



oppaga

Justification Review

August 2001

Report No. 01-36

Forest Protection Program Meets Most Standards; Could Achieve Further Savings

at a glance

The Forest and Resource Protection Program protects and manages Florida's forest resources to assure these resources will be available for future generations. Our review reached the conclusions below.

- The program met most of its performance standards for wildfire protection and land management and is accomplishing its mission in an effective manner.
- The program could save over \$1 million annually by eliminating some services that it provides to private landowners that are available from the private sector.
- The program could generate an additional \$750,000 annually from recreation activity fees by providing local state forest managers greater autonomy.
- By modifying the county fire protection assessment law, the Legislature could help improve privately owned forestland management practices and reduce program costs.
- Eliminating the requirement that program staff complete a structural firefighting course would save \$175,000 annually.
- To improve program accountability and effectiveness, four additional performance measures should be adopted.

Purpose

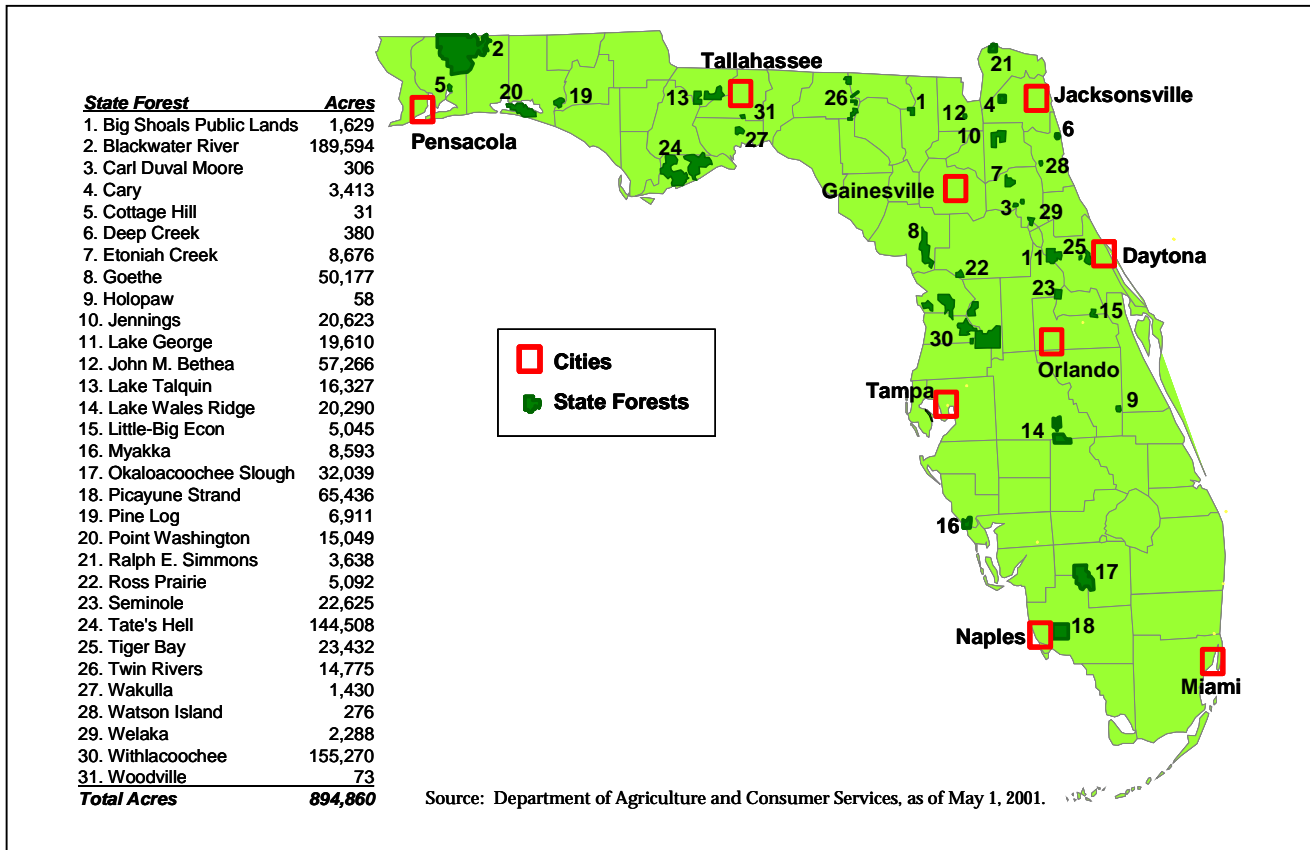
State law directs the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to complete a justification review of each state agency program that is operating under a performance-based program budget. This report reviews the performance and identifies policy alternatives for the Forest and Resource Protection Program administered by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Appendix A summarizes our conclusions regarding each of nine issue areas the law directs OPPAGA to consider in a program evaluation and justification review.

Background

The mission of the Forest and Resource Protection Program is to protect and manage Florida's forest resources to assure these resources will be available for future generations. The two major services provided by the program are forestland management and protection from wildfires. As shown in Exhibit 1, the program manages 31 state forests that are located throughout Florida. In addition to the 894,860 acres of state forestland, the program has the lead role in managing 221,810 acres of forestland owned by other state entities. It also provides forestland management services to private landowners.

Exhibit 1

Florida Has 31 State Forests



The program’s forest protection services include activities to protect approximately 25 million acres of state wildlands from fire. The program maintains crews in 15 districts located throughout the state to fight wildfires and perform fire prevention activities such as plowing firelines and conducting prescribed burns.

The Legislature appropriated the program \$81.3 million and 1,200 staff positions for Fiscal Year 2001-02. Approximately \$47.0 million or 58% of the program funding is from Florida’s general revenue fund. Various trust funds, including Conservation and Recreation Lands, Florida Forever, Incidental, and the Contracts and Grants Trust Fund provide the remaining \$34.3 million.

The program is organized into four bureaus, as shown in Exhibit 2.

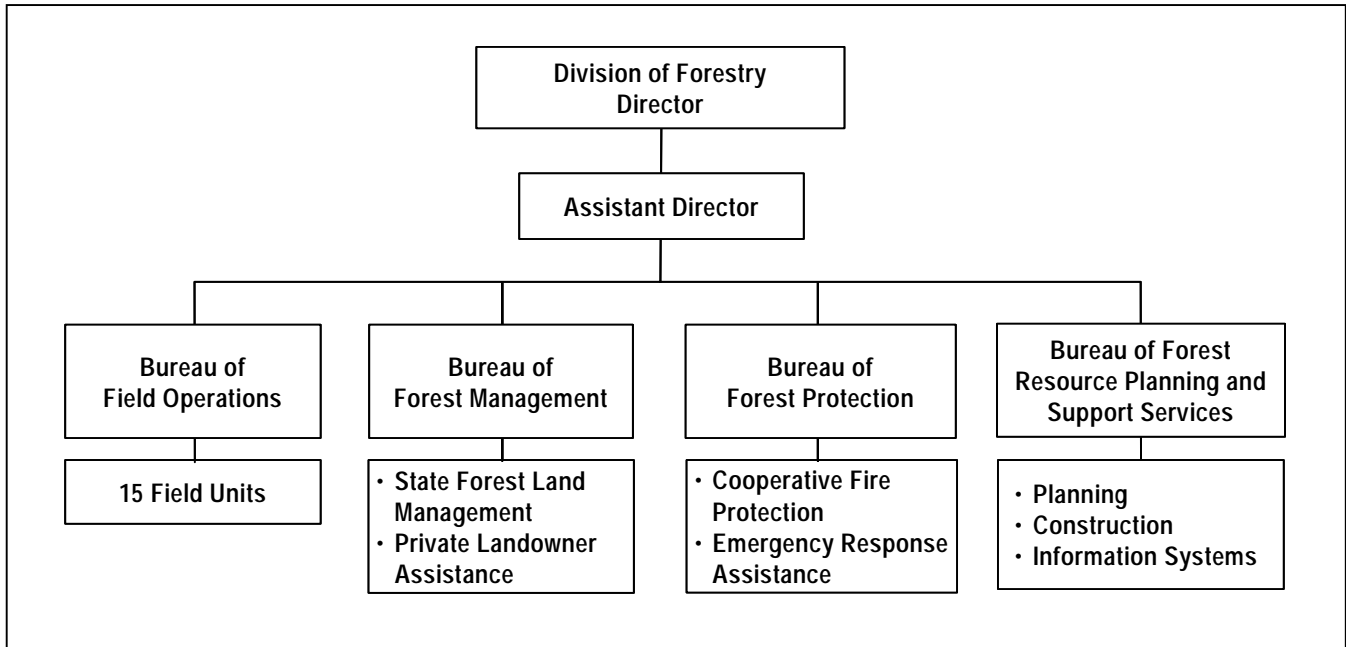
- The Bureau of Forest Management provides technical direction and management regarding the state-owned forestlands and administers various programs to assist

private landowners, such as the federal Forest Stewardship Program.¹

- The Bureau of Forest Protection administers programs relating to protecting Florida’s 25 million acres of wildlands from fire and provides statewide emergency response assistance.
- The Bureau of Field Operations implements the policies and procedures prescribed by the Forest Management and Forest Protection bureaus. This bureau is directly responsible for statewide operational activities and public lands management. Field operations are divided among 15 forestry centers and districts.
- The Bureau of Forest Resource Planning and Support Services provides planning, construction, information technology, telecommunications and equipment for the program.

¹The Forest Stewardship Program is a nationwide program sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service to encourage forest landowners to practice multiple-use management.

Exhibit 2
The Program Is Organized Into Four Bureaus



Program Need

The Forest and Resource Protection Program serves the public by providing protection from wildfires to approximately 25 million acres of forestland throughout Florida. These services are needed because local fire departments often lack the resources (such as bulldozers) and expertise to fight wildfires. Eliminating the program’s services in this area could result in millions of dollars of damage and an increased threat to the lives of Florida’s citizens.

The program also manages the forestlands owned by the state. Properly managed forestlands enhance the environment through clean soil, air, and water. Without qualified forest resource management, the health of forestland could decline, affecting the quality of the state’s water supply. In addition, state forests provide a retreat for Florida residents and tourists seeking to enjoy the outdoors at their own pace and discretion. Recreational opportunities include camping, swimming, hiking and hunting.

While some of the program’s services to private landowners promote sound forest stewardship, other services could be provided by the private

sector. Later in this report we recommend eliminating some program services that benefit only private forestland owners, which would save approximately \$1,006,000 each year.

Program Organization

The Forest Resource and Protection Program is appropriately placed within the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The program’s placement is appropriate given the department’s mission to conserve and protect the state’s agricultural and natural resources and to promote environmentally safe agricultural practices. While some other states have independent state forestry agencies, we concluded that there are no compelling reasons to change the program’s organizational placement because the current structure allows for sufficient program accountability.² Also, housing the program in the department avoids additional administrative cost that may occur if a new separate agency were created.

² We reviewed the organizational placement of 10 other state forestry programs. Alabama, California, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas have forestry programs that are organized in independent units, while programs in Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Tennessee are placed within these states’ Departments of Agriculture or Natural Resources.

Privatization

The program has privatized many activities in both forestland protection and management. The forestland protection service uses commercial fire suppression resources during periods of extreme fire activity and leases fire-fighting equipment as necessary to suppress fires. Also, the program has privatized most of its aircraft maintenance operations. In the area of forestland management, the program has encouraged privatization of forest management for private non-industrial landowners by gradually eliminating services, such as timber appraisals, site preparation, and tree planting that it previously provided. Also, nearly all of the functions of the program's land acquisition section, such as property surveys and appraisals, are privatized through statewide contracts.

To minimize the potential for unfair competition with the private market, the program's seedling nursery has been downsized and consolidated. This nursery grows tree seedlings and wiregrass to help replant forestlands with species that are indigenous to Florida, such as longleaf pines. Program officials meet with private nursery owners annually to inform them of planned production and pricing levels and to receive input on the state's reforestation program. Due to this cooperation with private industry and because nursery operations are fully funded from product sales, we determined that the program's seedling nursery should not be privatized.

The program also supports the private sector by leasing state forestlands to private entities for a variety of purposes including

- eight cattle leases on three state forests;
- nine apiary (beekeeping) leases on four state forests;
- one oil and gas lease;
- Boy Scout and Girl Scout camps in one state forest; and
- Eckerd Foundation camp for youths in one state forest.

Program Performance

As shown in Exhibit 3, the Forest and Resource Protection Program met most wildfire prevention and land management standards for Fiscal Year 1999-2000 and is accomplishing its mission in an effective manner.

The program did not meet some performance standards because of prevailing drought conditions that have existed since the spring of 1998. Due to this drought, the number and severity of wildfires have increased and resources required to suppress wildfires were diverted from land management activities. Consequently, some of the standards related to land management were not met. Also, due to the drought, a ban on prescribed burning limited the program's ability to meet standards related to the number of acres treated by prescribed burns and the number of open burning authorizations processed.³

The program's inability to meet its goals for prescribed burns is problematic because this increases the risk of wildfires. Prescribed burning is the primary method used by the program to reduce the number and severity of wildfires on forestlands.⁴ When burning conditions and risks are appropriate, prescribed burning is usually the preferred strategy in forest management plans because it also helps to maintain or restore native ground cover. Exhibit 4 shows that the program has not attained its goals relating to forest fuels reduction in Florida's state forests for each of the previous five years because of the inability to conduct prescribed burning due to the prevailing weather conditions. Consequently, a build-up of forest fuels has developed and increased the risk of major wildfires in the future.

³ In the future, the Legislature will be able to use the Fire Potential Index to consider meteorological conditions when evaluating program performance. The 2001 Legislature appropriated funds to develop and implement an index that provides a more accurate measure of the weather-related risk for wildfires to start and the difficulty in suppressing them. In addition to precipitation data, this index will include relative humidity and vegetative health into the calculation.

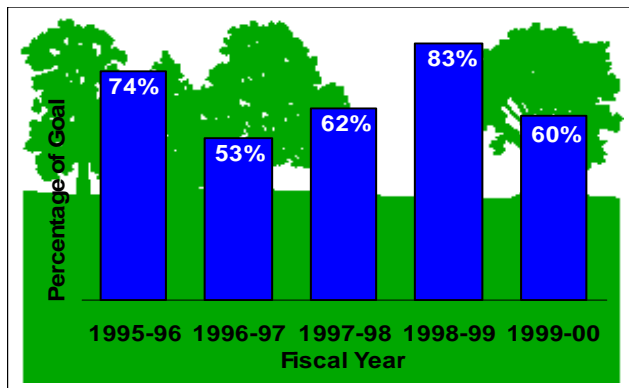
⁴ Section 590.125(1), *F.S.*, defines prescribed burning as "the controlled application of fire in accordance with a written prescription for vegetative fuels under specified environmental conditions while following appropriate precautionary measures that ensure that the fire is confined to a predetermined area to accomplish the planned fire or land management objectives."

Exhibit 3
In Fiscal Year 1999-2000, the Program Exceeded Most of Its Performance Standards

Service	Measure ¹	1999-2000 Performance Standard		1999-2000 Actual Performance		Reason for Not Meeting Standard
Wildland Prevention and Management	Average elapsed time in minutes between wildfire ignition and detection	55		54.7		Met standard
	Number of person-hours of firefighting training provided	47,000		62,000		Met standard
	Number of wildfires detected and suppressed	3,800		6,233		Met standard
	Number/Percentage of acres of forest lands protected from wildfires	24,924,300	99.3%	24,927,597	99.3%	Met standard
	Number/Percentage of threatened structures not burned by wildfires	1,000	98.0%	1,756	97.6%	While the number of threatened structures not burned by wildfires met standard, the percentage did not. The large number of wildfires in May and June of 2000 resulted in a shortage of aerial resources. Additional structures might have been saved if this shortage had not occurred.
	Number/Percentage of wildfires caused by humans	3,040	80%	4,744	76.4%	The percentage of wildfires caused by humans met the standard; however, the number of wildfires exceeded the standard because of the prevailing drought conditions.
	Number of acres burned through prescribed burning	2,100,000		1,707,221		Not met. A ban on prescribed burning was instituted in May 2000 due to drought conditions.
	Number/percentage of forest acres and other lands managed with approved management plans	831,951	94.0%	550,760	70.0%	Not met. Due to the large number of fires, land management personnel were diverted to fight fires more frequently.
	Number of fire prevention presentations made	1,350		733		Not met. The severe fire fighting season in the summer of 2000 resulted in presentations being reduced to shift staff to the firefighting effort.
Number of open burning authorizations processed for land clearing, agriculture, and silviculture	118,000		96,841		Not met. The number of authorizations issued during the fiscal year was reduced because of the drought conditions and the increasing number of wildfires.	
Land Management	Number of state forest timber producing acres adequately stocked and growing	107,485		139,590		Met standard
	Percentage of state forest timber producing acres stocked and growing		25.9%		33%	Met standard
	Number of forest-related technical assists provided to non-industrial private land owners	37,000		37,066		Met standard
	Number/percentage of forest acres and other lands managed with approved management plans	831,951	94.0%	550,760	70.0%	Not met. Due to the large number of fires, land management personnel were diverted to fight fires more frequently.

¹ This table does not represent a comprehensive list of all of the program's legislative measures.
 Source: Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

**Exhibit 4
Prescribed Burning Goals Are Not Being Met
in State Forests**



Source: Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

To address this problem, the program could increase its use of mowing and herbicides to reduce fire fuels. During periods of drought or in areas where smoke or escaped fires may threaten property and lives, prescribed burns may not be practicable. Many industrial forestland managers use herbicides to reduce fire fuels on their lands because prescribed burning may damage trees and reduce timber values. Unlike prescribed burning, herbicides do not promote biodiversity; however, research has demonstrated that properly applied herbicides do not endanger wildlife or water quality and can help to increase future timber sales because of the reduced damage to trees.

***Improvements to performance measures
would enhance accountability***

While the current legislative performance measures provide useful information about the program, they do not provide sufficient information to assess whether key program activities are being effectively accomplished. OPPAGA recommends four changes to the current measures.

1. The measure “Number of acres burned through prescribed burning” should be replaced with a measure that captures the percentage of acres treated for wildfire prevention and management.⁵ This would

⁵ In addition to prescribed burning on forestlands to reduce fire fuels, the current measure includes burning conducted on agricultural lands to promote crop production.

better show the number of acres treated through fire protection efforts including prescribed burns, mowing, and herbicide application.

2. A new measure should be adopted to show the number of acres treated for wildfire prevention and management and the corresponding number of structures protected in urban interface areas. The 1999 Legislature authorized the creation of four Wildfire Fire Management Teams to minimize the threat to communities from wildfire by implementing a fire fuel reduction program in nearby areas. Fire fuel reduction on forestland near communities is often more difficult and expensive because of the proximity of homes and business property, but does more to protect lives, structures, and property than fire fuel reduction in sparsely populated forestlands.
3. A new measure should be adopted to show the percentage of land management costs funded from state forest activities. Revenue from these activities benefits Florida’s taxpayers by offsetting state forest management costs.
4. A new measure should be adopted to show the percentage of forest land with certified management plans. These plans help ensure the conservation of soil, air and water quality, wildlife and fish habitat, and aesthetics. To reduce the number and severity of wildfires, we also recommend that a fire fuel reduction strategy be a required component of any approved management plan.

***The validity and reliability of the program’s
performance data has not been established***

The department’s inspector general is required to determine the validity of the measure and accuracy of the associated data for each legislative performance measure; however, this determination has not been completed for the Fiscal Year 1999-2000 performance measures.⁶ The inspector general has recently conducted training for program managers and required them to submit a self-assessment of each

⁶ Required by s. 20.055, F.S.

measure to identify those measures that lack sufficient controls and require more extensive review. The inspector general plans to complete a review and make a determination for any program measure or data control system that appears to be problematic during Fiscal Year 2001-02. Consequently, our discussion of performance based on these measures is provided without assurance that the measures are valid or that the associated data is accurate.

Options for Improvement

The program could increase revenues by providing local state forest managers greater autonomy in selecting and managing recreation activities

Management of Florida's state forests is mostly geared toward resource-based activities such as hiking, horseback riding, off-road bicycling, hunting, fishing, and canoeing.⁷ Fees from these activities help support the Forest and Resource Protection Program. The program anticipates collecting \$754,620 from recreation fees in Fiscal Year 2001-2002.

The program could increase recreational fee earnings by providing state forest managers more discretion over the selection and management of their recreation activities. In 1996, Congress directed that various federal land management agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, implement the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program, which authorizes certain federal sites to experiment with new or increased fees, with a portion of the new revenues used to meet local site needs. The U.S. General Accounting Office determined that fees at these sites almost doubled under this program, with no overall adverse effect on visitation.⁸

Implementing a similar program at the state forests has the potential of doubling Florida's recreational fee revenues from \$754,620 to over

\$1,500,000 annually, assuming that a comparable increase could be attained. However, increased freedom to make choices should be accompanied by oversight at the program level to ensure accountability and that the program's mission to protect Florida's forest resources for future generations is realized. Finally, to be successful, the Legislature needs to ensure that a percentage of the recreation fees collected are returned to the applicable state forest to help defray the additional costs associated with increased usage and provide land managers with an incentive to provide more revenue-generating recreation activities.

The program can save over \$1 million per year by limiting private landowner services to promoting sound forest stewardship

The state could save Florida taxpayers approximately \$1,006,000 by discontinuing services that are readily available from the private sector. The program's 39 county foresters currently provide these services.

The county forester function was established in 1941 to stimulate the production of timber wealth while encouraging the wise use of forestlands.⁹ Counties that participate in the function contribute a \$3,000 cost share for each staff person assigned, which has not been increased since 1963. This cost share now pays only 6% of the expense of supporting these staff, which averaged \$47,049 per position in Fiscal Year 1999-2000.

Since the creation of this function, many of the services provided by these staff have become available from the private sector. To reduce competition with the private sector, the function has eliminated some services such as timber appraisal and tree planting and harvesting. However, the function continues to provide planning services and technical advice concerning timber production and managing forests for hunting for landowners with smaller acreage.

⁷ Resource-based recreation includes those activities dependent on some particular element or combination of elements in the natural environment.

⁸ United States General Accounting Office, *Demonstration Fee Program Successful in Raising Revenues but Could Be Improved*, GAO/RCED 99-7, November 1998.

⁹ Forest landowner assistance is provided in cooperation with local governments under the terms and conditions as set forth in ss. 589.28-589.34, F.S.

Justification Review

OPPAGA recommends that the program discontinue providing these services. These services are currently available through the private sector and, when associated with timber production, are often available at no cost from industry foresters. Eliminating these services would save approximately \$1,006,000 annually.

We believe that the program should continue to promote public participation and certification in the federal Forest Stewardship Program. Under this program, which was created in 1990, sustainable management plans are developed for private forestlands. This activity is funded through a federal grant. In federal Fiscal Year 2000, the program received \$330,000 from this grant to develop these plans for private landowners. Federal funding allocation for this program is based on the demand for these services in each state.

Promoting participation and certification of these private forestlands can help the program achieve its mission and reduce Florida's wildfire suppression costs because the Forest Stewardship Program also encourages activities such as prescribed burns that serve to reduce damage caused by fire. We estimate that the program would need to retain 18 of the 39 county forester positions to perform this activity and other services, such as tree disease identification and wildland firefighting assistance that provide a public benefit.

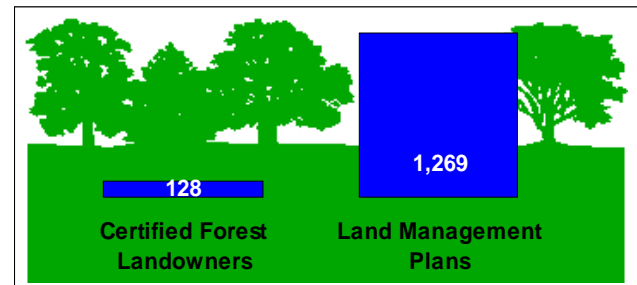
Incentives to counties and landowners can help improve privately owned forestland management practices and reduce the number and severity of wildfires in Florida

As shown in Exhibit 5, only 10% of the forest landowners with an approved land management plan have received certification in the Forest Stewardship Program. The state could encourage participation in the federal forest stewardship program by modifying the county fire protection assessment.

Florida partially funds the Forest and Resource Protection Program through a 3-cents-per-acre assessment paid by counties on private

forestland.¹⁰ This assessment has not been changed since its creation in 1935. In Fiscal Year 1999-2000, the program expended \$61.7 million for forestland fire protection services, and received \$538,338 from counties through the assessment. In a previous OPPAGA report, we noted that other southeastern states assessed forest fire protection fees of up to 10 cents per acre, which would produce \$1.3 million in additional revenue.¹¹

Exhibit 5 Only 10% of Landowners with Land Management Plans Have Received Certification in the Forest Stewardship Program



Source: Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' data as of February 28, 2001.

To motivate counties to encourage landowners to practice sustainable forestry, OPPAGA recommends that the Legislature change Florida law so that the amount of fees assessed to counties for fire protection services be dependent on whether forestlands are operating under a certified Forest Stewardship plan.¹² For example, the fee could be increased to 10 cents per acre on lands that are not operating under a certified Forest Stewardship plan, while remaining at 3-cents-per-acre on those forestlands that are operating under a certified plan. Under this scenario, OPPAGA estimates county fire suppression fee collections will

¹⁰ Required by s. 125.27, F.S.

¹¹ OPPAGA Performance Audit of the Division of Forestry Within the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Report No. 94-11, October 25, 1994.

¹² To encourage private landowners, counties may consider adopting local ordinances that require or provide incentives to landowners to become certified under an approved forest stewardship program. The program should also be authorized to approve a fee reduction on forestlands operating in accordance with other land management programs that ensure good forest stewardship.

initially increase by \$1.2 million annually. As more forest landowners receive certification, the amount collected will decrease; however, this would be at least in part offset by reduced fire suppression costs resulting from improved land management practices.

OPPAGA also recommends that the Legislature consider phasing-in financial incentives for forestland owners to perform activities, such as prescribed burning, that are required for certification in the federal Forest Stewardship Program. The Legislature could dedicate the additional monies from the county fire suppression fee increase to assisting private landowners in attaining and maintaining certification in the Forest Stewardship Program. Another alternative is to use the savings from the recommended reduction in private landowner services and county forester positions to assist private landowners in achieving and maintaining certification.

Regardless of the funding source, we believe that by promoting certification in approved forest stewardship programs, the Legislature will be helping to reduce the number and severity of future wildfires and the costs to both local counties and the state to suppress these wildfires.

The requirement to provide complete structural firefighting course should be eliminated

The state could save an additional \$175,000 annually by allowing the program greater flexibility in wildland firefighter training curriculum development. Current Florida law requires that the program include the basic volunteer structural fire training course, as approved by the Florida State Fire College of the Division of State Fire Marshall, into its basic wildfire training course.¹³ In 1999, the Florida State Fire College extended the basic structural fire training course from 60 to 160 hours.

Much of this additional training is not relevant to program firefighters because they are not equipped or authorized to enter burning structures. OPPAGA recommends that the Legislature amend this statute by exempting program firefighters from this requirement and authorizing the program to determine the appropriate amount of structural fire training provided to its firefighters. The program reported that structural fire training could be shortened by 80 hours by reducing training related to firefighting inside of structures without decreasing the proficiency of its firefighters, which would save \$175,000 annually.

Recommendations ———

The Forest and Resource Protection Program is effectively accomplishing its mission to protect and manage Florida's forest resources to assure these resources will be available for future generations. However, we have made several recommendations that will help to improve overall program accountability and decrease the burden on Florida's taxpayers. Specifically, we made six recommendations

- The Legislature should change four performance measures.
 1. The measure "Number of acres burned through prescribed burning" should be replaced with a measure that captures the percentage of acres treated for wildfire prevention and management.
 2. A new measure should be adopted to show the number of acres treated for wildfire prevention and management in urban interface areas.
 3. A new measure should be adopted to show the percentage of land management costs funded from state forest activities.
 4. A new measure should be adopted to show the percentage of forest land with certified management plans.

¹³ Section 590.02(e), *F.S.*, states that training curriculum for forestry firefighters must contain the basic volunteer structural fire training course approved by the Florida State Fire College of the Division of State Fire Marshall and a minimum of 250 hours of wildfire training.

Justification Review

- The program could double recreational fee earnings to \$1.5 million annually by providing state forest managers more discretion over the selection, management, and fees of their recreation activities. This would be accomplished by implementing a program similar to the federal demonstration fee program.
- The program should limit services to private landowners to promoting sound forest stewardship. Other program services, which only benefit private forestland owners and cost approximately \$1,006,000 annually, should be eliminated. This reduction would allow the program to eliminate 21 county forester positions.
- The Legislature should revise s. 125.27, *Florida Statutes*, so that the county fire suppression fee is increased to 10 cents per acre for forestlands that are not operating under the guidelines of the federal Forest Stewardship Program.
- To assist landowners in attaining and maintaining certification and reduce program costs, the Legislature should provide incentives to promote certification in approved forest stewardship land management plans.
- To save \$175,000 annually, the Legislature should revise s. 590.02(e), *Florida Statutes*, to eliminate the requirement that program staff complete a structural firefighting course.

Agency Response ---

The Commissioner of Agriculture's written response to our preliminary report has been reproduced herein in Appendix B, beginning on page 13.

Appendix A

Statutory Requirements for Program Evaluation and Justification Review

Section 11.513(3), *F.S.*, provides that OPPAGA Program Evaluation and Justification Reviews shall address nine issue areas. Our conclusions on these issues as they relate to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ Forest and Resource Protection Program are summarized in Table A-1.

Table A-1
Summary of the Program Evaluation and Justification Review of the Forest and Resource Protection Program

Issue	OPPAGA Conclusions
The identifiable cost of the program	The program was appropriated \$81.3 million and 1,200 FTEs for Fiscal Year 2001-2002.
The specific purpose of the program, as well as the specific public benefit derived therefrom	The Mission of the Forest and Resource Protection Program is to protect and manage Florida’s forest resources to assure these resources will be available for future generations.
The consequences of discontinuing the program	<p>The Forest and Resource Protection Program serves the public by providing protection from wildfires and by providing recreation activities, while preserving the natural environment, on state-owned forestlands. It provides wildfire protection services to approximately 25 million acres of forestland throughout Florida. The lack of a coordinated wildland fire fighting effort could result in millions of dollars of damage and an increased threat to the lives of the citizens of the state because local fire departments often lack the resources to fight forest wildfires.</p> <p>The program also manages the forestlands owned by the state. Properly managed forestlands provide clean soil, air and water for Florida’s environment. Without qualified forest resource management, the acreage of healthy forestland could decline, resulting in declines in the quality of the state’s water supply. In addition, state forests provide a retreat for Florida residents and tourists seeking to enjoy the outdoors at their own pace and discretion.</p>
Determination as to public policy, which may include recommendations as to whether it would be sound public policy to continue or discontinue funding the program, either in whole or in part	The public benefit derived from the fire protection and fire safety services provided by the program, along with its contribution to the quality of the state’s water supply through qualified forest resource management, indicate that it is sound public policy to continue funding the program. However, the public benefit of the services provided to private landowners is limited to promoting sound forest stewardship. Other program services that only benefit private forestland owners and cost \$1,006,000 annually should be eliminated.
Progress towards achieving the outputs and outcomes associated with the program	The Forest and Resource Protection Program met most of its standards for Fiscal Year 1999-2000. However, several performance standards were not met because of the prevailing drought conditions.
An explanation of circumstances contributing to the state agency’s ability to achieve, not achieve, or exceed its projected outputs and outcomes, as defined in s. 216.011, <i>F.S.</i> , associated with the program	Program performance is affected by the prevailing meteorological conditions during the year. For example, when drought conditions persist, there will be a higher number of wildfires and a larger number of acres of land burned. Consequently, reported performance associated with its wildfire prevention and management activities will be adversely affected. In addition, reported performance relating to its land management activities will suffer because of the additional resources that need to be diverted to fight wildfires.

Justification Review

Issue	OPPAGA Conclusions
Whether the information reported pursuant to s. 216.031(5), <i>F.S.</i> , has relevance and utility for the evaluation of the program	<p>The legislative performance measures allow for an assessment of the extent to which the program meets its purpose or is successful in carrying out its key functions. However, to more effectively evaluate the program's activities and help to improve operational efficiency, the Legislature should adopt four new measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ percentage of acres treated for wildfire prevention and management; ▪ number of acres treated for wildfire prevention and management in urban interface areas; ▪ percentage of land management costs funded from state forest activities; and ▪ percentage of forestlands that are operating in accordance with an approved land management plan.
Whether state agency management has established control systems sufficient to ensure that performance data are maintained and supported by state agency records and accurately presented in state agency performance reports	<p>The validity and reliability for the program's Fiscal Year 1999-2000 performance data has not been established. The inspector general has recently completed an assessment of each measure to identify those that lack sufficient controls and require more extensive review. The inspector general plans to complete his review and make a determination for any program measure or data control system that appears to be problematic during Fiscal Year 2001-2002.</p>
Alternative courses of action that would result in administering the program more efficiently and effectively	<p>To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of program's activities, OPPAGA recommends that the alternative courses of action noted below be implemented.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The program can increase the amount of revenue generated by providing local state forest managers greater autonomy in selecting and managing recreation activities. ▪ The program can save \$1,006,000 per year by limiting private landowner services to promoting sound forest stewardship. ▪ To provide an incentive for counties to encourage landowners to practice sustainable forestry, OPPAGA recommends that the amount of fees assessed to counties for fire protection services be dependent on the amount of forestlands that are operating under a certified federal Forest Stewardship plan. ▪ To assist landowners in attaining and maintaining certification and reduce program costs, the Legislature should provide financial incentives to promote certification in approved forest stewardship land management plans. ▪ Wildland firefighter training can be improved and costs reduced by an estimated \$175,000 annually by eliminating the requirement to provide the complete structural firefighting course.

Appendix B



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
CHARLES H. BRONSON, Commissioner
The Capitol • Tallahassee, FL 32399-0800

Please Respond to:

August 20, 2001

Mr. John W. Turcotte, Director
Office of Program Policy Analysis
and Government Accountability
111 West Madison, Room 312
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1475

Dear Mr. Turcotte:

The following is my response to the recommendations in your draft Justification Review of the Forest and Resource Protection Program, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Recommendation 1:

The Legislature should change four performance measures.

Response:

As this recommendation is directed to the Legislature, we will work with the appropriate Legislative committees to ensure the recommendation is carefully analyzed.

Recommendation 2:

The program could double recreational fee earnings to \$1.5 million annually by providing state forest managers more discretion over the selection, management, and fees of their recreation activities. This would be accomplished by implementing a program similar to the federal demonstration fee program.

Response:

The Department promotes and encourages forest recreation public lands per Section 589.04(1)(a), F.S. Section 589.04(3), F.S., charges the Division of Forestry (Forest and Resource Protection Program) with providing direction for the multiple-use management of forest lands owned by the State. "Multiple-use management" includes natural-resource-based-low-impact recreation. It is the policy of the Division of Forestry to emphasize resource-based recreation activities that are dispersed, have low-impact on resources, and require few or no developed facilities. Resource-based outdoor recreation activities include hiking, horseback



Florida Agriculture and Forest Products
\$ 53 Billion for Florida's Economy

Appendix B

Mr. John W. Turcotte
August 20, 2001
Page Two

riding, hunting, wildlife viewing, and primitive camping. Tasks associated with this activity involve the planning, implementation, operation and maintenance of recreation on State Forests to ensure visitors quality resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities. These activities can be accomplished most efficiently and effectively through centralized policies that consider statewide priorities. The Division will continue to review the cost-benefit of fees and the local impact of Division policies in managing the State Forests.

Recommendation 3:

The program should limit services to private landowners to promoting sound forest stewardship. Other program services, which only benefit private forestland owners and cost approximately \$1,006,000 annually, should be eliminated. This reduction would allow the program to eliminate 21 County Forester positions.

Response:

Florida has made a strong statement in recent years over promoting good land stewardship, guarding against development and protecting our forest resources. Our aggressive land acquisition and management strategies speak strongly to the emphasis placed on these issues. The 2001 Legislature passed the Rural Land and Family Protection Act, which is designed to protect our natural resources and save our lands from development through conservation easements. This is another indicator that the Legislature has spoken strongly to the issue of proper land stewardship and conservation. Our working with private non-industrial landowners through our County Foresters provides a cost effective way to deliver services, which meet the same objectives. The delivery of several federal programs such as Forest Stewardship Program, Forestry Incentive Program, the Stewardship Incentive Program and the Conservation Reserve Program does much to encourage our landowners to keep their forest lands and manage them with a professionally developed plan.

The fact is that many of our private non-industrial landowners could not afford the services of a private consultant and often times the size of the forestry parcel is not sufficient to attract the economic interest of a consultant. The County Forester primarily works with parcels of 160 acres or smaller. To suggest that most of our County Forester positions should be eliminated and let the private sector consultants fill the need would be tantamount to saying that a large percentage of our private non-industrial landowners would be without, and not deserving of, the assistance of professional management guidance and aiding in resource management plan development. Furthermore, the reduction of County Foresters appears to be contradictory to your recommendation to promote and increase certification in approved forest stewardship land management plans.

In addition, our County Foresters also play an active role in forest health by monitoring disease and insects such as the current epidemic of Southern Pine Beetle. They work with landowners, both urban and rural, in identifying these pests and recommending strategies for elimination and promoting overall good forest health and water quality. County Foresters, because of their objectivity, serve as a stabilizer in the professional community by providing benchmarks for appropriate practices and costs.

Mr. John W. Turcotte
August 20, 2001
Page Three

Recommendation 4:

The Legislature should revise Section 125.27, F. S., so that the county fire suppression fee is increased to 10 cents per acre for forestlands that are not operating under the guidelines of the federal Forest Stewardship Program.

Response:

As this recommendation is directed to the Legislature, we will work with the appropriate Legislative committees to ensure the recommendation is carefully analyzed.

Recommendation 5:

To assist landowners in attaining and maintaining certification and reduce program costs, the Legislature should provide incentives to promote certification in approved forest stewardship land management plans.

Response:

As this recommendation is directed to the Legislature, we will work with the appropriate Legislative committees to ensure the recommendation is carefully analyzed.

Recommendation 6:

To save \$175,000 annually, the Legislature should revise Section 590.02(e), F.S., to eliminate the requirement that program staff complete a structural firefighting course.

Response:

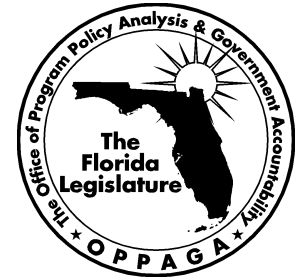
As this recommendation is directed to the Legislature, we will work with the appropriate Legislative committees to ensure the recommendation is carefully analyzed.

I appreciate the efforts of your staff in helping us to improve the operations of state government.

Sincerely,

/s/ Charles H. Bronson
Commissioner of Agriculture

CB/



The Florida Legislature

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability

Visit the [Florida Monitor](http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us), OPPAGA's online service. See <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us>. This site monitors the performance and accountability of Florida government by making OPPAGA's four primary products available online.

- [OPPAGA publications and contracted reviews](#), such as policy analyses and performance reviews, assess the efficiency and effectiveness of state policies and programs and recommend improvements for Florida government.
- [Performance-based program budgeting \(PB²\) reports and information](#) offer a variety of tools. Program evaluation and justification reviews assess state programs operating under performance-based program budgeting. Also offered are performance measures information and our assessments of measures.
- [Florida Government Accountability Report \(FGAR\)](#) is an Internet encyclopedia of Florida state government. FGAR offers concise information about state programs, policy issues, and performance. Check out the ratings of the accountability systems of 13 state programs.
- [Best Financial Management Practices Reviews of Florida school districts](#). In accordance with the *Sharpening the Pencil Act*, OPPAGA and the Auditor General jointly conduct reviews to determine if a school district is using best financial management practices to help school districts meet the challenge of educating their students in a cost-efficient manner.

Subscribe to OPPAGA's electronic newsletter, [Florida Monitor Weekly](#), a free source for brief e-mail announcements of research reports, conferences, and other resources of interest for Florida's policy research and program evaluation community.

OPPAGA provides objective, independent, professional analyses of state policies and services to assist the Florida Legislature in decision making, to ensure government accountability, and to recommend the best use of public resources. This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021 or 800/531-2477), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person, or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475).

Florida Monitor: <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/>

Project supervised by Debbie Gilreath (850/487-9278)

Project conducted by Chuck Hefren (850/487-9249)

John W. Turcotte, OPPAGA Director