

Familiar faces filled the halls of the State Capitol in Atlanta Wednesday as the forestry community gathered to celebrate the Georgia Forestry Association's annual legislative reception and Forestry Day at the Capitol. The event presented GFA members with an excellent opportunity to speak directly to their state Senators and Representatives.

This week saw the introduction of legislation seeking to reform property taxes as well as legislation from the Governor dealing with the state's water issues (both discussed in further detail below). Both of these issues could have an impact on forestry.



Caterpillar Forest Products President & GFA Board Member John Carpenter (L) meets with Rep. Lynn Smith (R-Newnan) & Rep. Randy Nix (R-LaGrange). Smith & Nix are Chair and Secretary of the House Natural Resources Committee, respectively.

Friday marked the thirteenth legislative day out of the allotted forty, and as the legislature heads into a four day work week Monday, GFA anticipates the action of several key bills.

Issue Watch

House Bill 1028 by Rep. **Jay Roberts** (R-Ocilla) will amend the Forest Land Protection Act to remove obstacles to enrollment related to potential liability of an owner of land in a covenant who sells a portion of the property to someone who later breaches the covenant. The bill is on the move, having passed out of the full Ways & Means Committee Thursday. It is expected to be voted on by the full House of Representatives next week. Passage of HB 1028 is GFA's top legislative priority this session.

House Bill 1008 by Rep. **Allen Peake** would extend the time during which the price of various forms of energy used by manufacturers is capped for purposes of the state sales tax. The caps were established by legislation in 2008 and are set to expire December 31, 2010. HB 1008 would extend the cap until 2012 for natural or artificial gas, No. 2 fuel oil, No. 6 fuel oil, propane, petroleum coke, and coal used directly or indirectly in the manufacture or processing, in a manufacturing plant located in this state. The bill has been assigned to the Ways & Means Committee and could be heard as early as next week. GFA supports this bill.

At GFA's request, Rep. **Debbie Buckner** (D-Junction City) has decided against legislation to impose a mandatory restitution of three times the fair market value of trees taken in an unintentional timber harvest overcut. Instead, Rep. Buckner is expected to introduce a bill to create a legislative study committee on timber trespass and theft. GFA will support the study committee and, if the bill passes, will participate as fully as possible in the committee's work.

House Bill 768 was introduced at GFA's request last year by Rep. **Allen Peake** (R-Macon). The bill would create income tax credits for reforestation under certain circumstances and expand those credits for reforestation following timber loss due to natural disasters, such as tornadoes, fire, etc. Given the difficult economic condition of the state, the Association will not pursue passage of this legislation in 2010 but will use this bill as a marker for a future session when revenue conditions are better.

House Bill 990 by Rep. **Alan Powell** (D-Hartwell) would require motor carriers (defined as “any motor vehicle or trailer transporting a load of logs, long pulpwood, poles or posts” extending more than four feet beyond the body or bed of a truck/trailer) to have a multidirectional amber lamp attached to the load that is visible from the rear and both sides. GFA is receiving comments on the bill and will soon announce its position on this legislation.

The *Georgia Forest Product Fairness Act*, similar to Louisiana’s Act 352 passed in 2009, is currently in the drafting stage. The bill would insure equal and fair treatment for existing forest product businesses when incentives or subsidies are implemented for new industries, such as bioenergy facilities. Several members of the Senate are discussing the details of the legislation and will announce their plan Friday afternoon. A bill could be introduced early next week.

House Bill 970 by Rep. **Ellis Black** (R-Valdosta) has just been introduced and there has been no committee action yet. While still under review, the bill would appear to require that adjoining landowners notify by certified mail when a property of five acres or more is being resurveyed or remarked. GFA is receiving comments on this bill as well and will announce its position soon.

House Bill 996 by Rep. **Jeff May** (R-Monroe) would appear to replace the current ad valorem tax exemption allowed for certain heavy-duty equipment motor vehicles and replace it with a credit against the ad valorem taxes. No committee action yet.

Copies of these bills can be found by logging on to the General Assembly web page (www.legis.ga.gov).

Property tax reform bill introduced in Senate

On Monday, Senate Majority Leader **Chip Rogers** (R-Woodstock) introduced a 47-page bill proposing what he refers to as “much needed” reform to the property tax system in Georgia. **Senate Bill 346**, he says, will give more power to homeowners.

The components of SB 346 include year-round property appraisals; ensuring that every property receives an annual notice of reassessment; establishing time limits for assessor action in response to appeals; statewide uniformity of assessment notices and appeal forms; allowing counties to accept payment plans for property taxes and incentives for early payments; and will require a unanimous vote by the Board of Equalization members when increasing an assessed value.

“The collection of taxes should be fair, transparent and easy to understand. Sadly, the property tax system in Georgia accomplishes none of these things,” Rogers said. “Georgians from all over the state created this legislation. We have had hundreds of suggestions for change. The more than 40 changes represented in this bill represent the will of the people and the will to bring needed relief to property owners.”

No companion bill has yet to be introduced in the House, although it is expected that House Majority Whip **Ed Lindsey** (R-Atlanta) will do so soon. Representative Lindsey is Senator Rogers’ counterpart in the House on the issue of property tax reform. GFA will likely support SB 346 and all other legislation attempting to reform the property tax system.



Senator Chip Rogers chairing the Senate Property Tax Assessment and Appeals Study Committee

Governor unveils Water Stewardship Act

In a press conference at the State Capitol on Wednesday, Governor **Sonny Perdue** announced a proposal that encourages water conservation and the reduction of wasteful loss that will incentivize the innovation for increasing water supply and decreasing demand. The bill, titled the Georgia Water Stewardship Act of 2010, mirrors the work of the Water Contingency Task Force the governor commissioned last fall.

“This bill represents the hard work and effort of the water task force and provides a road map towards being better stewards of our limited natural resources,” the governor said. “We have made great strides in creating a culture of conservation in Georgia, and these measures will continue our commitment to protect our state for future generations.”

A particularly noteworthy portion of the bill will extend the voluntary agriculture monitoring program to include surface water withdrawals. Farmers from around the state have agreed to the monitoring of groundwater withdrawals, and the results disprove several of the negative assumptions about water use for agriculture. By extending this program to surface water, the state will be able to obtain the critical data necessary for the water inventory of sources and uses that the Regional Water Councils (that many GFA members sit on) are currently developing.

The bill will be introduced by the Chairs of both the Senate and House Natural Resources and Environment Committees. Senator **Ross Tolleson** (R-Perry) will carry **Senate Bill 370** and Representative **Lynn Smith** (R-Newnan) will carry **House Bill 1094**. “Water is our most precious natural resource and this legislation gives us the tools we need to prepare for future growth and future droughts,” Rep. Smith said.

Senator Tolleson adds, “During the past two years Georgia has shown a great willingness and ability to conserve water and these proposals build on that foundation.”

BCAP regulations released

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has released the proposed regulations for the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP). BCAP will provide financial assistance to producers who deliver eligible material to approved biomass conversion facilities and the Farm Services Agency (FSA) will provide assistance with the CHST payment process. The program is part of the 2009 "Presidential Directive to USDA to Expand Access to Biofuels." The directive's mission is to increase the availability of renewable biomass to the renewable energy market.

BCAP is a pressing issue right now for loggers, landowners and consuming mills. For further details on the program including a summary of the regulations, log on to GFA's website (www.gfagrow.org) or for the complete copy, [click here](#).

For more information on the Georgia General Assembly, including contact information for your Representative and Senator, visit the Georgia Forestry Association website at www.gfagrow.org and click on Georgia General Assembly under the **Links** tab, or under the **Government Affairs** tab you may go to Contact Your Legislator, a particularly helpful resource if you are uncertain of the members in your local legislative delegation.

Archived Capitol Forestry Reports can be found on GFA's homepage, www.gfagrow.org.

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