

*It was another eventful week under the Gold Dome as the General Assembly knocked out another three legislative days. The Georgia Forestry Association celebrated a significant legislative victory as House Transportation Chairman Jay Roberts successfully carried House Bill 1028, the bill that will correct a potential landowner liability issue in the Forest Land Protection Act, through the House of Representatives. The battle, unfortunately, isn't over: the bill still needs to pass through the Senate and, if successful, will require the Governor's signature in order to become law. We still have a long way to go.*



HB 1028 Sponsor Jay Roberts (right), Chairman of the House Transportation Committee, explains an issue on the House floor.

*Thursday was the twentieth legislative day, which means that the 2010 session has reached the halfway point. The major issues facing the state – an unprecedented budget shortfall, challenges to the state's transportation infrastructure and a looming water crisis – remain unsolved. Both the House and Senate have agreed to recess for two weeks until March 8<sup>th</sup> and only the committees dealing with those issues are allowed to meet. The Appropriations Committees will gather to examine state revenue figures from January and February as they work on the budget for 2011, which begins on July 1<sup>st</sup>. The Natural Resources Committees will tweak the Governor's water bill and move it out of committee and onto the floor of both chambers. A solution to the problem of funding transportation projects across the state is likely to come out of both Transportation Committees, and property owners looking for relief regarding property taxes could see reform emerge from the Senate Finance Committee and the House Ways & Means Committee. No doubt, this is a full agenda for a two week period.*

*Although neither chamber will be in session, GFA will closely monitor and report on committee action during the 2 week recess when many lawmakers' return to Atlanta. Twenty days down, and twenty to go...*

## Issue Watch

As mentioned earlier, **House Bill 1028** by Rep. **Jay Roberts** (R-Ocilla), GFA's top legislative priority this session, was heard before the full House of Representatives Thursday and passed by a vote of 139 to 26. HB 1028 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. GFA must now repeat the success in the House on the Senate side.

**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. A substitute to the bill clarifies that SB 409 will only apply to incentives tied directly to raw forest products, and will exempt existing statutory incentives from the bill's provisions. The Senate Finance Committee will meet over the break, and this legislation could be on their agenda at the next meeting. GFA supports this bill.

**Senate Bill 346** by Senate Majority Leader **Chip Rogers** (R-Woodstock) attempts a major overhaul of the property tax appeals process 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, requiring a unanimous vote by the

Board of Equalization members when increasing an assessed value. SB 346 was heard in the Senate Finance Committee last week, but was held in committee so that Sen. Rogers can iron out the remaining problems that some committee members have. SB 346 is expected to be on the agenda at the Senate Finance Committee's next meeting. GFA supports this bill.

House Majority Whip **Ed Lindsey** (R-Atlanta) reintroduced a measure from last year aimed at granting property owners some relief. **House Resolution 1**, a constitutional amendment, and its enabling legislation **House Bill 517** would cap property tax reassessments at 3% per year or 9% for a 3 year period. Just as Sen. Rogers did with his property tax bill, Rep. Lindsey will also rework some of the provisions of his bill in order for it to receive favorable action by the Ad Valorem Subcommittee of House Ways & Means.

**Senate Bill 370** by Senate Natural Resources Chairman **Ross Tolleson** (R-Perry), the Governor's water bill, passed by substitute out of the Senate Natural Resources earlier this week. A similar substitute for **House Bill 1094** by House Natural Resources Chair **Lynn Smith** (R-Newnan), is being considered and will likely be heard when the House Natural Resources Committee meets during the break. The bills focus largely on residential and commercial water conservation.

*The following bills saw no movement or committee action this week.*

**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. 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. On a related note, Rep. **Debbie Buckner** (D-Junction City) is expected to introduce a bill to create a legislative study committee on timber trespass and theft. This study committee could also give shareholders the opportunity to look at Rep. Black's resurveying issue more closely. GFA will support the study committee and, if the bill passes, will participate fully in the committee's work.

**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. GFA supports this bill and has met with House Speaker David Ralston's staff to urge the extension of these caps. The bill will be heard in committee in the Sales Tax Subcommittee of House Ways & Means as soon as Rep. Peake receives the bill's fiscal note, estimating the revenue impact of the legislation.

**Senate Resolution 958** by Sen. **Chip Pearson** (R-Dawsonville) and its companion bill **House Resolution 1357** by Rep. **Ron Stephens** (R-Savannah) urge 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 both bills.

**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.

**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.

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The Georgia General Assembly will break until March 8, 2010 at the request of leadership in both the House and Senate. The two weeks will provide selected committees with the opportunity to work on issues without wasting remaining days on the legislative calendar. The next issue of *Capitol Forestry Report* will be published on March 12<sup>th</sup>.

## **Don't forget 2 important upcoming events in support of the Georgia Forestry Foundation!**

*The GFF First Annual Longleaf Golf Classic will be held Thursday, March 25, 2010  
at the Southern Hills Golf & Country Club in Hawkinsville, GA.  
For details on the tournament, [click here](#).*

*The 2010 GFF Photo Contest is now underway and is seeking amazing images of Georgia's forests and the  
wildlife they support - photos that tell the story of the beauty and benefits of Georgia's woodlands.  
For details on the contest, [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](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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