

## 2022 LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

By Jim Spratt, Magnolia Strategies LLC



Of the 3,685 bills filed during the 2022 session, 285 bills passed the legislature and await action by Governor Ron DeSantis. On the budget front, the legislature passed a record-setting \$112.1 billion budget, the largest in state history.

In addition, the legislature added \$8.9 billion total aggregated funding to the state reserve fund. The breakdown on reserve funding is as follows: \$5.3 billion in Unallocated General Revenue; \$3.1 billion in the Budget Stabilization Fund; and \$0.5 billion in the Emergency Preparedness and Response Fund.

### Budget

Let's kick off the budget update with funding initiatives at the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS). The Association and its members enjoy a strong partnership with IFAS and we are always happy to help with their priority issues in Tallahassee. The legislature provided \$8.7 million to continue and expand upon the UF/IFAS Fertilizer Rate Study for several key Florida crops.

\$1.1 million for Forestry Education, an important program for Florida's forest industry, was retained within the UF/IFAS budget. In addition, the legislature provided \$1.1 million for geomatics funding and \$2 million for an Agricultural Ecosystems Services Project. These dollars are designed to use IFAS Artificial Intelligence (AI) capabilities to identify and determine values on myriad of environmental/ ecosystems benefits provided by agricultural lands.

Funding within the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) is another key budget area for the Association and its members. Some of the highlights from the FDACS budget include \$35 million for the Office of Agriculture Water Policy for BMP implementation; \$1.5 million for Water; \$5 million for Lake Okeechobee Agricultural BMP projects; and \$100,000 for Operation Clean Sweep. Additionally, the legislature made the decision to invest a historic \$300 million for the Rural and Family Lands Program. Although there is specific budget language which holds the dollars in reserves until January 2023, the significance of the investment shouldn't be lost.

Association members genuinely appreciate the strong working relationship we share with the Florida Forest

Service. To this end, we appreciate the opportunity to assist with budget items where appropriate. Highlighting a few key budget items which were funded in the Florida Forest Services 2022-23 budget:

- 10 new positions for land acquisition activities
- Increased wildland firefighter base pay from \$29,500 to \$41,600
- \$17.1 million for wildfire protection/suppression equipment
- \$26.4 million for replacement aircraft(s) and
- \$15 million for aerial protection equipment and program(s).

Lastly, in the wake of the wildfires which impacted Bay and Calhoun Counties, the legislature added \$93 million for Emergency Wildfire Management.

The legislature also made a significant increase in their investment into agricultural marketing, including \$18 million for the Fresh from Florida program.

The budget also contains significant funding for water quality and restoration goals within the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). Highlights within FDEP'S budget include: \$75 million for Springs Restoration; \$2.5 million Florida Friendly Landscape Program (marketing, education, promotion); \$5 million for Red Tide Research and mitigation; \$352 million Everglades Restoration; \$73 Million for Northern Everglades projects; \$65 million C-51 Reservoir Palm Beach County; \$38 million Indian River Lagoon; \$125 million Wastewater Grants; \$10 million Septic Tank Upgrades; \$30 million for PFAS clean up; and, \$50 million for Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs).

### Policy Issues

While the Association followed a myriad of bills over the course of the session, we wish to highlight some of the legislation that passed of particular interest to Florida forestry:

**HB 7071 Taxation** (Sen. Anna Maria Rodriguez/ Rep. Bobby Payne): The omnibus tax package, which was largely held until the end of session, contained some new provisions for agricultural and silvicultural producers. Specifically, the bill further expanded the sales tax exemption on trailers used in agricultural production. In addition, the bill creates a sales tax exemption on certain agricultural fencing materials including barb wire and hog wire as well as the gates, posts and other materials to build and repair agricultural fences.

*Note: As of this writing, this legislation is currently awaiting action from Governor DeSantis. Upon approval, the Department of Revenue (DOR) will most likely enter into rulemaking or at the very least create a Tax Information Sheet (TIP Sheet). To this end, the Association is preparing to work with DOR to clarify how this new exemption will be implemented.*

**HB 323 Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC)** (Sen. Travis Hutson/ Rep. Tyler Sirios): Highlights of the Gopher Tortoise (GT) language which passed in the final version of this bill include:

- Mandates that land managing agencies look at available lands if they haven't already and, if there is potential soil and habitat of at least 40 acres, assess both biological and economic feasibility, start-up and ongoing maintenance costs, and expected revenue;
- Allows GTs from private development to be located on public sites if there are no private sites available;
- Adds language to the Florida Forever Act specifically authorizing recipient sites and conservation banking on conservation easements;
- Requires FWC to update their permitting system so that it has more accurate real time availability for recipient sites;
- Puts timeframes on requests for additional info and action on a complete application; and
- Requires FWC to submit a report which includes an update on federal listing status before next session.

**HB 909 Contamination of Agricultural Lands** (Sen. Ben Albritton/ Rep. Bobby Payne): A priority for the Association and a broad array of other agricultural organizations, the legislation clarifies the role of Florida's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary to set the standards and procedures for all appropriate inquiries regarding normal and customary environmental site assessments.

The genesis of this legislation was action by a county environmental department which, in updating their site assessment guidance, made the misguided assumption that all agricultural lands should be treated as contaminated sites. This determination was made based largely on the fact agricultural lands use pesticides.

This legislation will put everyone back into their appropriate lanes with regards to the customary process of environmental site assessments.

*continued on next page >*

**SB 2508 Environmental Resources** (*Appropriations Committee/ Sen. Ben Albritton*): Although amended from its original text, SB 2508 remains our goal post for water supply and restoration in South Florida and Specifically the Everglades. This legislation contains a host of provisions which are important to Association members and should be important to all Floridians.

As amended, the legislation:

1. Expands authority under Rural and Family Lands to include “fee simple” as well as less-than-fee acquisitions and creates a linkage between Rural and Family Lands and the Florida Wildlife Corridors;
2. Gives the Florida Department of Environmental protection the ability to contract with public entities to expedite Section 404 reviews;
3. Reenacts chapter 570.93 F.S. relating to agricultural irrigation systems cost-share programs;
4. Requires South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to certify that its recommendations to the Army Corp of Engineers do not diminish the quality or quantity of water available to existing legal users and will continue to adapt to meet the needs of the restored natural system and requires water shortages within the Lake to be managed pursuant to rule in effect on January 1, 2022; and
5. Clarifies that specific funding for Everglades Restoration projects including the EAA Reservoir, Lake Okeechobee Restoration Project, C-43 Reservoir Project and THE Indian River Lagoon South project shall be authorized.

Wrapping this back to the budget, the changes to Rural and Family Lands come with a \$300 million investment into the program with the funds being available January 1, 2023.

**SB 1186/ HB 717 Agritourism** (*Sen. Ben Albritton/ Rep. Josie Tomkow*): This legislation makes two clarifications to Florida’s Agritourism Law. First, the bill prohibits denial or revocation of the agricultural property tax classification solely on the basis of the underlying agritourism activity. Secondly, the bill creates specific guidance for the taxation of nonresidential structures which are integral to the farm or agritourism activity. The bill further requires those nonresidential structures be assessed at the just value and added to the agricultural value of the land.

**For a review of all our legislative highlights, please visit the Association’s website at [FLForestry.org](http://FLForestry.org). The wrap-up can be found under the Advocacy tab.**

Every session has winners, losers and those who are still trying to find the exit doors. Now the real work begins as we work through bill action by Governor DeSantis as well as the little issue of budget vetoes.

Additionally, the summer will be full of campaign events, campaign ads and the typical cadre of back-to-back ads on television and digital media outlets. While the onslaught is often mind-numbing, the real takeaway is there are new Senate and House districts

so the potential exists for you to have a new member of the legislature representing you after November. Take advantage of this election cycle to develop a relationship with the candidates! Furthermore, the entire cabinet is up for election, including the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Now is the time to develop the relationships and plant the seeds for future harvests!

Thank you for being Association members and for all you do for the Association and the industry.

## FORESTRY DAY AT THE CAPITOL



Following the Board of Directors meeting on Wednesday, January 19, Association leaders participated in the annual Forestry Day at the Capitol.

Highlights included being officially recognized by Senator Ben Albritton in the Senate gallery, meeting with Legislator of the Year award winner Representative Jayer Williamson and Representative Chuck Brannan, and hearing the “inside scoop” on legislative issues and budget items from Association lobbyist Jim Spratt and UF/IFAS lobbyist Mary Ann Hooks.

## ASSOCIATION ENDORSES WILTON SIMPSON FOR COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES



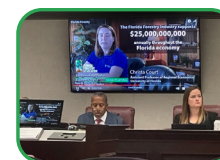
The Florida Forestry Association has endorsed Senator Wilton Simpson for Commissioner of Agriculture & Consumer Services.

“Wilton Simpson has a proven track record of strong leadership grounded in common sense,” said Alan Shelby, the Association’s executive vice president. “By combining sound policies with political acumen, he clearly presents Florida’s best choice for growing our economy while protecting our environment.”

“The forestry industry employs more than 124,000 Floridians and infuses \$25 billion into our economy,” Simpson said. “The Florida Forestry Association’s members are on the front line promoting the responsible and sustainable use of Florida’s precious forest resources, and I am honored to have their support.”

The announcement was made at an event honoring Simpson in Lake Butler on March 2, 2022. The event’s host committee and attendees included a long list of leaders from the forest community.

## BIELLING SPEAKS TO SENATE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE



During session, Association Vice President Jimmy Bielling spoke before the Senate Agriculture Committee. He provided an update on the state of Florida’s forest industry, and also shared the Association’s recently released “Florida Forestry” video.



In his remarks, Bielling explained to the committee members that although forestry is mainly associated with North Florida, its many economic and environmental benefits positively impact the entire state.



He was joined by Executive Committee member Jim Karels and Executive Vice President Alan Shelby and Florida Forest Service Assistant Director Johnny Sabo.

The forestry video is housed on the Association website ([FLForestry.org](http://FLForestry.org)) under the Resources tab. Three other videos, released during Florida Forests Week, can also be found there.

“Video is an important tool for telling the forestry story,” said Executive Vice President Alan Shelby. “Having these videos available will make it easier for the Association and our members to share our story with the legislature and a wide variety of other audiences.”

Many thanks go to our ad hoc video committee members Jimmy Bielling, John Dooner, Mark Milligan and Scott Sager, as well as to our video producer, Scott DeBerry, for their time and commitment to this important project.

## WESTROCK TO CLOSE PANAMA CITY PAPER MILL

WestRock has announced it will permanently cease operations at its mill in Panama City, Florida, by June 6, 2022.

The mill produces containerboard, heavyweight kraft, and fluff pulp, with a combined annual capacity of 645,000 tons. Select grades of containerboard currently produced at the mill will be manufactured at other WestRock facilities.

“A decision to close a facility and impact the lives of our employees is never easy to make,” said David B. Sewell, Chief Executive Officer at WestRock, in a press release. “As we implement our plans to close the Panama City mill, we do so with great appreciation for the many contributions of the team there. We are committed to assisting our Panama City team with exploring roles at other WestRock locations and outplacement assistance.”



## NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF FLORIDA'S TIMBER INDUSTRY

By Rep. Kat Cammack (R-FL-03)



As the lone Florida Republican on the House Agriculture Committee, I have traveled across our district and great state to meet with producers to better understand their challenges and unique needs. Agriculture contributes a significant amount to Florida's GDP—Florida's number one economic driver in 2020, in fact—and I'm committed to ensuring our producers benefit from a strong domestic supply chain and a thriving economy.

The forest products supply chain is interconnected among landowners, loggers, haulers, and manufacturers. To keep our forests healthy and productive, it is critical that the entire wood supply chain remains viable. Loggers and truckers are the supply chain links that connect the tracks to the mill. If these two links in the supply chain are not healthy, it is difficult for any other sector to remain healthy for an extended time. This relationship along with labor shortages and inflation have increased the strain on the forestry industry in its entirety over the last year.

Input costs continue to rise, specifically insurance costs and diesel for truckers. Insurance costs are significantly higher for log trucks in Florida than other states. As rising fuel costs take a toll on the people who harvest and move wood products, the need for sensible solutions only grows. Florida's average diesel price climbed from \$3.950 to \$5.172 in 30 days. The inflation loggers and truckers are facing far exceeds the average rise in costs for American consumers and the timber industry is feeling this pain.

The supply chain has also become challenged by a lack of labor. Like many industries, labor is proving difficult to find in multiple areas. The shortage of truck drivers has been growing for over a decade and while we've seen it fluctuate at times, it has remained ever present. Due to COVID-19, demand for an already strained workforce increased.

Locally, our team has been hard at work to expand trucking school capabilities to attract new drivers to the industry to help relieve some of the labor shortages we're feeling across North Central and Northeast Florida. We have also worked with our domestic producers in Florida and across the country to increase our fertilizer production to lessen our dependence on Russia and China. Finally, we've introduced and co-sponsored legislation to jumpstart domestic energy production to unlock our capabilities and reduce our reliance on imports.

The complexity of the supply chain challenges simple solutions. We must continue to monitor input costs as loggers and truckers are the supply chain links that connect the woods to the mill. It is clear the forestry industry relies on all aspects in order to operate, and it's in everyone's interest to make sure that wood moves smoothly from the forests to the mill.

With rising costs, we cannot let the value our forest products provide to our state diminish.

I'm committed to working toward sensible solutions for Florida's harvesters as the ongoing challenges continue. I invite you to learn more about our work on the House Agriculture Committee and in Congress to deliver much needed relief where possible.

I look forward to connecting with the many Florida Forestry Association members soon and thank you for all you do to keep our state and our nation moving. Our daily lives are affected by your work, and though it seems thankless at times, please know you have dedicated champions in your corner to tackle these challenges head-on.

*Congresswoman Kat Cammack proudly serves Florida's Third Congressional District as the youngest Republican woman in the 117th Congress. She is a member of the House Agriculture Committee, House Select Committee on the Economy, and serves as the lead Republican on the House Homeland Security Committee Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery.*

## MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Two regional membership meetings are held each year in an effort to reach more members close to home. These great informal gatherings have become annual favorites for members to get together and talk about issues of importance, with plenty of time allowed for networking.

This year's events were held at Doug and Theresa Moore's South Prong Plantation in Baker County, FL, and at Rex Lumber's cabin in Jackson County, FL. Farm Credit of Florida, Farm Credit of Northwest Florida and ArborGen Inc. sponsored the meetings.

Thank you to our hosts, sponsors and attendees for continuing to make our membership meetings so successful. Be sure to look for the location near you in 2023!



## MASTER LOGGER CONTINUING LOGGER EDUCATION SCHEDULE

July 14 – Virtual  
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October 22 – Virtual  
December 8 – Blountstown



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## WAYNE SMITH INDUCTED INTO FLORIDA AGRICULTURAL HALL OF FAME



Dr. Wayne Smith, professor emeritus of the UF/IFAS School of Forest, Fisheries and Geomatics Sciences, was inducted into the Florida Agricultural Hall of Fame on Tuesday, February 15, at the State Fair in Tampa.

"Wayne's body of work and research changed the face of Florida forestry," said Association Executive Vice President Alan Shelby. "Witnessing his well-deserved induction into the Hall of Fame was a pleasure and a privilege for all of us who were able to attend."

## JONES HONORED IN LAKE CITY



Local officials joined the Lake City Garden Club in honoring Florida Forestry Association President Carlton Jones at its Arbor Day celebration on Thursday, January 13, 2022.

City Councilman Eugene Jefferson read the official proclamation, which he presented to Jones, along with Mayor Stephen Witt.

"It's incredible to be recognized, especially by your hometown," said Jones.

"We are strong believers in being good stewards of our forests," he said. "We understand how important trees and forests are, and we are committed to spreading that message."

"The Lake City Garden Club is proud to recognize Carlton Jones as our Arbor Day honoree," said Committee member Tina Roberts. "His work in forestry makes a positive impact on our town and our state."

## READY TO TALK TURKEY?



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For more information, contact Krista Harvard ([Krista@FLForestry.org](mailto:Krista@FLForestry.org)).





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