

DOF weighs-in on hurricane preparations

Florida's landscape has changed dramatically in many areas and has been seriously scarred in others following recent hurricane seasons.

Representatives from the Florida Division of Forestry (DOF), held a press conference in Tallahassee last week 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.

DOF

"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.

Below are some tips to help residents save and restore their vegetation:

Urban Land Recovery

If you remove a tree, plant another in its place.

Not all storm-damaged trees need to be removed; many trees can

recover.

Consider removing pine trees within 30 ft. of structures (if the trunk is bigger than 15 inches in diameter, the tree poses a threat to property).

Rural Land Recovery

Decide what trees to remove or restore based on soil space and soil properties; tree health, size and age, and previous cultural practices

Hire a professional to help with post hurricane recovery

Immediately following a storm, document any damage to your property prior to salvaging and cleaning. Save copy of local newspaper to support claim

Evaluating trees and forest stands, and reharvesting them after a hurricane is strongly encouraged.

General (Urban & Rural) Land Recovery

Foresters provide alternative resources and referrals for storm planning and recovery of trees after a hurricane

Foresters provide reforestation assistance to landowners; planning the timing of harvesting timber, manner of harvesting timber, methods of site preparation and planting, and use of cost share programs are considered.

Many early warning signs of

stressed trees are undetectable to the average eye - foresters are trained experts in identifying injured trees.

Restoring Your Trees in an Urban Setting

Restoration span depends on size of tree, age, species, and amount of damage to land

Immediately following a storm, clean tree canopies

Develop a tree management program with professionals

Regular pruning can build stronger tree structure and minimize failure in future storms

Prioritize restoration plan, aiding larger trees first

Trees with good structure will require less pruning attention. Trees with good structure include the baldcypress, sweetgum, southern magnolia, and live oak

With less than 50% of canopy damage, monitor and restore for one to two years; with more than 50% of canopy damage, monitor over two years and decide if recoverable

Proper pruning is important to land recovery (contact your county forester for more information)

After a hurricane, develop a response plan and implement a multi-year pruning program.