

Spring/Summer 2021

# FLORIDA FORESTS

AN OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FLORIDA FORESTRY ASSOCIATION

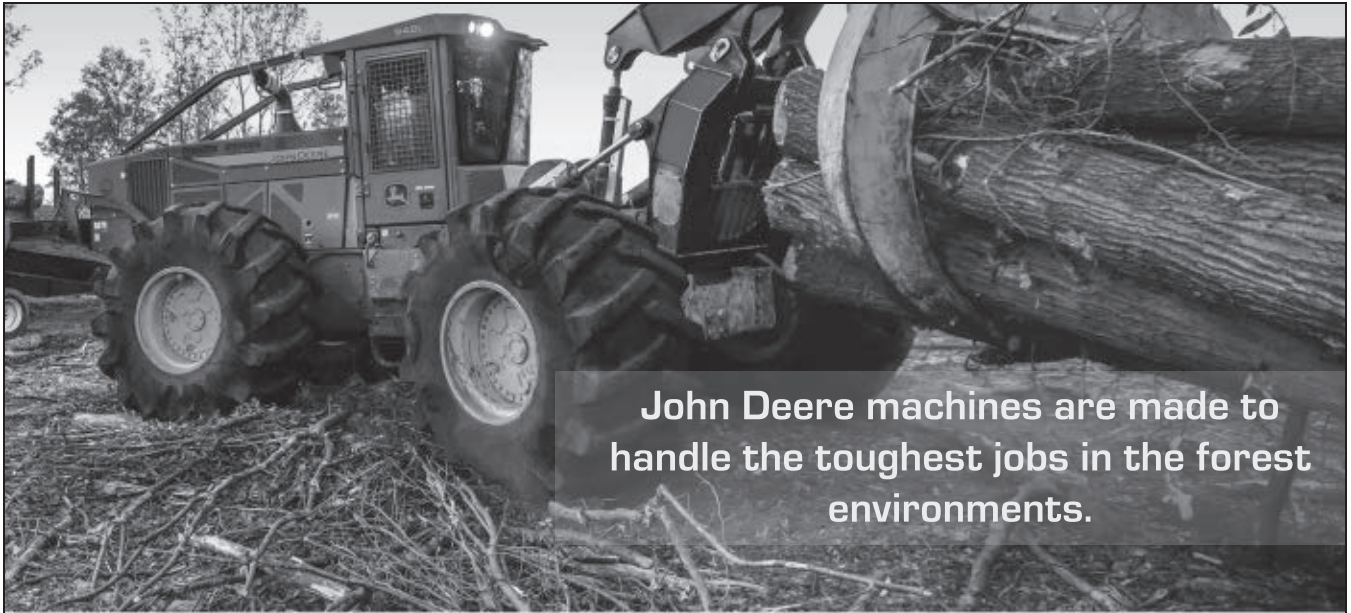
## NEW LAW STRENGTHENS LANDOWNERS' RIGHTS

BE WILDFIRE READY

PRESERVING THE PAST TO EDUCATE THE  
FUTURE: UF'S SAWMILL RESTORATION PROJECT

SILVICULTURE WATER QUALITY REGULATIONS:  
PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE





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Volume 25, Issue 1  
Spring/Summer 2021



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# Moving Forestry Forward

By **ALAN SHELBY**, Florida Forestry Association Executive Vice President

Florida forestry is made up of some of the most resilient people I know. Over the years I have watched them handle natural disasters, economic downturns, and now a global pandemic without breaking stride. They assess the situation, adjust accordingly, and get to work doing whatever needs to be done.

This issue of *Florida Forests* is a testament to that resilience.

Despite limited access to the capitol due to COVID-19 protocols, Florida forestry can count the 2021 legislative session in the “win” column. *New Law Strengthens Landowners’ Rights* details one of the major victories, highlights some budget triumphs and provides insight into the secret of our success. (*Spoiler alert: it’s all about relationships.*)

Hurricane Michael made landfall in Florida in October of 2018, but its effects can still be seen throughout the Panhandle. The Florida Forest Service remains diligent in their efforts to mitigate the damage and the danger. *Be Wildfire Ready* delves into the reason wildfire is a real threat in the area and explains what we can do both to deflect and prepare for that possibility.

Even the challenges of educating students amid a pandemic could not stop the University of Florida’s School of Forest Resources and Conservation (SFRC) from moving forward. This spring they officially announced a name change. SFRC

is now the School of Forest, Fisheries, & Geomatic Sciences (FFGS). You can learn more about that change in *UF’s School of Forest Resources and Conservation Gets New Name*.

“*Preserving the Past to Educate for the Future*” showcases FFGS’s efforts to give a 1930s sawmill more visibility. It not only provides a window into that bygone era; it also illustrates the fact that sawmills have been operating in Florida for more than a century and still our forests remain healthy and economically viable thanks to sustainable management.

In this issue, you will also find an update on Florida’s Silviculture Best Management Practices, discover what Project Learning Tree has been busy accomplishing, and take a sneak peek at the latest Forestry Forward tour!

We are excited to be in the midst of planning our 2021 Annual Meeting. Information on that event is also included in this issue, as well as on our website, [FLForestry.org](http://FLForestry.org). All comers are welcome! Registrants, exhibitors, sponsors, golfers, and silent auction donors – we need each and every one of you!

I congratulate you all on your success in navigating through our first – and hopefully our last – pandemic. Like the industry we represent, the Association doesn’t slow down for much. We are here for you, always working to move forestry forward. •





THIS LEGISLATIVE SESSION IS OVER, BUT THE NEED TO REMAIN ENGAGED WILL NEVER END.

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## A New Day Dawning

By **CARLTON JONES**, Florida Forestry Association President

2021 marks my 30<sup>th</sup> year working in Florida forestry. A lot of things have changed since that first day I joined the team at Cochran Forest Products. Technological advances have transformed the world and the forest industry along with it. To paraphrase a car commercial that was popular back in the day, this is not your father's forest industry.

One thing, however, has not changed: The people who work in Florida forestry remain its most valuable asset. Last year, at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, Governor Ron DeSantis designated the state's forestry workers as "essential." This allowed people from all points on the forestry supply chain to continue their good work keeping consumers' needs met and the sustainability cycle in motion, even when the situation was at its worst.

While forestry has managed to maintain its stride amid the pandemic, the legislature was not so fortunate. COVID-19 protocols completely changed the landscape of the 2021 legislative session, and access to legislators was severely limited.

Despite the many challenges, Florida forestry had a successful session. Right to Farm legislation which protects agricultural and timber producers, much needed improvements to the Bert J. Harris, Jr., Private Property Rights Act, key funding for UF/IFAS programs and support and funding for the Florida Forest Service are just a few of the successes this session.

The reason for our success in these unprecedented times can be found in our ongoing efforts to develop strong relationships with our elected officials. Because of our earlier interactions with legislators through tours of forestry

operations, support from TREEPAC, and our regional political action groups, we already had strong connections in place before the capitol had to shut its doors. People inside knew and understood the forestry story, and it made a difference.

We also owe our success to the tireless efforts of our lobbyist, Jim Spratt of Magnolia Strategies, Inc. Like us, Jim appreciates the importance of relationships. His ability to connect legislators with the right people and the best information has proven invaluable over the years.

This legislative session is over, but the need to remain engaged will never end.

As such, we are very much looking forward to our next big event: our 2021 Annual Meeting & Trade Show! I hope you will join us as we gather at the Sheraton Panama City Beach Golf & Spa Resort August 31 – September 2. Many of our longstanding members have a lot of great memories of events we held there when it was known as the Baypoint Marriott. A \$32 million renovation has made it even better than before!

Our staff is busy lining up an impressive slate of speakers, exhibitors and sponsors. Legislators are invited to join us at the Welcome Reception on Wednesday evening (September 1), so please encourage your representative and senator to attend. It's always a good time to tell the forestry story!

While we are hopeful that the pandemic will be in the rearview mirror by then, please rest assured that all events will be staged with your health and safety uppermost in mind.

I feel a new day dawning, and I am optimistic about the future. Most of all, I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as your president. •

# NEW LAW STRENGTHENS LANDOWNERS' RIGHTS

By **LEE ANN FISCH**, Director of Communications, Florida Forestry Association



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**AS FLORIDA'S POPULATION** continues to grow, the buffers between rural and urban communities have become

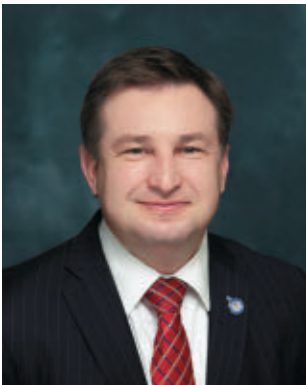
increasingly narrow. Owners of forestry and other agricultural lands feel pressured to change or disrupt their

operations by those moving into the area. More and more frequently, that pressure comes in the form of nuisance lawsuits.



Nuisance lawsuits put little, if any, burden on the complainant. Those being sued, however, are unfairly required to spend time, money, and other resources to defend their right to continue their normal, approved operations.

Legislation successfully proposed by Senator Jason Brodeur, R-Lake Mary, and Representative Jayer Williamson, R-Pace, during the 2021 legislative session helps to alleviate the problem of frivolous lawsuits. With support from both Senate President Wilton Simpson and House Speaker Chris Sprowls, SB 88, Farming Operations, overwhelmingly passed in both chambers. Governor Ron DeSantis signed the legislation into law before the end of session.



Senator Jason Brodeur, R-Lake Mary



Representative Jayer Williamson, R-Pace

"The original Right to Farm Act was established more than 40 years ago," explained Florida Forestry Association Executive Vice President Alan Shelby. "Without it, Florida agriculture would be lost. The provisions in SB 88 strengthen

our members' rights to continue managing their land with practices based on science, not public opinion."

Association lobbyist Jim Spratt of Magnolia Strategies explained that the legislation minimizes the potential for lawsuits by putting guardrails on who can bring a suit and by requiring that those who bring complaints have sufficient evidence to prove their concerns. It also discourages frivolous lawsuits by allowing landowners to collect attorney's fees if they prevail in the court case, limiting the amount of compensatory damages, and only allowing for punitive damages in specific situations. Lastly, it modernizes the Right to Farm Act by extending protections to agritourism activities.

Jim Karels, retired Florida Forest Service Director and State Forester and member of the Association's Board of Directors and Executive Committee, testified before the House Environment, Agriculture and Flooding Subcommittee during session. He emphasized that the legislation will only protect forest landowners from litigation if they follow all the applicable laws and regulations, including Best Management Practices.

"(This legislation) is necessary for forest landowners, farmers and their businesses to continue to practice their trade and to provide public benefit and public protection without the threat of unnecessary lawsuits," he said.

On average, each year the State of Florida authorizes more than two million acres of prescribed burning. This practice benefits the environment in several ways. It removes threatening, invasive pests and limits the spread of forest disease. It releases nutrients back into the soil, allowing for the healthy growth of plants and trees. And it protects habitats for endangered species and other wildlife.

Prescribed burning protects human habitats as well. Without regular controlled fires, trees get stressed by overcrowding. Flammable vegetation builds up. Prescribed burning reduces that fuel load. When wildfires inevitably occur, they burn with less intensity, reduced spread and fewer smoke impacts on communities and firefighters.

In fact, noted Spratt, both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have acknowledged the effectiveness of prescribed burning in managing the land, protecting people and improving air quality.

"This issue was a legislative priority for the Association," said Shelby, "but the passage of SB 88 is a win for everyone."

Considering the challenges presented by COVID-19 protocols in place at the capitol during session, the passage of SB 88 is an especially strong illustration of the value of relationships.



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## Budget Successes (pending approval by the governor)

### Florida Forest Service:

Wildfire Suppression Equipment/Replacement (includes replacement of aircraft for wildfire control)	\$12.2 million
Road and Bridge Maintenance projects	\$7 million

### UF/IFAS:

UF/IFAS Workload funding	\$4 million
School of Forest, Fisheries and Geomatic Sciences	\$1.1 million
Fertilizer Rate Study	\$1.6 million

### Florida Department of Environmental Protection:

Resilient Trust Fund	\$500 million
Florida Wildlife Corridors	\$300 million
Florida Forever Springs	\$100 million
	\$75 million



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"This victory certainly wouldn't have happened without the support of President Simpson, Speaker Sprowls and Governor DeSantis," said Spratt. "We could not have asked for better bill sponsors than Senator Brodeur and Representative Williamson. The overall bipartisan backing from our friends in both chambers was incredible."

However, not all help came from inside the capitol. A strong grassroots game from the forestry and ag communities proved key in carrying the ball over the goal line.

"The best legislative relationships start before the candidate is elected," Spratt noted. "You shouldn't wait till session to knock on their door. This year, you couldn't have gotten to the door."

He commended Association members for their work in reaching out to their elected officials and interested candidates. Hosting educational tours of forestry operations, serving as trusted resources on industry-related issues, participating in political fundraisers ... these are all positive ways to establish a relationship, he said.

Shelby echoed the power of grassroots in advocacy efforts. "Sometimes people think it doesn't matter whether they respond to one of our legislative alerts," he said. "But when it comes to the difference between bills passing or dying, everything matters."

"To me, the overriding message from this experience is that our state policymakers understand the importance of forestry and agriculture to Florida," he said. "And that is a great message to hear." •



# BE WILDFIRE READY

## FLORIDA FOREST SERVICE LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TARGETING HURRICANE MICHAEL IMPACT AREA

By **MONICA CORBIN**, State Communications Manager, Florida Forest Service

**IN THE AFTERMATH** of Hurricane Michael, there is still a threat to life, homes and communities – a wildfire threat. The 2018 Category 5 storm destroyed 2.8 million acres of trees in the Panhandle – the equivalent of more than 2.1 million football fields – and much remains on the ground today, ready to burn.

The Panhandle region is a known part of the wildland-urban interface, or WUI (pronounced WOO-EE), areas where homes and businesses are near forest land and wooded areas. When wildfire enters the WUI, the effects on communities can be catastrophic, including the loss of life and devastating socioeconomic impacts.

To reduce the chances of a catastrophic wildfire, the Florida Forest Service (FFS) launched the “Be Wildfire Ready” campaign. The initiative is designed to not only increase awareness of the wildfire threat but to engage residents by providing resources that will help them prevent and prepare for a wildfire, including information on how





The following images depict Florida Forest Service crews battling Lighthouse Fire in Gulf County (March 2021).



to safely burn yard waste and how to create defensible space around their homes.

While the public does their part to be wildfire ready, FFS wildland firefighters are ready to respond to wildfires that are unavoidable. The exponential volume and density of damaged trees in the Panhandle have already proven to increase the intensity and speed of wildfires as well as the difficulty of suppressing them. Many wildfires are requiring multiple tractors and crews to respond.

Spring is the peak of Florida's year-round wildfire season. The potential for large, devastating wildfires remains a major concern as areas dry out and temperatures rise. As in the past, there may be a need to call in outside resources from around the state to assist with containing and controlling wildfires throughout the Hurricane Michael-impact area. These wildfires will require more effort to suppress and



**THE POTENTIAL FOR LARGE, DEVASTATING WILDFIRES REMAINS A MAJOR CONCERN AS AREAS DRY OUT AND TEMPERATURES RISE.**





collaborative determination to fight and contain.

Given these challenges, the partnership between the FFS and local fire departments and cooperators is more important than ever. Responding to more frequent and intense wildfires in the areas impacted by Hurricane Michael will require the highest level of coordinated emergency response. These cooperative efforts, along with the public's engagement, will help reduce the chances of a catastrophic wildfire from further devastating these Panhandle communities. •





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# ARE YOU READY FOR WILDFIRE?

In the aftermath of Hurricane Michael, there is still a threat to life, homes, and our communities – a wildfire threat. 2.8 million acres of trees (more than 2.1 million football fields) were destroyed during the storm and much remains on the ground today, ready to burn. You must be ready for wildfire.

It's not about *if* a wildfire will ignite but *when*.



Protect your life, home, and community, visit:

**[BeWildfireReadyFL.com](http://BeWildfireReadyFL.com)**



# REFORESTATION EFFORTS IN THE PANHANDLE



By **JIMMY ROBERTS**, Chief of Forest Management, Florida Forest Service

**THE SUMMER AFTER** Hurricane Michael made its catastrophic journey through Florida’s Panhandle in October 2018, former President Trump signed an Emergency Disaster Relief package encompassing multiple natural disasters. Florida was awarded \$380.7 million for a timber and irrigation recovery block grant. This historic relief package was the first to offer payments to landowners for damaged timber.

The Florida Division of Emergency Management is administering the Timber Recovery Block Grant in partnership with the Florida Forest Service. FDEM is responsible for overall management, including landowner registration, execution of applications and ensuring payment to landowners. The FFS is responsible for conducting initial and comprehensive timber damage assessments to determine if applicants are eligible for the program.

Since the TRBG program launched in August 2020, more than 3,300 eligible



registrations have been received and more than \$88 million has been distributed to landowners who suffered losses from Hurricane Michael. While

not intended to provide full value to the pre-hurricane timber, this financial relief is helping landowners clean-up and conduct site preparation prior to reforestation. •

ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF ALEX CANTATORE.





# UF'S SCHOOL OF FOREST RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION GETS A **NEW NAME**

By **KIM SCOTTO-KELLEY**, Communications Specialist  
UF/IFAS School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences

**THE UNIVERSITY OF** Florida's School of Forest Resources and Conservation is now the School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences. The new name was announced in March 2021 at a brief outdoor ceremony.

Director Terrell "Red" Baker spoke at the ceremony about how the new name represents the three broad program areas under the school: Forest Resources and Conservation; Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences; and Geomatics.

The school was first established at UF in 1935 as a forestry department and officially became a School in 1937. In 2004, the School welcomed the Geomatics program, and four years later the Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences department were added.

The new name was chosen after close engagement with faculty, staff, students, alumni and stakeholders, including in-person brainstorming sessions, phone calls and surveys.

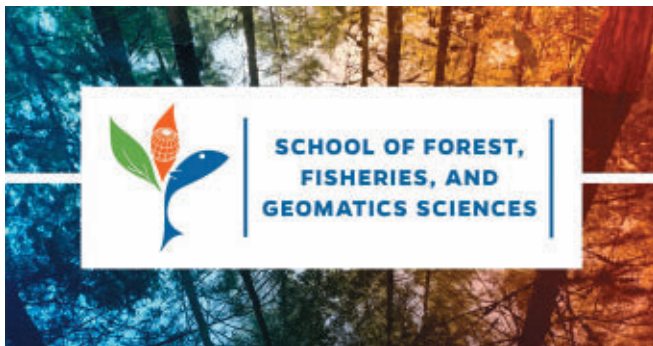


It was important to all that forestry retain its prominence in the name, and as such was put first in the list.

"We are thrilled to have our geomatics and fisheries colleagues more appropriately recognized in our name," Baker said. "We are here today to celebrate not just our program's individual accomplishments, but what we have done and will continue to do together as a school."

Our forestry and natural resources teaching, research, and extension programs are greatly benefitted by our faculty experts in fisheries, aquaculture, surveying and mapping, and a variety of other disciplines.

"One thing we've learned over the past decade or more is that we are simply much stronger than the sum of our parts,"



Baker said. "As science, scholarship, and education becomes increasingly interdisciplinary our school is uniquely situated to help provide solutions for our lives."

While our name is changing, our commitment to forestry in Florida, the country, and the world has stayed the same. You can view our recent work with Florida Forestry Association members here: <https://ffgs.ifas.ufl.edu/FFA-report/>

Learn more about our name change and School history at: <https://ffgs.ifas.ufl.edu/name-change/>

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# PRESERVING THE PAST TO EDUCATE THE FUTURE: **UF'S SAWMILL RESTORATION PROJECT**

By **SCOTT SAGER**, Forester/Assistant Director, University of Florida School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences







**SAWMILLS HAVE BEEN OPERATING IN FLORIDA FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS AND YET OUR FORESTS REMAIN HEALTHY AND ECONOMICALLY VIABLE BECAUSE OF SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT.**

**VISITORS TO THE** University of Florida's Austin Cary Forest marvel at how beautiful the setting is. They enjoy the drive through stands of 90-year-old longleaf and slash pine maintained with prescribed fire and logging. They appreciate how the Stern Learning Center provides a great location for a variety of events. They talk about how the educational displays, such as the Skinner Turpentine Education Site, the tree identification walk around Lake Mize, and exhibits on the history of the forests and forestry in Florida, are engaging and informative.

But they rarely mention the sawmill that made all these things possible. And we want to change that.

In the 1930s when the university began to acquire lands for the Austin Cary Forest, the first structure built was a small, "portable" sawmill. It was installed by the Works Progress Administration near the front of the Forest to saw trees left behind following extensive grazing, turpentine, and aggressive burning. The mill produced enough lumber to build seven buildings on the forest, four of which are still in use.

Sawmills like it were operated extensively through the 1950s, before being

replaced by larger and more technologically advanced mills. The sawmill on the forest remains a window into that era. The original equipment is still there, including the chalkboard that describes the daily cut for a 1980s class, when, under the supervision of Don Post, Professor Emeritus, students ran the mill for the last time.

While sharing this history is important, more important is the opportunity to engage visitors on the current wood products industries of Florida and their future. Work is underway to relocate the sawmill from its "hidden" site to





near the conference facilities surrounding Lake Mize. Visitors who have come to the Austin Cary Forest for a meeting, workshop, wedding, or similar event will see not only the advancements in wood

products manufacturing, but also exhibits on the sustainability of wood use and videos of modern wood milling and manufacturing that contributes \$14 billion to Florida's economy.

- Specific messages abound:
- the efficiency of modern mills, where even sawdust is captured for use in pulping;
  - the economic importance of forestry in Florida, with approximately 1% of the state's workforce involved in managing forests and forestry having the largest economic impact of any agricultural commodity; and
  - the carbon capture opportunities from wood, which is the only construction material with a net-positive impact on atmospheric carbon-dioxide levels.

Equally important is the chance to share the new opportunities for wood use: engineered wood buildings, cellulosic plastics, and fuel additives.

Sawmills have been operating in Florida for more than 100 years and yet our forests remain healthy and economically viable because of sustainable management. This is perhaps the most important message, and it will be prominent. That is a story we can all get behind.

*The Austin Cary Forest is located northeast of Gainesville. It is managed by UF/IFAS-School of Forest, Fisheries, & Geomatics Sciences. It serves as the University's "experimental forest," supporting teaching, research, and outreach/Extension activities.*

*If you're interested in learning more about this project, including supporting it with a donation of money or materials, please contact Scott Sager at 352.317.7675 or [sasager@ufl.edu](mailto:sasager@ufl.edu).*

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# Silviculture Water Quality Regulations: **PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE**

By **JEFF VOWELL**, Senior Program Manager, F4 Tech

## **PAST**

In the early 1970s the newly formed U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was tasked with cleaning up the nation's waterways and associated wetlands. Nonpoint sources of water pollution, such as silviculture, were essentially given a choice: either become a regulated land use or develop a reliable way to "self-regulate." In virtually all states, Best Management Practices (BMPs) were determined to be the preferred alternative to accomplish this goal. These practices

were envisioned as preventative in nature (not rehabilitative) and were to be developed by stakeholder groups within the states. This was deemed critical in order to produce practices that were acceptable to all interested parties and have credibility with regulatory agencies.

Hence, most states, including Florida, developed BMPs in the late 1970s and continued to improve them over time as new science and research presented opportunities to do so. In addition,

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IMAGE COURTESY OF F4 TECH.

EPA envisioned that states would develop a technique to measure implementation of whatever methodology was developed, so that a track record could ultimately be established. This was important to EPA, as the agency was tasked with reporting to Congress on the nation's various land uses and how they were working toward the national goal of clean water.

Toward that end, Florida established the BMP Implementation Survey, which began in 1981 and continues today. The responsibility for producing, publishing and distributing Florida Silviculture BMPs and for conducting the BMP Survey is housed within the Florida Forest Service (FFS). Also, the FFS is tasked with conducting BMP training for loggers, landowners and forestry practitioners; these training sessions are also ongoing.

Finally, in order to satisfy the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), a process was established between DEP and Florida's five Water Management Districts (WMDs). This process had to do with DEP's responsibility for regulating state wetlands and resulted in a simple, one-page notification that was to be mailed to the local WMD prior to conducting certain silvicultural activities.

Initially, no cost and no approval by the WMD was necessary prior to commencement of operations. However, there was eventually a cost associated with the "permit," and compliance inspections by the WMD could take place and often did, at least initially. This notification became known as the silviculture "Jiffy Permit" and was needed for any silvicultural operation that included stream or wetland crossings, construction of new above-grade roads, ditching, or similar water resource/wetland related activities.

Rarely was a logger or landowner found in violation of any state regulations. Eventually, the WMDs became comfortable with silvicultural operations and operators and seldom visited these "permitted" sites. The only exception being a complaint filed by a third party.

**PRESENT**

Currently, silvicultural operations in Florida enjoy an essentially "regulatory free" working environment, as it relates to water quality. What was once the "Jiffy Permit" has become a

*No Fee, Noticed Exemption* via DEP rule 62-330.0511 F.A.C., promulgated in 2013. This was accomplished via much effort from the FFS, the Florida Forestry Association's Environmental Committee and DEP. Although this *Notice* must still be submitted to the local WMD, it can now be done online and continues to be a simple process. The criteria and performance standards in the rule must still be followed in order for the operation to be exempt. And as always, silviculture BMPs must be adhered to for all applicable operations.

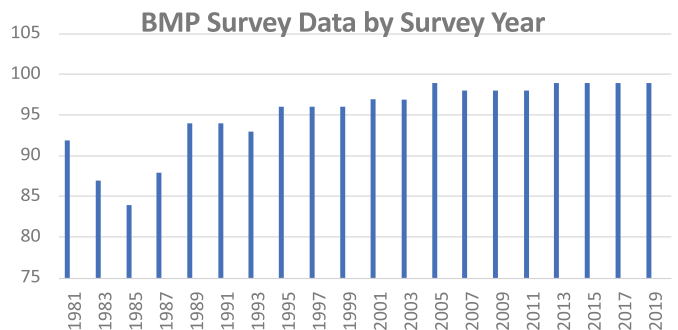
As for Florida's silviculture BMP Manual, it has been revised several times over the years, with the last substantive revision in 2008. Revisions have occurred mostly in response to new research, but in some cases new issues have emerged where BMPs would apply. The fact that it hasn't been revised in more than 13 years speaks to the scientific integrity of the document and the hard work of the BMP Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

The TAC is made up of a diverse group of 22 stakeholders, including representatives from the forest industry, environmental groups and academia. The TAC meets every two years to evaluate the program and to ensure that BMPs are addressing current and/or new forest-water quality issues. The Manual includes information on all aspects of silvicultural operations and specific methodologies for sizing culverts, constructing new forest roads and properly implementing Special Management Zones along waterbodies.

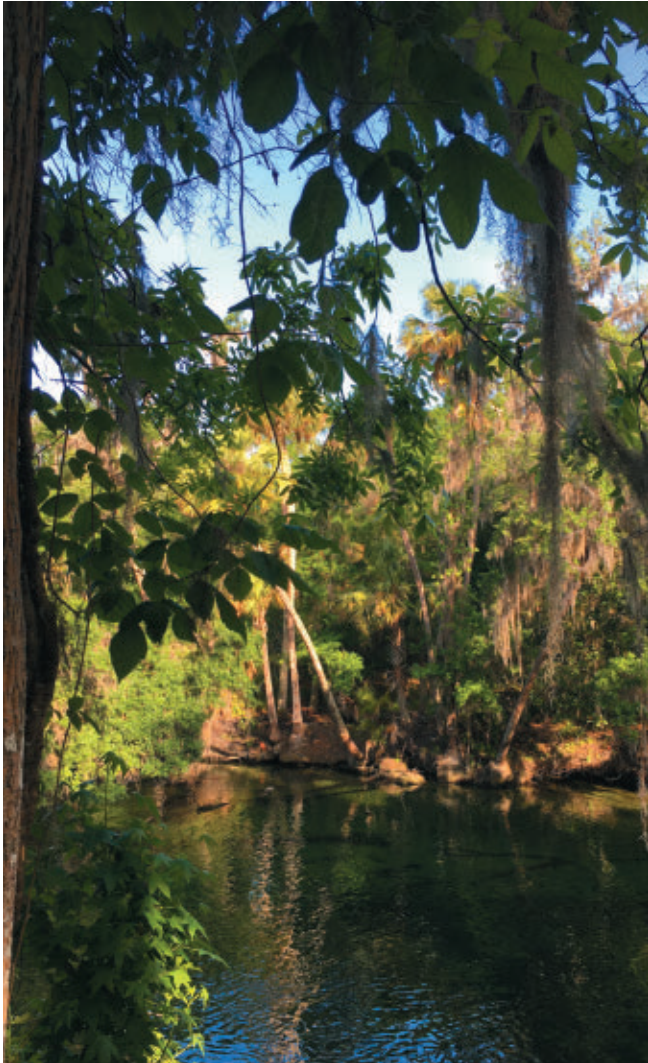
Florida's BMP Implementation Surveys are conducted biennially and results are published in a Survey report. The last Survey (2019) showed 99.7% statewide compliance and 95% compliance for the 40-year period of record. There have been some ups and downs in the compliance data, but, as shown in the chart below, there is a continued, upward trend.\*

In 2012, the Florida legislature authorized the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) to establish rule 5M-15, F.A.C. This rule gave DACS the authority to make *binding determinations* as to whether an activity (Silviculture or Agriculture) is exempt from permitting. Prior to this rule, DACS was often "asked their opinion" regarding exemption status, but it was non-binding. This new rule was a real game changer for the silviculture land-use.

Simply put, an FFS representative can now be called to a silvicultural site where there is a dispute between the







landowner and the WMD. At this on-site meeting, the FFS can make a “binding determination” as to whether the activity is exempt from permitting. **This binding determination by the FFS representative ends the dispute, on-the-spot,** but is always contingent on the operation being compliant with BMPs and the rule criteria in the Exemption.

## FUTURE

Given the past and present, the future for silvicultural operations looks very favorable regarding water resource issues. With the state’s BMP program, the advent of the WMD Exemption and the DACS rule for resolving WMD disputes, there is no reason for major concerns regarding the future of water quality regulations related to forestry.

Further, in 2018, DEP issued Confirmatory Verification for Effectiveness to all Silviculture BMPs – the only such designation given to BMPs for a land use in the state. This was done under Section 403.067(7)(3) Florida Statutes, and was the culmination of a long process of research, site visiting and negotiations with DEP.

That said, there is always the possibility of changes via the legislature, i.e., anything that can be done in the legislature can be undone. So, it is always a good thing to be vigilant regarding forestry and water resource related issues on the horizon.

Finally, this year the Florida legislature passed SB 88, which was signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis. This bill modernizes and strengthens Florida’s Right to Farm Act – a critical Act for silviculture – by minimizing frivolous lawsuits, limiting who can bring a suit and allowing producers to collect attorney’s fees if they prevail in a court case. The bill also limits the amount of compensatory damages to the value of the property harmed and allowing punitive damages in specific situations. •

*\* Due to COVID-19, the 2019 BMP Survey was published online at [fdacs.gov/Forest-Wildfire/Silviculture-Best-Management-Practices](http://fdacs.gov/Forest-Wildfire/Silviculture-Best-Management-Practices)*

*Jeff Vowell is a Senior Program Manager at F4 Tech in Tallahassee. He has more than 41 years of experience in forest management emphasizing forest wetlands, wildlife, and water resources – especially Best Management Practices.*

*Jeff Vowell has a B.S. in Forest Management from Oklahoma State University, and a M.S. in Forest Hydrology from Oklahoma State University. He worked as a procurement forester in Southwest Arkansas and was the Forest Hydrologist with the Florida Forest Service. He completed his 31- year career at the Florida Forest Service as the Assistant Director for the agency.*

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# FORESTRY FORWARD TOURS USHER LAND & TIMBER

**IN APRIL, MEMBERS** of Forestry Forward, the Association's leadership development program, were treated to a special tour of the Usher Land & Timber, Inc., forestry and cattle operations in Chiefland, FL. Family-owned and operated for multiple generations, the company is now run by Lynetta Usher Griner, her husband, Ken, their son, Corey, and Eric Handley, whom the Griners claim as their second son.

On the forestry side, the company currently has 25 employees. Three logging crews and 10 truck drivers, working along with four office employees and three mechanics, deliver approximately 160 loads of various wood products each week to six different mills in North Florida. The company also manages about 3000 acres of pine timber land for the Usher Family.

Handley, who manages the forest operations and is a graduate of Forestry Forward, led the tour. Taking the group to a variety of sites on the property, he shared a little of the company's history and land management philosophy. He also explained that the company has recently expanded its portfolio: they now provide site prep and cleanup services in addition to timber harvesting.

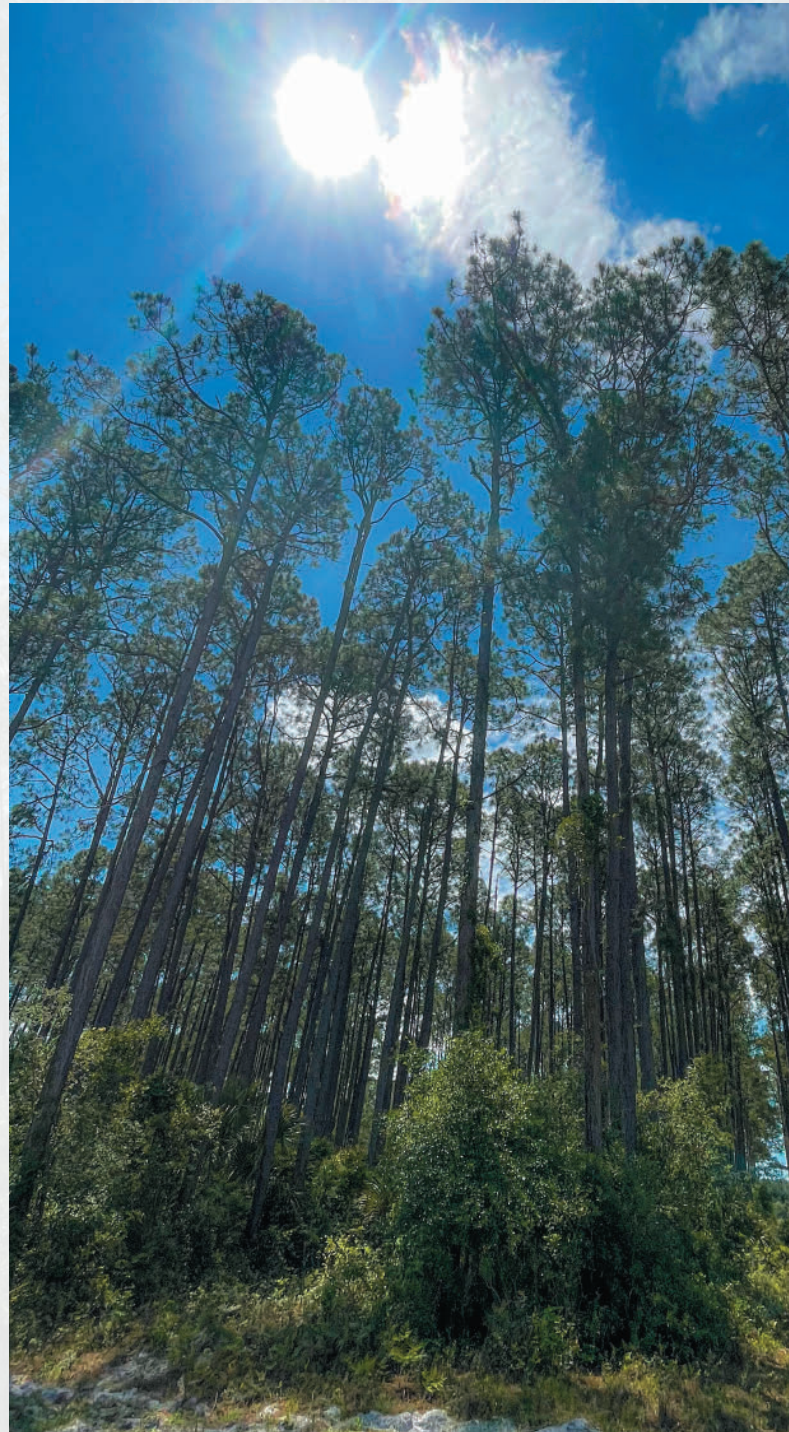
"We're excited to be able to offer our clients more services," Handley said. "We have the experience and the resources, so the expansion into the site prep world is a natural fit for us and our clients."

On the cattle side, Corey Griner explained the company participates in all phases of the cattle industry from conception to consumption. Its cow/calf operation currently has about 850 "momma" cows. Close attention is paid to the particular genetics of the heifers that are retained as well as to how bulls are deployed within the herd and in the use of Artificial Insemination (AI). This is important to producing cattle that are healthy and thrive better in the Florida environment.

Usher Land & Timber is a founding member of the Florida Cattle Ranchers, a group of family cattle ranchers who came together to produce the first beef born and raised in Florida in decades.

Over the years, Usher Land & Timber has received numerous awards for excellence and environmental stewardship: Logger of the Year on the national, regional and state levels, Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year and Audubon Sustainable Forester of the Year. They have also been recognized by the County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship (CARES) program.

Many thanks go to the Griners and to Eric Handley for their hospitality and their support of the Forestry Forward program. •





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# FLORIDA PLT: CONNECTING EDUCATORS WITH FORESTRY

By **JESSICA IRELAND**, Florida PLT Coordinator

**SINCE MARCH 2020**, Florida Project Learning Tree (FL PLT) has conducted 31 PLT professional development experiences for educators, including 27 virtual and four in-person events. Through these, FL PLT trained more than 500 educators and pre-service teachers (college students studying to be teachers) throughout Florida. Florida PLT has successfully demonstrated the ability to model hands-on learning and encourage teachers to get their students outside, creating valuable learning experiences for use with students both in-person and virtually.

Here are just two of the many positive comments teachers shared about the value of their training experience:

"The greatest value of this training is not only getting a guide with lessons to use in my classroom but getting to meet some people from the [forest industry]."

"This training made me realize that environmental education is not just limited to science, but that the environment itself can be a launching pad for learning any subject."

This year, PLT has launched several new activity guides including the release of the new *Explore Your Environment: K-8 Activity Guide* and the *Forest Literacy Framework: A Guide to Teaching and Learning About Forests*.

The *Explore Your Environment: K-8 Activity Guide* includes 50 hands-on multidisciplinary activities to connect children to nature and increase young people's awareness and knowledge about the environment. The guide includes a "Did You Know? Forest Fact" section within activities to present interesting insights into forests as global solutions for environmental, economic, and social sustainability. In addition, the *I Love My Green Job Career Corner* section introduces youth to the wide range of exciting green careers. Learn more about the guide and purchase a copy at [plt.org/curriculum/k-8-activity-guide-explore-your-environment/](http://plt.org/curriculum/k-8-activity-guide-explore-your-environment/)

The new *Forest Literacy Framework: A Guide to Teaching and Learning About Forests* provides a conceptual outline for those who educate young people, create education policy or curricula, or advocate for forests. This framework suggests sample activities and resources for exploring concepts with various audiences. Why? Because it is important for diverse groups of people to understand the values and benefits of forests! Download a free copy at [plt.org/forestliteracy](http://plt.org/forestliteracy)

Moving forward, FL PLT will incorporate the new guides into professional development trainings, including emphasizing the job opportunities available within the forest industry.

For more information about professional development trainings, educational resources, or suggestions for and assistance with outreach in your community, contact Jessica Ireland, FL PLT Coordinator at [jjtireland@ufl.edu](mailto:jjtireland@ufl.edu) •



# Forest Resources Association's National Logger of the Year: **Jerry Gray**

**C**ongratulations to Gray Logging, LLC, of Madison, FL, for being recognized as the Forest Resources Association's National Logger of the Year!

Jerry Gray and his team at Gray Logging operate 14 logging trucks and semi-trailers, working with a number

of mills within a 100-mile radius of Madison.

In addition to the logging operation, Gray is very active in his community. He was instrumental in launching North Florida College's Commercial Driver's License program and also provided a logging truck and trailer for training.



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Gray was honored at the Association's 2020 Annual Meeting as the Florida Logger of the Year. He previously won that award in 2010 and the regional award in 2011.

"Jerry Gray embodies the essence of logging at its best," said Association President Carlton Jones. "He is known for his extensive knowledge, his strict adherence to professional practices, and his passion for the industry."

Gray will be recognized at the Association's 2021 Annual Meeting for this latest accomplishment. •



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