

**LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION
BATON ROUGE, LA
MARCH 10, 2020
MINUTES**

CALL TO ORDER

The Louisiana Forestry Commission meeting was called to order by Michael Hudson at 10:10 a.m.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Epney Brasher

Members Present:

Gradon Clemons, Wayne Hagan, Michael Hudson, Bill Jenkins, and Dr. Allen Rutherford

LDAF staff present: Epney Brasher, Kirk Casanova, Brent Cutrer, Mark Davis, Patricia Dayberry, Damian Johnson, Matt Polk, Don Smith, Roy St. Pierre and Jason Waguespack

PUBLIC COMMENTS - There were no public comments at this time.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Bill Jenkins made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting held on December 2, 2019; Gradon Clemons seconded the motion. All were in favor.

There was a request in December for someone from the Department of Revenue to come to the meeting, and discuss severance tax. That request is carried over to the June meeting.

BUDGET

Epney discussed the budget. It is looking good so far mostly due to the lack of fires and the lack of fuel consumption keeping the expenses down. We are looking for there to be a little excess in the Protection Tax Assessment Fund. That excess will roll over into the Protection Tax Assessment Fund that is held in LAFA that will allow us to make purchases without going into the state general fund. There are some purchases that we are looking into for the new fiscal year. There is a grant that will help us purchase some mulching machines that will help us with fuel reduction especially in the Florida Parishes and around the state forest. We are hoping to put the mitigation funds with the protection tax assessment funds to purchase at least two maybe three of these units. These units would be totally outfitted with the trucks and trailers and will be able to carry the machines as well. That is our long term plan over the next year or two with some of those funds. The painting of the aircraft fleet has been completed and the G5 navigational equipment will be completed this year as well. Next year we are planning on two more air conditioners and the possibility of replacing one engine. March 15 is the deadline to request purchasing big ticket items and they have to be delivered by June 30, very limited to try and get any additional big ticket items for this fiscal year. So these purchases will have to wait until the new fiscal year.

DIVISION REPORTS

The question was asked if we are fully staffed with the answer being no. There are eight positions empty with six in the process of being filled. We recently hired two new crew people. Interviews are going on for two new pilots and one enforcement position with interviews coming up soon to cover the southwest area.

Roy discussed the enforcement report. There has been \$122,452 recovered in property and some additional arrests since the reports were written. One was \$178,000 theft of timber from Rapides parish.

Another arrest was from cypress theft in Assumption parish with the thief incarcerated without bond. There were two additional settlements out of court. Much discussion followed pertaining to what goes into investigations and proceeding. Each officer audits one to two cases per quarter. There may be one or two hearings at the June meeting. Roy will provide updates for the hearings at least a month before the meeting date. June and August have been dedicated as the judiciary hearing months.

Epney discussed FPP and cost shares. There is \$8.6 million in the Treasury fund. For 2020 we approved \$3.2 million and the maximum limit for 2021 is \$3.5 million. We are in the process of preapproving applications for next fiscal year and paying out cost shares with the receipts from this year. In June we will have a better idea of how much we actually paid out. There are a lot of practices funded that the landowners were not able to accomplish. This year there were a lot of burns not accomplished because of the weather. The balance in the fund decreased slightly this year. Jack McFarland has a bill proposed for this year that will clear up the language that is a contradiction to a rule clearing the way to be able to proceed with the 75% cost share. The ultimate goal is to allow the Commission to make the rule changes and not have to have a new bill in the Legislature to make changes.

Aviation flights have been limited due to the weather. Both pilot positions are posted and closed and Damian is interviewing for those pilot positions now. We will then have two pilots assigned to each district. When the new pilots are hired, Damian will be strictly management, unless he is needed for one reason or another to assist in fire patrol.

Forest Health - SPB traps will be out for a six week period, which increased from four weeks beginning last year. The Emerald Ash Borers traps will be approximately as many as last year in the parishes bordering known areas and also stretching down where we know there is a heavy ash borer present. There is heavy interest in the Cogongrass program also. The book is still in process.

OLD BUSINESS

The bill that was needed in the Legislature and the Revenue Department coming to discuss severance tax was already discussed.

NEW BUSINESS

As usual, there has been discussion of budget cuts to the Department. As the session moves forward, we will keep the commission members up to date on what ends up happening. Forestry's budget is highly dependent on state general funds, about 50%. The Legislature was informed that it was unacceptable. Retirees' benefits are taken out of the budget first.

The LFA meeting will be in Baton Rouge, March 17, beginning at 2:30 pm. There will be a reception that evening with the Legislature invited and there will be a visit to the Capital with no formal meetings.

Epney introduced the visiting foresters. Matt Polk, forester for Washington and northern Tangipahoa parishes and has been with the agency for 15 years. Mark Davis, forester for Vernon and Rapides parishes, has been with the agency 12 years. Jason Waguespack, forester for Beauregard, Calcasieu and Acadia parishes has been with the agency for 5 years.

PUBLIC COMMENTS - There were no public comments at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Wayne Hagan made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 10:55 a.m.