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March 25, 2020

The Honorable Robert Hutchinson, Chair
Alachua County Commission

Via E-Mail

Dear Chairman Hutchinson:

On behalf of all the members of the Florida Forestry Association, thank you for your leadership during the COVID-19 outbreak. We know that you have had to make some tough calls and will continue to do so as the situation unfolds. We realize that you have issued a "Stay at Home" order for Alachua County and wanted to make sure that you are aware of federal guidance regarding forestry's designation as a critical industry and highlight the important of forestry operations during these tumultuous times.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has released the "Memorandum on Identification of Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers During COVID-19 Response" (March 19). **This guidance includes the forest industry in its list of critical industries that are recommended to remain operational in the event of any shelter in place order.** In such a situation, it would be critical to keep the full range of the industry operational. This includes but is not limited to our manufacturing assets (pulp/paper mills and sawmills, etc.); other integral parts of the forest products supply chain (logging and trucking forces, forestry consultants, site prep contractors, etc.)

The importance of forestry products and the need for their continued supply has been at the forefront of many conversations during this disaster. With the strain on our society at a high, abundant supplies, food, medical equipment and other necessities must be available. The forest industry supplies the raw material needed for many of these products – including toilet paper, diapers, feminine hygiene products, paper masks and gowns, among many others – as well as packaging to ship and store all of these items.

Not only does society depend daily on the forest industry, but Florida's economy does as well. Florida is expecting to experience unprecedented revenue losses in 2020 due to the COVID-19 virus. Keeping businesses operating and people employed where practical and safe is imperative. According to a study by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, forestry in Florida has a \$25 billion economic impact, helps provide 124,000 jobs, and yields \$880 million dollars in state and local taxes and \$1.7 billion in federal taxes. **In Alachua County, forestry has a \$769 million economic impact, helps provide more than 3,000 jobs, and yields more than \$29 million in local and state taxes.**

Forest operations are inherently low risk due to their very nature. Companies are engaging in additional practices to slow the spread of the virus while still providing products our society needs at the level of current demand. They are increasing sanitization procedures, practicing social distancing, limiting staff travel, and implementing remote working status, among others.

We respectfully request that your stay at home order recognize the federal recommendations to identify forestry as a critical and essential workforce. This inclusion will benefit not only the public's health during this time but also the health of the economy.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter, and thank you again for your leadership in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. Please contact me at alan@flforestry.org if additional information is needed.

Sincerely,

Alan Shelby
Executive Vice President

Cc: Michele Lieberman, County Manager