

FOREST TRACK

The Legislative Resource
For Florida's Forest Community

Florida Forestry Association



2010 SESSION WRAP-UP

Legislation That Passed

Greenbelt Clarification – 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.

Truck Weight Increase – HB 1271 by Rep. Horner

Contained within this omnibus Department of Transportation legislative package, DOT and local government are granted the authority to issue overweight permits, for a fee, for all trucks transporting loads up to 88,000 lbs, on designated routes off the Interstate Highway System.

Ag Industry Bill – HB 7103 by Rep. T. Williams

This legislation contains a number of provisions that are beneficial to agriculture and forestry practices. The bill makes the Ag Lands Practices Act retroactive, preventing the “enforcement” of any county ordinance adopted prior to 2003, which further regulates Ag or forestry practices beyond adopted BMP's, excluding wetlands protection ordinances; exempts ag and forestry lands from local government storm water fees or assessments, if adopted BMP's are followed; exempts non-residential farm buildings & fences from permits or fees; creates the Agricultural Land Acknowledgement Act, requiring those who develop land adjacent to agricultural land to sign an acknowledgment form and submit to prospective buyers.

Water Resources – SB 550 by Sen. Constantine

This omnibus bill addresses a large number of issues dealing with water supply, recharge and disposal. In addition, this bill expands the laws relative to expedited permitting to include renewable energy facilities. Specifically, there are three distinct eligibility provisions dealing with energy that are eligible for expedited permitting: renewable energy generating facilities; biofuel processing facilities; and agricultural lands (greater than 1,000 acres) used to grow a biofuel feed stock.

Economic Development – SB 1752 by Sen. Gaetz

This large economic development package amends several Florida business tax exemptions and tax credits, the Qualified Target Industry incentive program, and other economic development-related statutes in an effort to create jobs in Florida. Of particular importance it provides for expedited permitting and grants a two-year permit extension for certain permits issued by Water Management Districts and the Department of Environmental Protection.

Continued on page 2

Unemployment Compensation Tax Relief – HB 7033 by Rep. Murzin

Facing an unemployment tax rate increase from \$8 per employee per year, to \$100, this measure was passed by both chambers and signed into law by the Governor on the opening day of session. Effective immediately, this legislation will reduce this dramatic increase in unemployment insurance costs for Florida employers. HB 7033 will reduce the taxable wage base from \$8,500 to \$7,000 for the next two years; and eliminate any rate increase for the next two years. Rates will again rise in 2012 if the Unemployment Comp. Trust Fund has not recovered.

Budget Issues – In a year where legislators were faced with a \$3 billion budget shortfall, relatively few cuts were in the following areas:

DOF

Initially requested to submit a list of cuts equaling 15-percent, the DOF ultimately lost 8 vacant positions and a total budget cut of around 5-percent.

UF/IFAS

The initial request to the legislature was not to cut IFAS 's budget more than the rest of the State University System. As it turned out, the overall IFAS budget received a budget reduction of less than 1-percent.

Legislation That Failed To Pass

Springs Protection – Legislation was filed to designate all counties having a first magnitude spring as spring protection zones. Required all agricultural operations in the 34 affected counties to implement applicable BMP's, including those for nutrient management, adopted by DAC's to reduce nitrogen impacts to ground water.

Renewable Energy – Legislation was filed to provide a set of incentive mechanisms to encourage the development and use of alternative energy sources, by authorizing public utilities to recover their cost to produce or purchase renewable energy under certain circumstances; and required utilities to purchase renewable energy from certain producers at a rate equal to 80 percent of retail electric rates.

Department of Agriculture – Legislation was filed granting DOF the sole authority to issue burn authorizations; established a certified pile burner program; and contained numerous other issues related to the powers and duties of the department.

Plastic & Paper Bags – A legislative workshop was held on the recommendations of the "Retail Bags Report", conducted by the DEP. In an effort to increase recycling and reduce greenhouse gases, a ban on single-use plastic and paper retail bags were among the recommendations outlined in the report.