carbon storage, wildlife habitat, and greenspace for recreational opportunities. Landowner incentive programs to keep working forests working, should be considered.

#### **Florida Forestry Association Position:**

***The Association supports a statewide financial incentive program that rewards a landowner for providing these essential ecosystem services.***

### **ISSUE 9 – Budget Issues**

#### **Florida Forest Service**

Rural and Family Lands Program	\$ 50.0 M
Firefighting Equipment Replacement	\$ 5.87 M
Healthy Forests Program	\$ 3.0 M
Land Management/ Maintenance	\$ 2.9 M
Facility Replacement/ Repair	\$ 2.9 M

#### **Department of Environmental Protection**

Springs Protection Funding	\$ 50.0 M
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