



## IFA Legislative Update (May 20, 2008)

*By Paula Purdue and Jenni Purdue*

Much has been happening in the Capitol in the past few weeks as session seems to be on a path to wind down. (Although, it is unlikely that it will adjourn on time – May 29<sup>th</sup> – but hopefully it will be done by mid-June.) We have been working hard on House Bill 4549 (a.k.a., HB4549) and on FY09 budget requests.

HB4549 is now in the Senate with Senator Sullivan as the Chief Sponsor and Senator Righter as the Chief Co-Sponsor, Senator Holmes and Senator Demuzio are also sponsors of the bill. We would encourage IFA members to thank their Senators if they are a sponsor of the bill, and if you do not see your Senator listed as a sponsor, feel free to call them and ask for their support of this bill.

When HB4549 was in the House, the Speaker added an amendment with language that gave rule-making authority to the legislators. This amendment was added to almost all of the bills that came out of the House. When HB4549 came to the Senate, we were told that it would not get out of rules committee with the Speaker's amendment. Senator Sullivan agreed to remove this amendment to pass the bill through the Senate – it has already passed out of committee with no nay votes. We are expecting the bill to be heard this week, and hopefully it will pass through the Senate with no problems.

Once it passes the Senate, it will have to go back to the House since we altered the bill while it was in the Senate (removed the Speaker's amendment). We have been told that the two houses think they can work something out in regards to this amendment situation, but we are slightly concerned about the back and forth fight going on between the Senate and the House. We are also unsure of whether the Governor will sign a bill with the Speaker's amendment or not. This may significantly delay the enactment of HB4549, or may defeat it. We are working so that this does not happen, but since we cannot control the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, or the Governor, anything may ultimately happen.

In other news, we have spent the last week passing out budget requests to all of the legislators in the House, and to staff in the House and Senate. This week we will be focused on getting the IFA budget request to all of the Senate members. We are asking that the Forestry Fund not be swept and for 6 million additional dollars to fund forestry staffing at IDNR, to bring the level of staff up to FY2000 levels. A big Thank You needs to go out to Dave Gillespie, and Dick Little for putting together the budget numbers on such short notice. Attached is a copy of the letter we have been handing out to the legislators – if everyone on the legislative committee (and other members of IFA) can contact their legislators and reiterate this budget request that would be fantastic. The more the legislators hear the request the more seriously they will take it.

We are not expecting to receive the total amount this year, if anything, so if we get even a minimal increase this year, we will consider that a success. Getting money in the budget can take a while to get to; especially this year with the State falling on such bad financial times. Since there is no tax increase in the works that we know of (at least no before November), there is a serious deficit in State revenues. Many people are saying that the budget passed this year will not include any increases and may even cut some programs. In this tough budget climate, we are hoping to lay a good foundation with the legislators and staff about forestry needs, and working to keep what funds are currently available (or maybe get a bit of an increase). At least we are educating the legislators on the need to increase the IDNR budget for forestry staffers