

**LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION
ROY O MARTIN HEADQUARTERS
ALEXANDRIA, LA
OCTOBER 3, 2017
MINUTES**

CALL TO ORDER

The Louisiana Forestry Commission meeting was called to order by Chairman Scott Poole at 10:25 a.m.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Epney Brasher

Members Present:

Gradon Clemons, Bill Jenkins, Scott Poole and Dr. Allen Rutherford

LDAF Staff Present: Wade Dubea, Epney Brasher, David Campbell, Don Smith and Roy St. Pierre

No outside guests present.

Public Comments: None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Dr. Allen Rutherford made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 13, 2017 as printed; Gradon Clemons seconded the motion. All were in favor.

BUDGET

Epney reported that the budget showed that the bond debt has been paid completely. So the protection assessment funds can now be used toward other purchases if needed. One of the purchases that were on the books for this year was the radios. The new mobile radios are being placed in vehicles: the crew leaders, the pickup trucks, the enforcement vehicles, the airplanes, the transport units and the dozers. The installation and change out is about half finished now. The balance needed to finish out the mobile units should be installed soon. Then the purchase of 150 hand-held radios will complete the update to our system that is about 30 years old. That is just short of a \$250,000 purchase.

Wade stated that the law was changed about two sessions back. Before the change, any unused funds reverted back to the state general fund. Now any unused funds revert to an account in LAFA for the same statutory purpose which is the acquisition and maintenance of firefighting equipment. That is good because we can save up if we need to purchase a larger piece of equipment and won't lose the funds, or it can be used for periodic maintenance on the aircraft or ground equipment.

Epney explained the budget is mostly stationary for this year. The Governor's office and Division of Administration gave permission to receive ten more positions and the funding to go

with them. But it did not go over to the Civil Service portion, so only seven out of the ten have been hired. They only allow so many positions even though the funds are there. Epney and Wade explained the system of positions with Civil Service.

The protection tax assessment fund was explained along with expected revenue. The repairs and/or replacement of dozers were discussed along with transports as a unit.

Wade explained the changes to the Civil Service pay scale on a number of positions. On January 1, 2018, every classified employee will get a 2% pay increase and that was appropriated. On January 2, 2018, every classified employee who is not at the bottom of the minimum of the new pay scale will be raised to that minimum. That was not appropriated, so it is up to each office to come up with the budget to cover that salary increase. It is much needed and way overdue. Then every July 15 after that, there will be a 2 to 4% increase to move them up to the place in the new scale to match where they moved from. If they were at the mid-range on the old scale, they will work their way up to the mid-range of the new scale, but it will be done over time.

A progression series has been proposed for two years now that has not moved. Two other offices in the Department who began the process at the same time have proposed their progression series and have been implemented along with the pay increases involved. There was much discussion on what stage the progression series was in within the Department along with what adjustments to budget are needed to cover any salary increases. The need to bring state salaries closer to industry salaries in order to hire and retain good employees was also discussed.

There was discussion about the future budget for Forestry for fiscal year 2019. The extra monies for salaries and increases will need to be requested from the Legislature.

DIVISION REPORTS

In Forest Health, the biggest issues are more parishes have been added for emerald ash borer and the confirmation of southern pine beetle in some parishes. Pilots while doing fire patrol have reported areas that are currently being investigated for southern pine beetle. The fire patrol flights are being utilized for multi tasks – fire patrol and bug flights depending on weather conditions.

In Enforcement, Richard Caillier was rehired for the southwest part of the state. There is really a need for two more enforcement agents.

As for FPP, there is a lot of money in the FPP account. This is the first full year of the new changes in rates. There are some issues with going to a single year at a time instead of having two years to complete practices. This way there is no crossing over from one fiscal year to another. One suggestion on using more of the funds for landowners is to possibly increase the rate from 50/50 cost share match to maybe 75/25. The ultimate goal is to get it to as many qualified landowners as possible. For the fiscal year 2019, the budget authority needs to be increased. In the guidelines, only ten percent can be used for any grants and the commission would need to grade the submissions for any research proposals.

The discussion included the fact that landowners do not have a place to market their timber in their vicinity. There are no sawmills or other producers within a reasonable proximity of the landowners.

In Aviation, engine replacements are at a standstill at the moment, propeller purchases may be necessary the airplanes are about 14 years old and are being repainted. The reason for repainting is because of the anti-corrosion protection and not just for looks.

OLD BUSINESS

No old business.

NEW BUSINESS

The discoveries of new patches of southern pine beetles that have been reported in the state are being handled.

There is a meeting in East Feliciana parish in Clinton on November 16 with Governor Edwards and Commissioner Strain. It is a fact finding tour that they are taking across the state for an open discussion with individuals that work in the fields of agriculture and forestry to address the needs.

At Indian Creek campground, the Department is applying for a grant to rebuild the pier on the lake. The land is part of the state forest and the reservoir is owned by the police jury. So they need to have the approval of both parties before they can get the pier rebuilt.

MOTION: Dr. Allen Rutherford made a motion to support the construction of the pier at Indian Creek campground; Bill Jenkins seconded the motion. All were in favor.

ADJOURNMENT

Dr. Allen Rutherford made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Bill Jenkins seconded the motion. All were in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 11:39 a.m.