



Florida Forestry Association 2020 Legislative Position Statements

Federal Hurricane Disaster Assistance

It has been over one year since Hurricane Michael impacted Florida's Panhandle. Recent hurricane seasons have caused significant damage to forestry and other agricultural industries in Florida. While the federal government has approved disaster relief, neither the USDA nor state block grant programs have begun to send relief to forest landowners.

Florida Forestry Association Position:

The Florida Forestry Association supports the federal disaster package and specifically the state's funding request for funding to allow timber landowners to move forward with recovery.

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 a 75% cost-share match for BMP activities that mitigate erosion; improve aquifer recharge; remove invasive species; reduce fuel loads, including hurricane debris; or reforest storm-damaged timber stands.

Florida Forestry Association Position:

The Association supports the creation and funding of the Protecting Florida Resources program, with initial focus on the areas impacted by Hurricane Michael. The Association further supports the use of this program as a mechanism to pay for environmental services provided by working forestlands.

Related Bills:

SB 1772 by Sen. Bill Montford/ HB 1311 by Rep. Lorraine Ausley -- Requires the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to determine the environmental value that agricultural lands and timberlands provide.

SB 1878 by Sen. Rob Bradley – Provides recurring funding through 2023 for Everglades, springs, water quality, etc.

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 to encourage landowners to keep their lands in agricultural and forest production.

Florida Forestry Association Position:

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.

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.

Related Bills:

SB 1822 by Sen. Joe Gruters/HB 1265 by Rep. Cord Byrd -- Requires public employers, contractors, and subcontractors to use the E-Verify system

Labor/Workforce Pipeline

One of the many challenges that forest and forest products businesses face is an adequate supply of skilled labor (i.e. 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.

Florida Forestry Association Position:

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.

Related Bills:

SB 1750 by Sen. Bill Montford/HB 403 by Rep. Jason Shoaf -- Revises the credit requirements to earn a standard high school diploma to include career and technical education rather than practical arts, etc.

Priority Budget Issues

Florida Forest Service –

Firefighting Equipment Replacement	\$ 6.6 M
Florida Forest Service Helicopter	\$ 11.1 M
Rural and Family Lands Program	\$ 32.6 M

UF/IFAS –

Workload	\$ 3.88 M
Forestry Resources	\$ 1.11 M

Department of Environmental Protection –

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

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