



2019 Legislative Priorities

Federal Hurricane Disaster Assistance

Recent hurricane seasons have caused significant damage to forestry and other agricultural industries in Florida. As a result, there has been a renewed interest in providing federal relief to those areas impacted by natural disasters.

The Florida Forestry Association supports the provision of federal funds for meaningful assistance to the forest industry in the case of natural disasters, including but not limited to financial assistance with compensation for timber crop loss, debris removal, reforestation, and wildfire protection as well as pest and invasive species detection and mitigation.

Protecting Florida Resources

Maintaining healthy and sustainable working forests is vital to Florida's environment and natural resources. While forests help provide jobs for more than 100,000 Floridians, one often unrecognized benefit of healthy forests is their significant environmental contributions to both water quality and quantity, as well as to the flora and fauna which make their homes there.

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 Protecting Florida Resources program would allow the Florida Forest Service (FFS) to provide Best Management Practices (BMP) cost-share opportunities to timberland owners. This program, which is similar in nature to BMP cost-share programs for other agricultural commodities, would authorize FFS to provide up to 75% cost-share match for BMP activities which mitigate erosion, improve aquifer recharge, remove invasive species and reduce fuel loads, to include hurricane debris and reestablishment of storm damaged timber stands.

The Association supports legislation to create and appropriations to fund the Protecting Florida Resources program, with initial focus on the areas impacted by Hurricane Michael.

Rural and Family Lands Program

The Rural and Family Lands Program (RFLP) provides agricultural landowners the opportunity to preserve their lands while maintaining the property as a working farm or forest. The RFLP is a critical tool in the toolbox for supporting conservation goals as well as ensuring that agricultural land uses remain a critical part of Florida's economy.

In the wake of Hurricane Michael's devastating impacts to the Florida Panhandle, there are growing concerns that agricultural and forest land uses in the region will be permanently changed. As an alternative and a potential option to help with recovery efforts, there has been an interest in utilizing the "less than perpetual" function of the RFLP Program to encourage landowners to keep their lands in agricultural and forest production.

The Association supports funding for the Rural and Family Lands Program as a critical tool for landowners to preserve their working agricultural and forest lands. In addition, the Association supports funding for the use of "less than perpetual" agreements with landowners, especially within the areas impacted by Hurricane Michael, as a mechanism to help landowners recover and to keep their agricultural lands in production.

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.

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.

Amendment 1 Funding

In 2014 Florida voters approved the “Florida’s Land and Water Legacy” amendment, also known as “Amendment 1,” to Florida’s Constitution. This initiative requires 33% of documentary stamp revenues collected by the state to be used specifically 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 storm water runoff. Healthy working forests also provide essential habitat for many wildlife species.

The Florida Forestry 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.

Sales Tax Exemptions

The 2015 legislature expanded the sales tax exemptions for forestry and ag to include parts and repairs of power farm equipment used in ag production and a partial exemption of specific trailers owned by farmers. 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, thereby excluding loggers and other forest service providers from the benefit.

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

Labor/Workforce Pipeline

One of the many challenges that forest and forest products businesses face is an adequate supply of skilled labor (truck drivers, equipment operators, mechanics, etc.). This challenge is exacerbated by the push to get every student “college ready”. Simply put, you don’t have to go to college to be successful. Thankfully, more and more elected officials have begun to recognize these voids created in the state’s work force without strong vocational education programs.

The Association supports the development and implementation of programs which offer vocational training and job readiness skills applicable to the forest and forest products industry as an option for students who are not planning to attain a four-year college degree.

Priority Budget Issues

Florida Forest Service –

Firefighting Equipment Replacement	\$ 6.0 M
Florida Forest Service Helicopter	\$ 9.9 M
Protecting Florida Resources Program	\$ 50.0 M/yr./7yrs.
Rural and Family Lands Program	\$ 75.0 M

UF/IFAS –

Geomatics, Aquaculture and Center for Landscape Conservation and Ecology	\$ 2.96 M
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Department of Environmental Protection –

Springs Protection Funding	\$ 50.0 M
Florida Forever Funding	\$100.0 M

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