

# FLORIDA PINES & NEEDLES

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#### **WELCOME TO JIM KARELS**



The Executive Committee is pleased to announce the addition of Jim Karels to the Association team. They have contracted with Karels, former State Forester/Director of the Florida Forest Service, to serve

as Executive Director during the current transition.

Karels will lead the Association in coordination with Interim Executive Vice President Brittany Varn.

"Jim's expertise across the whole forestry spectrum will be invaluable," said Varn. "We are all looking forward to working with him to lead forestry into this new era. The industry is facing more than its fair share of challenges right now, but we are committed to pursuing solutions and charting new strategies for success."

Jim may be reached at Jim@FLForestry.org or 850.228.7763. Brittany may be reached at Brittany@FLForestry.org or 850.524.4577.

#### **2025 ANNUAL MEETING & TRADE SHOW**

The Association hosted its 2025 Annual Meeting & Trade Show, August 26-28, at the Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort. Highlights included a slate of excellent speakers, multiple networking events, and silent and live auctions.

One of our favorite parts of the Annual Meeting is honoring some of our best and brightest. This year's award-winners are featured below:



Alter, left, with Association President Avery Roberts

## Distinguished Service Award: John Alter

The Association's Distinguished Service Award celebrates those leaders whose lifetime achievements have positively impacted the trajectory of the Association.

John Alter has a distinguished resume of service to the

Association. A longtime, active member of its Communications Committee, he also has served on the Board of Directors for more than a decade. He has previously been honored with the Association's Above & Beyond award and recognized, along with his wife Elizabeth, as the Florida Outstanding Tree Farmer.

John spearheaded the Forestry in the Classroom project as part of Florida Forests Week. It now brings the Association's message on the value of working forests to *all* 16 fourth grade classes in his home county.

John also originated a letter-writing campaign to boost membership that has been replicated by other leaders across the state with great success. He has hosted a membership meeting at the historic Bascom Schoolhouse in Jackson County several years ago and a congressional tour to showcase his area's recovery after Hurricane Michael.

As a former public relations professional and journalist, John is a prolific writer and an expert spokesperson for forestry. In addition to the articles and letters to the editor he has written himself, the Association has guided many local, state and national reporters his way, including the *Wall Street Journal* and most recently *Florida Trend*.



Paul and Sandy with Association Vice President Wesley Carter

#### Above & Beyond Award: Sandy Touchton and Paul Byrd

The Association's Above & Beyond award recognizes those who can usually be found going the extra mile... those who become the "goto" person in any group they join... those whose service

and commitment to the Association is always a step beyond what is expected.

For more than two decades, Paul and Sandy have been the heartbeat of our Silent—and now Live—Auctions.

Year after year, they contribute outstanding auction items and countless hours of their time. They are there through it all, including the critical auction closeout—staying late to ensure every bidder gets the correct items.

Paul and Sandy never seek the spotlight, but their generosity shines brightly. They are always ready to lend a hand and never hesitate to go Above & Beyond. As a result, they have been instrumental in making our auction a highlight of the Annual Meeting year after year.

Paul and Sandy have a combined 49 years in the forest industry. When they're not supporting the Association, they love traveling and cherishing time with family. One of their favorite destinations—no surprise—is our Annual Meeting, which they look forward to every year.



From left – Tree Farm President John Nash, Linda and Joe Boyles, and Association Vice President Wesley Carter

# Jon Gould Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year: Boyles Tree Farm

Florida's Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year Award honors the memory of Mr. Jon Gould, a respected

member of Florida's Tree Farm Program State Committee and a proud Tree Farmer and advocate for forestry for more than 30 years throughout the southeast.

Boyles Tree Farm began in 1942 when Eugene Boyles, then a 22-year-old lieutenant in the Army and 1941 graduate of the University of Florida School of Agriculture, purchased a 365-acre farm near his parents in Suwannee County, FL. For half a century, Eugene was at the helm and added additional timber tracts amounting to 1,145 acres.

After Eugene's death in 1991, the management of Boyles Tree Farm conferred to his two sons; Joe and Fred, who have doubled the size of BTF to 2,235 acres, including tracts in Hamilton, Madison and Suwannee Counties.

The brothers work closely with the third generation of the Boyles family to facilitate succession and continue the family's stewardship legacy. Currently, nine descendants of Eugene and Frances own the properties.

Boyles Tree Farm has been certified in American Tree Farm System (ATFS) for over 50 years. Since 2018, all the pine plantations have been hand-planted with containerized, genetically improved seedlings, as available. They market timber products, hunting leases, pine straw, and real estate. Some stands are enrolled in the carbon market.



The Ward family

#### Logger of the Year: Chad Ward

The Logger of the Year award recognizes those loggers who maintain an excellent reputation with fellow industry members

and landowners, demonstrate exemplary contributions and exceed industry expectations.

Chad is a third-generation logger and proud owner of Chad Ward Enterprise, Inc., established in July 2001. Chad followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, Nolan Ward, who began logging in the late 1950's after returning from World War II, and his father, Dean Ward, who took over in the mid-1960's.

continued on next page>

Chad learned the intricacies of the logging industry under his father's mentorship. He credits both his grandfather and father, whom he considers the finest men he's ever known, for instilling in him the values of being a devoted son, husband, father, and honest businessman through their exemplary leadership.

For Chad, working alongside family is the greatest gift he could ask for. Starting his career with shovel logging, Chad adapted to market shifts by transitioning to upland logging and later embracing whole tree chipping to support hill logging operations. This pivot was driven by a new biomass market in Gainesville, which later enabled his business to expand into an export market supplying Turkey.

Chad's resilience, family legacy, and commitment to integrity continue to drive the success of his enterprise.



#### **Legislator of the Year (Senate): Senator Erin Grall**

Advocacy is at the heart of all that the Association does. The Legislator of the Year award honors those lawmakers who have proven to be champions for Florida forestry in the state capitol.

Senator Erin Grall has consistently been a champion for Florida's agriculture and silviculture industries. She was a key voice in the development and passage of the Agriculture and Timber disaster packages in the wake of Hurricane Idelia.

She continues to be an advocate for programs such as Rural and Family Lands, Florida Forever, and the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

During the 2025 session, Senator Grall stepped up to the plate for Florida's forest industry and championed efforts to get Tall Mass Timber recognized in the Florida Building Code. True to form, she took every opportunity to learn about mass timber products and the Florida Building Code process. The language was ultimately removed from the bill. However, thanks to her good fight, the issue was brought into the limelight, gained the attention it needed, and is teed up to return in another forum.



Representative Griffitts with Association Vice President Wesley Carter and lobbyist Jim Spratt

#### Legislator of the Year (House): Representative "Griff" Griffitts

Representative "Griff" Griffitts has proven time and again to be a champion for rural communities and the industries which are critical to the economic stability and character of those communities.

During the 2025 session, Representative Griffitts took the House lead on the "Rural Renaissance" legislation. Although the legislation did not pass, it forced a productive discussion and focus on our rural communities. Including everything from infrastructure, to roads, education, and health care, the unique bill was a strong sign of interest in helping our rural communities. It likely will be a starting point for legislation in 2026.

More specific to Florida's forest industry, Representative Griffitts carried the House companion bill to Senator Grall's mass timber legislation. He actively worked with his House colleagues on the language, but it was removed from the bill in the last committee stop. However, his actions were an important part on shining some much-needed light onto the building code process.



Charlie Pedersen

#### Jim Stevenson Resource Manager of the Year: Charlie Pedersen

This award recognizes land managers from the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Florida Forest Service, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, who have

demonstrated exceptional leadership and dedication to the protection and management of Florida's natural resources.

Charlie Pedersen serves as the center biologist at the Waccasassa Forestry Center. Over the course of his 28year career, he has worked across a dozen state forests.

Charlie's contributions to the state of Florida most notably include his role in the downlisting of the Red Cockaded Woodpecker, being the driving force behind restoration of the federally listed Etoniah Rosemary, and his mentorship to many successful state lands managers. He has also demonstrated outstanding leadership in invasive species management.

Charlie has also been integral in the adoption of the Florida Forest Service's new drone program. By integrating drones into prescribed fire practices, Charlie has not only increased the safety and effectiveness of fire crews on the ground but also played a pivotal role in enhancing ecosystem restoration efforts.



Audubon Florida Executive Director Julie Wraithmell, Dan Roach, and Association Vice President Wesley Carter

#### **Audubon Florida Sustainable Forestry** Award

year, Audubon Each Florida is proud to celebrate the significance of forestry to Florida's natural resources bv presenting our Sustainable Forester of the Year Award

to an individual who is helping elevate the industry's visibility and importance to conservation.

This year, Audubon Florida Executive Director Julie Wraithmell was humbled to be able to recognize a giant in Florida's sustainable forestry space, Dan Roach, upon his retirement from Rayonier. Over the course of his 30+ year career, Dan's work mirrored the very emergence of sustainability, and he was at the forefront of collaborations on everything from gopher tortoise conservation to pioneering industry standards for sustainable forestry.

His early years in field gave him the credibility to speak authentically about the work even in his later years, when he spent more time meeting in board rooms than cruising timber. His trademark humor and focus on commonsense solutions helped him assemble broad coalitions of unconventional partners, all aligned behind Florida's working forests.

Audubon recognizes that forests protect our watersheds, provide wildlife habitat, capture carbon and support rural economies. It is proud to celebrate Dan Roach's career and his contributions to this essential part of Florida's landscape.





### **FORESTRY FEATURED** IN FLORIDA TREND

Florida Trend reporter Brittney Miller spent several days talking with people in the industry, listening to their stories and learning about our challenges and opportunities. The result is

insightful coverage coupled with artistic imagery.

"We're in a difficult time in our industry right now. It's a critical time. But a lot of good things can come out of tough times," (Association President Avery Roberts, pictured) says. "When there's tough times in a family, it unifies the family. That's where we need to be in the forest industry. Our family needs to be unified. And we're getting there."

Read the story at bit.ly/FLTRENDFORESTRY.

# MASTER LOGGER TRAINING SCHEDULE

**Core Training**October 16 – Virtual



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#### Saturday, November 1 @ 8:30 a.m.

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Register online at:
https://runsignup.com/Flatwoods5K
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The University of Florida is committed to providing universal access to all of our events. Fo disability accommodations such as sign language interpreters and listening devices, please contact Taylor Stein, tstein@ufl.edu, 352.846.0860 at least one week in advance which is necessary to arrange for accessibility needs.







#### **FLATWOODS 5K**

Ready for a day of fitness, fun, and forestry? Lace up for the 2025 Flatwoods 5K!

Join us **Saturday, November 1** at 8:30 a.m. on the beautiful trails of Austin Cary Forest in Gainesville, FL. Run, walk, or just come enjoy the day—this is a family-friendly event you won't want to miss!

#### What to expect:

- Scenic 5K through the forest
- · Delicious food trucks
- · Local beer on tap
- · Fun and educational activities for the whole family

Location: 10625 NE Waldo Rd, Gainesville, FL 32609 Register: **runsignup.com/Flatwoods5K** or scan the QR code on the flyer!

This event is presented by the UF/IFAS School of Forest, Fisheries, & Geomatics Sciences in partnership with the Florida Forestry Association.

# VOGEL SELECTED FOR FLORIDA AGRICULTURAL HALL OF FAME



Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Wilton Simpson and the Florida Agricultural Hall of Fame Foundation have announced Woody Larson, Dennis Wedgworth, and Jack Vogel as 2026 Florida Agricultural Hall of Fame Inductees. Since 1980, the Florida

Agricultural Hall of Fame has honored men and women who have made lasting contributions to agriculture in this state and to the mentoring of our youth, who represent the future of agriculture in Florida. The induction ceremony will be held at the Florida State Fair's Agricultural Hall of Fame Banquet on February 10, 2026.

"Florida agriculture is stronger today because of leaders like Woody Larson, Dennis Wedgworth, and Jack Vogel," said Commissioner Wilton Simpson. "Each of these inductees represents the very best of our industry — visionary leadership, service to community, and a lifelong commitment to ensuring agriculture remains at the heart of Florida's economy and way of life."

More information on the Florida Agricultural Hall of Fame, inductees, and the banquet can be found at FloridaAgHallofFame.org



#### **CLE TRAINING WORKSHOPS**

Contact Whitney Hough (Whitney@FLForestry.org) for details.

December 11 - Virtual

For more information and to register, go to bit.ly/LoggerTraining



### **WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!**

We are excited to welcome these businesses and individuals:

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#### **HUNTING FOR WAYS TO SAVE?**



Did you know Association members receive special reduced rates for liability insurance for hunting leases and timberland from Outdoor Underwriters? For more information, please contact Brittany Varn (850.222.5646) or Brittany@FLForestry.org.

#### **GET INVOLVED!**



The success of any organization depends on an engaged membership. An easy and effective way to be active in the Association is through our committees: Government Relations, TREEPAC, Environmental, Steering and Communications.

To join a committee, go to bit.ly/FLForestryCommittees



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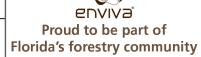
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