

HB 897

Timber Harvesting: Changes to County Ordinance & New Notification Website

Background:

At the request of the Georgia Forestry Association (GFA), ACCG participated in several meetings with county officials, county staff, representatives from the forestry industry, and staff from the Georgia Forestry Commission this past summer and fall.

The purpose of the meetings was to discuss Georgia's timber harvest notification process as laid out in OCGA §12-6-24. Last changed in 2015, this code section allows a county governing authority to pass an ordinance relating to timber harvest operations, but the law is specific in what can be included in a county ordinance.

[House Bill 897](#), sponsored by Rep. James Burchett and Sen. Tyler Harper, is the result of a recommendation from the 2019 report of the House Rural Development Council. The Council recommended that the General Assembly pass legislation that will create uniformity of harvesting and transportation of timber throughout the state.

HB 897 Summary

- Establishes a framework for a statewide timber harvest notification webpage housed by the Georgia Forestry Commission. Per discussions with the Georgia Forestry Commission, the website would allow timber harvest operators to select the county and tract, submit all pertinent information, and county officials would be automatically emailed any time a new harvest site has been submitted on this website. This would establish state-wide uniformity on the notification process as well as make it easier for counties to be aware of all new harvest sites within their jurisdiction.
- Punishes bad actors by increasing fines (up to \$1,500) on harvesters who fail to notify the county that they are operating. Fine currently cannot exceed \$500.
- Increases the bond amount due for harvesters who have previously been found to cause damage to county roads and/or rights of way (not to exceed \$10,000).
- Narrows the scope of when the \$5,000 bond can be used but does not prevent a county from pursuing other remedies available to recoup damages to county roads or rights of way.
- Creates a timeline for when and how a county can utilize a bond.

Of Note:

ACCG has committed to creating a model timber harvest notification ordinance and will work on joint education efforts with GFA.