

February 3, 2012

## ARTICLES OF INTEREST:

### Top Energy Innovations from CES 2012

The Consumer Electronics Show (CES) wrapped up Jan. 13, after a typically splashy convention that unveiled numerous new gadgets. Although some of the items are perhaps less useful than others – automated unicycle, anyone? – many of the consumer electronics displayed are notable for their practical embrace of energy efficiency measures. To insiders, this signals that manufacturers are cementing energy efficiency as a part of their business models going forward. [\[More\]](#)

## EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

February 8, 2012

### APA Public Policy Workshop

University Center Club

Tallahassee, FL

[\[More\]](#)

February 9, 2012

### FARE Lobby Day

Tallahassee, FL

[\[More\]](#)

## Project of the Week

### Quality, Commitment Take Southern Crafted Homes to the Top

Since 2009, 100 percent of all homes that Southern Crafted Homes builds under their “Eco-Crafted” brand are both FGBC and Energy Star certified. In 2011, the company won Builder of the Year from the Florida Green Building Coalition and a “Leadership in Housing” award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Their Strathmore II model featured this week earn FGBC silver certification and achieved a HERS rating of 69.

[\[More\]](#)



## FEATURES:

### Bill Proposes Waiving Water Quality Rules Ratification Process

The House Agriculture & Natural Resources Subcommittee on Tuesday agreed to file HB 7051, a proposed committee bill that would waive requirements in state law that the Legislature ratify proposed rules costing more than \$1 million. Democrats and Republicans on the committee said they support moving forward with the state rule despite opposition from Sierra Club Florida and Clean Water Action.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has proposed rules that it says will cost less and provide flexibility in reducing nutrient pollution. But environmental groups that sued the EPA have filed an administrative challenge against the proposed state rules, saying they are weak and ineffective.

During the public comment on the bill, Sierra Club lobbyist David Cullen said Florida would be better off with the EPA rule than the proposed state rule. And Stephanie Kunkel with Clean Water Action said there are not enough protections in the proposed state rule to protect clean water.

### **Florida's Nuclear Power "Tax" Challenged**

The Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE) filed an appeal last month with the Florida Supreme Court challenging the Florida Public Service Commission's (PSC) Final Order in the 2011 Nuclear Cost Recovery docket. Issued in November of 2011, that docket approved a combined \$282 million in cost recovery for Progress Energy Florida (PEF) and Florida Power & Light (FPL). The appeal also challenges the constitutionality of Florida's early cost recovery statute, Fla. Stat. 366.93.

Florida's PSC has approved more than a billion dollars in advanced cost recovery over the past three years for questionable new nuclear reactors proposed by PEF and FPL, despite the fact that neither utility has demonstrated the intent to actually build the reactors. In fact, both utilities admit that no final decision to build has been made. [\[More\]](#)

### **Water Districts Find Support in Senate Budget Committee**

Sen. JD Alexander, the powerful Senate Budget Committee chairman, says no one was happy with the law changes made last year that involve budgeting for Florida's five water management districts -- and now he's supporting new changes.

Last year, SB 2142 cut water management district property tax revenue by \$210 million. The bill also required water management district budgets to be approved by the Legislative Budget Commission in addition to the Governor's Office.

Environmental groups were especially critical of the budget cuts. During an environmental rally at the Capitol in November, former U. S. Sen. Bob Graham called on Gov. Rick Scott to restore funding and take other actions to protect the environment.

This year, SB 1834 would delete the property tax spending caps put in state law last year and replace them with new tax rate caps that would allow revenue to increase as property values rebound.

"I think we need a longer-term, more stable system but one that will help to check runaway spending," said Alexander, R-Lake Wales. "The bill seeks to find that balance."

Representatives of the water management districts say that in addition to eliminating positions and laying off employees, they plan to spend down much of their reserve funds in the next five years. Those reserves are needed to respond to hurricanes or other natural disasters.

SB 1834 would establish a separate tax rate in state law for "core" missions of the districts, such as water supply, flood control and protection of natural systems. A separate tax rate would be established for regulatory, outreach, management and administrative programs. If the Legislature fails to set a tax rate caps for those programs then the districts cannot spend money on them. The bill also maintains budgetary oversight by the Legislature but less than what was required by the law changes in 2011.

### **Multifamily Building Owners Could Save Billions With Energy Efficiency Improvements**

Energy efficiency upgrades in multifamily buildings could save building owners and residents up to \$3.4 billion nationwide, according to a report released today by CNT Energy and the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE). The report "Engaging as Partners in Energy Efficiency: Multifamily Housing and Utilities" demonstrates that energy use in multifamily buildings can be reduced substantially, and cost-effective

upgrades can result in utility cost savings of 15 to 30 percent in buildings with five or more residential units. The key to unlocking the savings, the report finds, is for energy utilities and apartment building owners to work together more closely to develop effective energy efficiency policies.

The report identifies regions where the multifamily sector could see particularly dramatic benefits from improvements in energy efficiency policy. These include Florida, Illinois, Texas, and the District of Columbia—regions that have a substantial number of multifamily buildings and energy policies that leave significant room for improvement. [\[Report\]](#)

Energy efficiency upgrades improve the bottom line for multifamily building owners, help maintain affordable housing, decrease financial risk for lending institutions, and improve occupant comfort.

Those interested in learning more are invited to participate in a Webinar on February 13 at 1 p.m. CST. [\[Register\]](#)

### **USDA Revises Plant Hardiness Zones**

Global warming is hitting not just home, but garden. The color-coded map of planting zones often seen on the back of seed packets was recently updated by the government, illustrating a hotter 21st century. A panel of experts at Cornell say the new map combined with other evidence shows a clear trend of climate change. It appears that most of the state had no zone change, but north Florida and a few coastal areas in the middle of the state realized one zone change, as the change map (linked below) demonstrates.

For the first time, the map is available as an interactive GIS-based map. [\[Hardiness Map\]](#) There's also an interactive map showing the zone changes (very cool). [\[Changes Map\]](#)

### **Babcock Ranch Solar Project Gets Boost**

The House Energy & Utilities Subcommittee recently approved bills that are intended to encourage oil exploration and drilling on state lands and the development of a solar energy project in Southwest Florida.

HB 695 would allow state land management agencies to enter into partnerships with businesses to produce oil and gas. The Cabinet, which oversees the use of state lands, must approve any such public-private partnership agreement or oil drilling proposals.

The Subcommittee also approved HB 1391, which would allow Florida Power & Light Co. to charge the average residential customer up to 5 cents per month more for a 75-megawatt solar power plant at Babcock Ranch development in Charlotte and Lee counties. But just this week House and Senate panels have removed the portion of the bill that allows for utilities to charge more for renewable energy projects.



Babcock Ranch developer Syd Kitson proposed the solar project in 2009 but the Legislature for the past three years has not approved bills that would allow utilities to charge more for renewable energy projects. Babcock has estimated the project cost at \$300 million.

### **'Green Button' Helps Consumers Manage Energy Use**

A new consumer-friendly technology tool called the "Green Button" program that allows utility customers to get more information about their energy use by logging onto their utilities' websites was just released on the West Coast.

Customers of participating utilities will be able to download their own energy use information with a “click of a button’ and manage that data with applications from utilities and third-party software designers. Consumers can then view and understand their energy usage. Consumer-oriented energy use feedback systems have been shown to reduce energy consumption by 5-15%.

The Green Button program takes advantage of new technology that allows energy usage data to be standardized from state to state so utilities across the United States can participate. Smart meters will not be required to participate, but those with smart meters will have more data to analyze.

### **Renewable Energy Tax Incentives Moving Forward**

A Senate committee revived the stalled debate over renewable energy in Florida on Monday and moved forward with a bill to give \$16 million a year in tax incentives to businesses and homeowners, beginning next year. The measure, being pushed by Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam, was introduced by the Senate Communications, Energy and Utilities Committee on Monday and will be voted on next week. It was described by energy advocates as a small step towards encouraging a market for renewable energy in Florida and weaning the state off its dependence on natural gas. Renewable energy includes everything from solar panels to bio-fuels, wind farms and tidal power. Last year, legislators allowed a series of similar tax credits to expire. [\[More\]](#)

### **News Notes**

Scott McIntyre of Solar Energy Management in St. Petersburg has been elected president of the Florida Alliance for Renewable Energy (FARE). FARE is hosting a “Lobby Day” on February 9 at the Capitol in Tallahassee.