

Floridians encouraged to prepare for busy hurricane season

TALLAHASSEE — Florida's landscape has changed dramatically in many areas and been seriously scared in others following recent hurricane seasons. Representatives from the Florida Division of Forestry (DOF), held a press conference in Tallahassee today to encourage Florida residents to include their yards and property in hurricane planning and preparation.

Alberto's arrival in the first week of June served as an early reminder that even a relatively small storm has the ability to bring down trees and cause damage to personal property. At the end of the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, damaged trees littered the state from Miami to Pensacola. While devastated landscapes are the most visible and longest lasting affect

of a hurricane, many Floridians are unaware of storm preparation tactics for their yards and property. Even less know about where to begin the clean up and recovery process.

With 17 named storms predicted for the 2006 hurricane season, including nine hurricanes, five of them intense, the DOF is certain to be an important resource for land owners across the state.

"The Division of Forestry has a lot to offer Floridians before and after hurricanes," said Mike Long, DOF Director. "From preparation and planning to recovery and restoration, our foresters along with County Extension Offices across the state are an important resource to the communities they serve."

After each hurricane season

the impact on Florida's urban landscape is clearly visible. Tree damage ranges from being stripped of leaves and leaning to major structural damage. This has prompted many Floridians to remove trees from their yards. This may not, however, be the best decision for the homeowner.

"Properly planted and pruned trees can offer important wind breaks in communities and have the potential to reduce wind damage," said Charlie Marcus, Urban Forester. "In addition, studies show that trees properly placed around buildings can reduce air condition needs by 30 percent while healthy mature trees can add up to 10 percent to a property's value.

Stripping communities of healthy, mature trees is not a

good practice."

In addition to property damage, safety during cleanup is a major consideration. Too many people are seen on their roof in shorts and flip-flops operating a chainsaw - this is the perfect recipe for disaster said Marcus.

Another part of the state that feels the impact of storms is our rural communities. Forest products account for Florida's largest agricultural-based industry, contributing over \$16 billion and 137,000 jobs to the state's economy annually. The most recent data shows that in 2004 hurricanes damaged 10 million acres of forests, two million of which were severely damaged.

Four recent hurricanes, Charlie, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne greatly impacted Florida's Agribusiness; total cost in timber

damage statewide nearly reached \$400 million dollars. The financial impact is devastating for landowners.

To add insult to injury, the fallen timber becomes fuel for forest fires increasing the risk of fire from lightning strikes."

To learn more about the resources available visit the Division of Forestry website at www.fl-dof.com or the Extension Office home page at www.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/index.htm.

The Florida Division of Forestry is committed to protecting Florida and its' people from the dangers of wildland fire and manage the forest resources through a stewardship ethic to assure they are available for future generations.