

## **Illinois Forestry Association Legislative Update (July 31, 2008)**

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On May 31<sup>st</sup> the Illinois General Assembly finished session on time with a budget passed out of both houses. Unfortunately, that budget is unbalanced by about 1 to 2 billion dollars (depending on who you talk to). The Governor did amendatoraly veto major portions of the budget with the hope of encouraging the House to pass the gaming and funds sweep bills that the Senate passed in May. The House did not pass any increase in funds bills when they were in session in July. The Senate is not planning on getting together to deal with the budget cuts until Veto-override Session scheduled for November 12-15, 19-21. A major concern is the lack of communication between the House and Senate and Governor. It is impossible to devise a compromise when communication is non existent. So even though session is "officially" over, there is still much work to be done.

We are still working on HB4549. Unfortunately, it did not get out of the House after the Senate removed the JCAR amendment that the Speaker of the House required. We thought there might be a way of adding HB 4549 onto an "agreed bill list" during veto-override in the fall. An agreed bill list is a list of bills that the House and Senate leadership agree to have on a list for a single vote. Agreed bill lists are often used at the end of session to get bills that have little or no opposition on the Governor's desk. This possibility is not looking good, now.

We need every IFA member and their friends to contact their legislators and ask them to help to get HB 4549 on the Governor's desk. Please also thank Rep. Reitz, Senator Sullivan and Senator Righter for sponsoring the bill and helping it on its way to date. The bill has received no No votes in committees or on the floor of the House or Senate. We just need to get an agreement from the leadership of the House and Senate so we can get it to the Governor's desk.

This year was a very tough year, with no one getting along, and as you can see many good pieces of legislation have been stalled, and our budget is in limbo. That being said, we've still got some opportunities to get our legislation through, and we think we have started to lay some good groundwork for getting a future budget request. Even though we didn't get everything that we wanted in this session, IFA has a stronger presence in the capital. Hopefully we will be able to come to an agreement on HB4549 this year, and continue to build key relationships with legislators so that IFA can benefit from the legislative process.