

FOREST TRACK

The Legislative Resource
For Florida's Forest Community

Florida Forestry Association



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As we wrap-up the 7th of a nine-week session, budget negotiations continue to be up in the air. The hold-up seems to revolve around Federal Medicaid funding, and just how much Florida will be receiving. There remains a huge difference in the proposed House & Senate budgets that must be reconciled before the legislature can sine die and go home by midnight on April 30th.

Truck Weight Increase – SB 2362 by Sen. Gardiner / HB 1271 by Rep. Horner

These two bills are the omnibus Department of Transportation packages for this session. SB 2362 includes language to granting DOT and local government the authority to issue overweight permits for a fee, for “all” trucks hauling loads up to 88,000 lbs. SB 2362 was approved by Transportation Appropriations and now heads to the Senate Floor. HB 1271 contains overweight permit authority language for DOT and local governments for agriculture loads only, up to 88,000 lbs. HB 1271 is on the Economic Development & Community Affairs Policy Council agenda today. If approved it will then go to the House Floor.

Greenbelt Clarification – SB 2182 by Sen. Alexander / HB 981 by Rep. Grimsley

This legislation clarifies that simply placing a parcel of agricultural property up for sale, shall not constitute a denial of greenbelt classification. SB 2182 was approved by Finance & Tax and now goes to General Government Appropriations. HB 981 was approved late last week by the General Government Policy Council and now heads to the House Floor. SB 2182 was approved by General Government Appropriations and now heads to the Senate Floor.

Ag Industry Bill – SB 2074 by Sen. Peadar / HB 7103 by Rep. T. Williams

This legislation contains a number of provisions that are beneficial to agriculture and forestry practices. It includes language making the Ag Lands Practices Act retroactive, preempting all county ordinances regulating Ag or forestry practices beyond adopted BMP's; exempts ag lands from storm water management fees or assessments, if adopted BMP's are followed; exempts non-residential farm buildings & fences from permits or fees. HB 7103 was approved by the General Government Policy Council and now heads to the House Floor. SB 2074 was approved by the Finance & Tax Committee and is on the General Govt. Appropriation Committee agenda next week.

Renewable Energy – PCB EUP 10-06 / SB 1186 by Sen. Bennett / SB 992 by Sen. Diaz de la Portilla

This legislation revises existing statements of legislative intent with respect to Florida's energy policy and the development of renewable energy and provides a set of incentive mechanisms to encourage the development of renewable and alternative energy resources. The bill:

- Extends the sunset date for sales and use tax exemptions for certain renewable energy technologies;
- Extends the sunset date for corporate investment tax credits for certain renewable energy technologies; reduces the total credit available for production, storage, and distribution of biodiesel and ethanol costs from \$6.5 million to \$6 million per state fiscal year for all taxpayers; and creates a new corporate investment tax credit for investments in solar energy systems up to a limit of \$2.5 million per system and up to \$7.5 million per state fiscal year for all taxpayers;
- Extends the sunset date for renewable energy production tax credits;

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- Amends the definition of the term "biomass" to include a power source comprised of recycling byproducts;
- Requires public utilities to continuously purchase renewable energy from producers that meet specified operating requirements at a rate equal to 80 percent of the weighted average of firm service retail electric rates of the public utility, with the costs to the utility recoverable from its ratepayers;
- Authorizes public utilities, subject to specified conditions, to recover the costs to produce or purchase up to 735 megawatts of renewable energy statewide;
- Exempts from the definition of "public utility" a developer of a solar energy generation facility that is no larger than 2 megawatts and is located on the premises of a host consumer;
- Exempts solar electrical generating facilities from the Florida Electrical Power Plant Siting Act; and
- Establishes a loan guarantee program for certain renewable energy projects and facilities.

Provisions of the bill requiring public utilities to purchase renewable energy and allowing utilities to make discretionary production or purchases of renewable energy will result in an indeterminate increase in utility costs and rates. PCB 10-6 was approved by the House Energy Committee and is awaiting further committee reference. SB 1186 was approved by the Senate Energy Committee and now goes to Environmental Preservation. SB 992 was TP'd (temporarily deferred) by the Senate Energy Committee and should be reconsidered next week.

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