

2006 Florida Legislative Recap

During the 60-day Regular Session of the Florida Legislature, a number of issues will be considered affecting hunters in Florida. Several of the proposals will address concerns raised by sportsmen during the 2005 Summit on the Future of Hunting in Florida. Below is a summary of proposed legislation, along with a link to the legislative web sites for each bill. It is imperative that sportsmen be involved in the legislative process. Sportsmen are encouraged to contact their representative or senator and ask for their support of these bills.

No Net Loss of Hunting Lands HB 265 by Rep. Don Brown and SB 430 by Senator Nancy Argenziano

This legislation requires certain lands owned, managed or leased by the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to be used for the purpose of hunting. It establishes a benchmark to determine how much public land is currently hunted in the state and provides that the FWCC shall ensure that hunting land acreage will not be reduced below the acreage in place at this time this legislation takes affect. The legislation also requires all state agencies and water management districts to report an inventory of all lands owned by such agencies, to disclose which lands are hunted and which lands are not hunted.

*******UPDATE*******

This morning, the House State Resources Council passed, by a unanimous vote, HB 265 pertaining to no-net loss of hunting lands. Three amendments by the bill sponsor were adopted. One of the amendments clarified that water management district-owned lands would be included in the no-net loss calculation and in the inventory of lands required by the bill. An additional amendment provided that, to the greatest extent feasible, FWCC must replace lands that are removed from hunting with lands situated in the same FWCC region and with similar hunting methods.

While I had turned in an appearance card along with Ms. Marion Hammer, it was both of our intentions to waive our time in support of the bill. However, after a spokesman for the St. Johns Water Management District and a spokeswoman for Audubon of Florida spoke against the bill, we were inclined not only to speak in favor of the bill, but to take these previous speakers to task over their objections to the bill.

It is clear now that at least some of the water management districts are concerned about having FWCC be the lead agency that makes decisions on whether or not a piece of land is suitable for hunting. In addition, Audubon wanted to prohibit state park lands from being considered in the mix of lands that would be looked at.

I testified that these are the precise reasons why this very bill is needed. I said that I would bet that 100% of the lands that have been purchased by state agencies and water management districts were at one time hunted by our fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers, and that if they had been closed to hunting, there needs to be a hard look at why. Further, I said that the inventory would finally provide a vehicle for sportsmen to find out what land is truly out there, that may be ripe for hunting opportunity.

Several of the members of the committee took those in opposition to task, and it was clear that this committee is fully supportive of our great hunting heritage in Florida.

I'd like to thank Rep. Don Brown for his support on this bill, and I would encourage our ASAF members to call his office in Tallahassee, or e-mail him, thanking him for his support. His Tallahassee office number is 850-488-4726, and his e-mail address is donald.brown@myfloridahouse.gov.

House Bill 265

Senate Bill 430

Sportsmen's Voter Registration HB 125 by Rep. Greg Evers and SB 208 by Senator Carey Baker

Provides that agents or subagents of the state that sale hunting and fishing licenses to also offer voter registration information to persons buying hunting and fishing

HB 125

SB 208

Restricted Hunting License HB 471 by Rep. Baxter Troutman and SBs 1726 and 2202 by Sen. Carey Baker

Authorizes the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to issue a restricted hunting license that will allow an individual to hunt for up to 12 months without having to take the hunter safety course. The person receiving the restricted license must be accompanied by an adult hunter who is properly licensed and who has completed the hunter safety course or was exempt from having to take the course due to age.

HB 471

SB 1726

SB 2202

The passage of SB 430 and HB 265, the No-Net-Loss of Hunting Lands in Florida legislation, has picked up momentum as the legislature enters its final three weeks of meetings in Tallahassee. The opposition of certain environmental and conservation organizations has been eliminated, based upon comfort language being agreed to which will provide that state park lands will not be considered as potential replacement for hunting lands which may be closed. However, the Department of Environmental Protection will still be required to report all of their lands, including park lands, in the annual inventory of all lands which is mandated by the legislation.

The list of organizations which have signed off on the legislation and the proposed amendment, as of Friday, April 14, include:

The Nature Conservancy (Marianne Gengenbach)
Florida Wildlife Federation (David Gluckman/Manley Fuller)
National Rifle Association (Marion Hammer)
Unified Sportsmen of Florida (Marion Hammer)
FWC (Ken Haddad/Nick Wiley)
DEP (Colleen Castille/Jennifer Fitzwater)
Standing Watch (Jim Kalvin)
Florida Airboat Association (Phil Walters)
Allied Sportsmen's Association of Florida (Lane Stephens) which is comprised of the following organizations:
Florida State Chapter of National Wild Turkey Federation
Everglades Coordinating Council
Florida Dog Hunters and Sportsmen's Association
SCI - Tampa Chapter
SCI - South Florida Chapter
SCI - North Florida Chapter
Tall Timbers Research Station
United Water Fowlers of Florida

To stay up to date on activities regarding this legislation, anyone can register to receive automatic updates by e-mail via the Florida House of Representatives web site. The following link will take you to the House Bill Tracking site, where you can sign up. Make sure to enter both bill numbers to stay informed of activities in both chambers during the closing weeks of session. <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/MyHouse/login.aspx>

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Babcock - While I have not read the bill as passed, I did get to read a number of the amendments that were adopted in the Senate, and to which the House accepted. The bill looks much more like the agreement that was adopted by the Cabinet last November, and which we supported. I know that Senators Bennett and Dockery said all along they did not support the plan that was put forth by the House in the closing weeks of session, and if what I believe happened did happen, the Senate stripped much of the language out that would have left the private leases in place, etc. It may not be perfect, but it is a heck of a lot better than it was.

Mentoring License - The legislation filed by Sportsmens' Caucus Leader Baxter Troutman passed. It will allow new hunters the opportunity to hunt, for up to 12 months, without having to take the hunter safety course. During that time, they must hunt with an adult hunter who has complied with the hunter safety requirements.

No-Net-Loss - The no-net-loss of hunting lands legislation, which is part of a model legislation package being offered up by the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses, was adopted. In Florida, Marion Hammer, the NRA/United Sportsmen of Florida leader, took this proposal under her wings and championed this legislation through the process.

She also led the efforts to reach a compromise when some of the environmentalist groups and DEP balked about state parks being included.

Sportsmen Voter Registration - Another piece of NASC model legislation that was picked up and promoted by the NRA was the sportsmen's voter registration bill. This bill, which will require businesses that selling hunting and fishing licenses to offer voter registration cards to purchasers, was also adopted.

These were the big issues that the Allied Sportsmen's Associations of Florida worked on throughout the Session. Much thanks goes to the various sponsors of the legislation, including Representatives Baxter Troutman, Don Brown and Greg Evers, and Senators Nancy Argenziano, Carey Baker and Durrell Peaden.

In addition, let me say that we once again had a great working relationship with Marion Hammer and NRA. Without her taking to lead and seeking bill sponsors for the No Net Loss and Sportsmen's Voter bill, those issues may have had to wait for another day. Her persistence and tenacity paid off, however, and we had big wins.

Finally, I want to thank Jackie Fauls, legislative director for FWCC, and all of the FWCC staff for their assistance during the Session. When you combine FWCC, Marion Hammer/NRA, and Allied Sportsmen's Association of Florida, the sportsmen in this state should know they are being well represented in Tallahassee.

Thanks, Lane