

LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION
BATON ROUGE, LA
MARCH 8, 2022
MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The Louisiana Forestry Commission meeting was called to order by Michael Hudson at 10:15 a.m.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Epney Brasher

Members Present:

Gradon Clemons, Peggy Hagan, Michael Hudson, Glynn Pittman and Dr. Allen Rutherford

LDAF staff present: Wade Dubea, Epney Brasher, Steve Bary, David Campbell, Brent Cutrer, Walter Daigre, Patricia Dayberry, Bret Lane, Roy St. Pierre, Amy McInnis, and Bayleigh Olah

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Dr. Allen Rutherford made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting held on December 6, 2021; Glynn Pittman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

ADJUDICATORY HEARING

Alicia Wheeler, Assistant Attorney General with the Department of Justice's office was the hearing officer at the adjudicatory hearing.

Continued Matter: Case No. 20-000117 – Lionel Washington

LDAF legal counsel admitted into evidence on each case – LDAF 1 - Stipulation

1) Case No. 20-000061 – Tommy Lee Evans – First Violation – 1 Count - \$150.00 Fine

MOTION: Gradon Clemons made a motion to accept the stipulation plea by Mr. Evans and the penalty as stated; Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.

2) Case No. 21-000020 – Moses Williams – First Violation – 1 Count - \$150.00 Fine

MOTION: Glynn Pittman made a motion to accept the stipulation plea by Mr. Williams and the penalty as stated; Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.

3) Case No. 21-000075 – James Weeks – First Violation – 2 Counts \$300.00 Fine

MOTION: Gradon Clemons made a motion to accept the stipulation plea by Mr. Weeks and the penalty as stated; Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.

4) Case No. 21-000078 – Kenneth Guillot – First Violation – 1 Count - \$150.00 Fine

MOTION: Glynn Pittman made a motion to accept the stipulation plea by Mr. Guillot and the penalty as stated; Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.

5) Case No. 22-000009 – John Dowden – First Violation – 1 Count - \$150.00 Fine

MOTION: Gradon Clemons made a motion to accept the stipulation plea by Mr. Dowden and the penalty as stated; Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.

These cases resulted from criminal investigations which brought about these violations over a two year period, but the hearings were delayed due to COVID. A fine stipulation schedule was mentioned for penalty assessments and for a B Schedule for violations and penalties to be presented at next meeting for approval.

The adjudicatory hearing was adjourned at 10:27 a.m.

BUDGET

Epney discussed the budget. Expenditures to offset revenue; travel expenses are reimbursable; supplies are limited and the cost of gas is going up. Deliveries are slow coming in for orders placed; contracts are being renegotiated. Expenditures for next budget year we are looking at replacing dozers and transports with money coming in from Legislature. Aviation – we have two engines expected to be delivered by end of this fiscal year and installed in the upcoming fiscal year along with the radio upgrades from analog to digital to continue. We are looking for there to be a little excess in the Protection Tax Assessment Fund and that excess will roll over into the Protection Tax Assessment Fund that is held in LAFA. Supply issues include vehicles for additional employees that we were able to hire from the several taxes, which increased our firefighter positions. Grant opportunities are available at no match, but we have to have the money paid out then we get reimbursed, which creates that case flow problem. We are looking at securing equipment to help with stewardship, mitigation, and forest health and radio communication upgrades all to be done with current budget received and expenditures remaining within the budget.

DIVISION REPORTS

Protection division has crews and equipment available to go out and assist in Oklahoma and Texas unless our environment conditions change. We are averaging 15 acres per fire due to downed timber and current conditions with over 500 fires so far this year. Currently 65% of the state is in moderate to severe drought also those same areas having most of fires. Debris from storms will complicate fires and if necessary we may have to call for emergency preparations to go into effect.

Roy discussed the current situation with the enforcement division. Currently has four agents including him and one opening in southeast area to be filled. Investigations are between 46 to 60 pertaining to fires, fuel theft, and logging equipment damaged. Five out of six of the fire calls are neglect by individuals burning yard debris, etc., but we did have a 40 to 50 acre control burn that did get out of control.

Forest management still deals with issues from Katrina and forest protection program in the northwest dealing with post chemical releases. Currently we have 95 preapproved applications for fiscal year 2023, beginning April 1st. The new mulching machines are being utilized for mitigation work, but currently not for rent and we are looking at possibly adding that service for a fee at a later date. The purchase of the John Deere 330 skid steers to assist, but as with any maintenance upkeep is costly. With management practices in place hoping to decrease beetles and other bug issues. BMP survey for 2021 has been concluded with 204 sites surveyed with 96% in compliance.

Aviation has a new command fleet pilot – Steve Bary. Aviation still needs to hire two pilots for Jena and Natchitoches. BMP, tornadoes, hurricanes, enforcement investigations have been keeping the pilots busy. This is in addition to regular fire patrol flights, executive, administrative flights and the weekly marijuana flights that have been added on. We also have to throw training in there for the newer pilots as well. Due to the timber down this is creating a larger acre per fire for our pilots to contend with. Our aircraft fleet consists of twelve Cessna 182T planes to which we are currently getting all this done.

OLD BUSINESS

At this time nothing to discuss.

NEW BUSINESS

At this time nothing to present.

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

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Gradon Clemons made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 11:23 a.m.