



March 14, 2008

Farm Bureau Day Activities

We encourage you to join us for Farm Bureau Day activities in Tallahassee on March 17 and 18.

Limited seats are still available for the briefing dinner at the Cross Creek Driving Range and Golf Course on Monday at 6:30 p.m.

Reservations are required and must be made by 3 p.m. Friday, March 14. Please call Chris Scovotto at (850) 222-2557. Cost is \$10 per person. Dress is casual.

A second issue briefing will be held in the Civic Center Exhibition Hall at 5 p.m., with the legislative reception officially beginning at 5:30.

Please make appointments with your legislators and invite them to our reception. Because of the gift ban, legislators, staff and other governmental employees must pay to attend.

Tickets for Farm Bureau members are available at county Farm Bureau offices. The cost is \$10 each.

Informational Meeting on Alternative Energy

Farm Bureau will brief our members interested in producing energy from alternative sources. Speakers are Agriculture Commissioner Charlie Bronson, Public Service Commission Chair Matt Carter, Bill Willingham of the Florida Electric Cooperatives Association and Dana Weber of the Florida Biofuels Association.

The meeting will be held on Farm Bureau Day, Tuesday, March 18, from 3-5 p.m. in Meeting Room B on the ground floor of the Leon County Civic Center.

Elected Water Management District (WMD) Board Members

The proposal to make WMD governing board seats elected positions has been a recurring issue on the Joint Legislative Sunset Review Committee's agenda.

Currently, board members in the five water management districts are appointed by the Governor and then confirmed by the Senate.

Farm Bureau policy opposes electing WMD board members. Although agriculture is one of the largest consumers of WMD services, we are far outnumbered at the polls. Less than one percent of the population is in agriculture. Our chances of having any representation on elected WMD boards, particularly in the three southern districts, would be slim to none.

Sen. Ronda Storms, R-Brandon, has been the most outspoken proponent of this issue. Her arguments in favor of elected positions center around the districts' taxing authority and her belief that appointed members do not work as hard as elected members. Her proposal was narrowly defeated.

In the final minutes of the meeting, an alternative proposal was offered in the form of a hybrid WMD board consisting of both elected and appointed members. The committee began discussing this option but ran out of time.

As of this writing, Farm Bureau, environmental groups and WMDs have helped defeat the proposal for elected WMD board members. However, we expect this issue to resurface in some form next week at the final committee meeting.

WMD Board Open Seats

Governor Charlie Christ is in the process of making decisions on appointments to water management district boards.

Eleven seats are currently open. The Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) has three seats open; the other four districts each have two seats open.

A number of good agricultural candidates have turned in their applications. We have heard that the Governor is looking for “conservation minded” candidates.

Paul Senft of Polk County was just appointed to the SWFWMD this week. Senft, a former county commissioner, owns a consulting and insurance company. His term runs through March of 2011, pending Senate confirmation.

Decisions will be made soon, but it’s still not too late to send in letters of support.

Surveyors

After much negotiation, Farm Bureau and the Florida Surveying and Mapping Society came to a resolution on how to penalize a surveyor who breaks fences or who allows livestock to escape because of a break. A portion of the new law, if passed by the legislature, states the following:

“Any person authorized to enter lands pursuant to subsection (1) who willfully and maliciously breaks down, mars, injures, defaces, cuts, or otherwise creates or causes to be created an opening, gap, interruption, or break in any fence, or any part thereof, belonging to or enclosing land not his or her own, or whoever (willfully and maliciously) causes to be broken down, marred, injured, defaced, or cut any fence belonging to or enclosing land not his or her or own, commits a misdemeanor of the first degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082 or s. 775.083. A person who commits a second or subsequent offense under this subsection commits a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082, s. 775.083, or s. 775.08.”

This measure, HB 789, by Rep. Will Kendrick, R-Carrabelle, passed the House Homeland Security and Public Safety Committee on a unanimous vote Wednesday.

Public Land Management

The Joint Legislative Sunset Committee and the House Conservation and State Lands Committee are considering proposals to consolidate certain public lands managed by the state. One proposal of interest is the transfer of responsibility of these public lands to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ Division of Forestry.

The lands are currently managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Department of Environmental Protection’s Recreation and Parks, Greenways and Trails, and Coastal Aquatic Managed Areas Divisions. If approved, this transfer would bring an additional 2,215,161 acres of public land under the responsibility of the Division of Forestry.

The transferred lands would continue to be overseen with the current management objectives. Over time, expenditures would be expected to decrease as efficiencies and duplicative functions are identified and eliminated.

Fuel Relief on the Way?

Led by the Florida Forestry Association in an effort to help offset rising diesel fuel prices, the Ag Coalition this week took steps to seek an emergency weight extension for trucks.

Florida Agriculture Commissioner Charles Bronson was asked to push for a 95,000-pound weight extension so more products can be hauled with each gallon of fuel burned. Fully aware of the hardship on the industry, Commissioner Bronson pledged his support and will encourage Gov. Crist to issue an emergency executive order to address this critical need.

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