



Leaders of the state: Lt. Governor Casey Cagle (L), Governor Sonny Perdue & Speaker David Ralston (R) address the biggest issues facing Georgia during a joint press conference earlier this week.

*The Georgia General Assembly had another busy week, burning through four more legislative days. Committees acted on several bills that the Georgia Forestry Association is monitoring, while others are waiting to be added to the appropriate committees' agendas.*

*While water, property taxes and the state budget are among the most high profile issues being dealt with at the moment, GFA is hard at work to make sure that the less talked about issues do not fall through the cracks.*

*The General Assembly will reconvene on Tuesday, February 16 for day eighteen of the 2010 session. For the next few weeks, the legislature will meet every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Seventeen days down, and twenty-three remain....*

## **Issue Watch**

GFA's priority issue, **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 or transfers a portion of the property to someone who later breaches the covenant. The bill passed out of the House Ways & Means Committee unanimously last week. Rep. Roberts will ask for the bill to be added to the House Rules Calendar (the list of bills scheduled for debate and vote each day) next week. Please contact your House member to solicit his or her support when House Bill 1028 hits the House floor.

**House Bill 970** by Rep. **Ellis Black** (D-Valdosta) would require that adjoining landowners be notified by certified mail when a property of five acres or more is being resurveyed or remarked. The bill was held in the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Wednesday so that the sponsor can rework some of the legislation's provisions. GFA opposed the bill as it was introduced. Rep. Black has drafted a substitute to HB 970, but GFA's concern is with the underlying mandate for notice. Therefore, the Association remains opposed to House Bill 970.

**Senate Bill 409** by Senate Finance Chairman **Ronnie Chance** (R-Tyrone), also known as the *Georgia Forest Product Fairness Act*, will ensure equal and fair treatment for existing forest product businesses when incentives or subsidies are implemented for new industries, such as bioenergy facilities. SB 409 could be in the Senate Finance Committee as early as next week. GFA supports this bill.

**Senate Bill 346** by Senate Majority Leader **Chip Rogers** (R-Woodstock) attempts a major overhaul of the property tax system in Georgia. Its components 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 to provide incentives for early payments; and will require a unanimous vote by the Board of Equalization members when increasing an assessed value. The bill was heard in the Senate Finance Committee on Wednesday, and is expected to be voted on in committee next week. It should be noted that GFA members

Roger Land and Wheeler Bryan worked very closely with Sen. Rogers to draft this legislation. GFA supports this bill.

**Senate Resolution 958** by Sen. **Chip Pearson** (R-Dawsonville) urges Congress “to enact legislation restricting the Environmental Protection Agency's efforts to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from stationary sources through the Clean Air Act until Congress adopts a balanced approach to address climate and energy supply issues without crippling the economy”. GFA supports this bill.

*The following bills are either still developing or have seen no committee action.*

**House Bill 1008** by Rep. **Allen Peake** extends 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 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. Action on this legislation has been delayed as the Department of Revenue has yet to submit a fiscal note. GFA supports this bill and has met with House Speaker David Ralston’s staff to urge the extension of these caps.

At GFA’s request, Rep. **Debbie Buckner** (D-Junction City) has abandoned her intention earlier in the session to introduce legislation imposing a mandatory restitution of three times the fair market value of trees taken in an unintentional timber harvest overcut. Instead, she 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 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, but it appears that HB 990 would only require Georgia to comply with federal regulations already in place.

Initial hearings on the governor’s water bills, **Senate Bill 370** by Senate Natural Resources Chairman **Ross Tolleson** (R-Perry) and **House Bill 1094** by House Natural Resources Chair **Lynn Smith** (R-Newnan), were held this week but no committee action was taken. The bills, in their current form, seem primarily aimed at urban conservation with a focus on sub-meter requirements in all new residential and commercial building. Additional language related to agriculture could be added soon. Committee action on both bills is expected soon.

**House Bill 996** by Rep. **Jeff May** (R-Monroe) would 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 has been taken yet.

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## **Forestry Commission’s budget woes mount**

The Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) is entering this legislative session with a proposed 11.34% reduction (\$3,726,947) to its amended 2010 fiscal year budget. This week the House Appropriations Committee approved an \$80,000 addition to the GFC budget (correcting an error made by OPB as related to a vacant position and also providing funds for chief rangers to keep their trucks, which has a big impact on response time to wildfires) recommended by the House Economic Development Appropriations Subcommittee chaired by Representative **Butch Parrish** (R-Swainsboro). The amended 2010 appropriations bill will now go to the Senate Natural Resources Appropriations Subcommittee, chaired by Senator **Ross Tolleson**, for approval or further

modification. The full Senate Appropriations Committee, chaired by Senator **Jack Hill** (R-Reidsville), will review the amended appropriations bill (**HB 947**) next Tuesday, February 16th.

The current year reductions include the loss of state funding for 49 positions, closing and disposing of 7 more offices, eliminating all crawler tractor replacement funds, cutting \$375,000 in regular operating funds, 6 days of furlough for all personnel, and 9 days of furlough for senior management.

The budget reduction proposals mean that the GFC will experience a total reduction of \$10,000,000 (26%) from where they started in 2009. Since the beginning of 2009, the GFC will have closed and disposed 9% of its fire control offices and lost state funding for 10% of the agency's positions. The long term funding of the GFC is in dire straits, in terms of real dollars the GFC has \$18,400,000 (40%) less than it had to operate a decade ago.

As the Commission heads into the 2011 fiscal year, which begins July 1, their concerns include continued state funding for positions and the \$17,200,000 gap in replacing worn out firefighting equipment and maintaining offices. The GFC considers it critical at a minimum to maintain the Governor's budget proposal of \$5,200,000 in FY11 bonds to partially address these needs.

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](http://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](http://www.gfagrow.org).

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