

**LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION**  
**VIA TELECONFERENCE OR VIDEOCONFERENCE**  
**JUNE 9, 2020**  
**MINUTES**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The Louisiana Forestry Commission meeting was called to order by Chairman Scott Poole at 10:08 a.m.

**ROLL CALL**

The roll call was conducted by Wade Dubea

**Members Present On Call:**

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

**LDAF Staff Present On Call:** Wade Dubea, Epney Brasher, David Campbell, Brent Cutrer, Patricia Dayberry, Damian Johnson, Don Smith, and Roy St. Pierre

**Guest(s) Present On Call:** Buck Vandersteen

**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 March 10, 2020; Gradon Clemons seconded the motion. All were in favor.

**BUDGET**

There is no budget report available since the Office of Forestry's assigned accountant provided by the Office of Management and Finance has been out due to the pandemic. Wade discussed that the budget is on task to finish on schedule for this year. We are holding all large expenditures until next fiscal year. Payroll is completed but this has been a roller coaster year. The Office of Forestry is looking at a one to two percent budget cut as in the past. This is similar to the last couple of years, and can add up to a couple hundred thousand. For now we are being told we are okay and that we can utilize federal COVID fund to supplement our budget. Next fiscal year, we are looking at purchasing an aircraft engine and the mitigation mulching machines. We are sitting on vacant positions, we currently have nine positions and we are going to proceed with filling seven of the nine and that will not affect this year's budget. The southeast enforcement officer, Blake Phillips, resigned during COVID and Enforcement is now down to Roy and two other officers. We are hoping to get them back up to five, which includes Roy who is the Director and that would give him four officers to cover the state. The announcement for the southwest enforcement officer's position closes in one week. We are also hoping to hire two pilots and the rest are fire crew personnel. Wayne Hagan questioned whether or not the Parish Foresters could assist Enforcement. Roy explained that any they could possibly assist with surveillance, but not on investigations. They are not commissioned officers and any situation could present itself to be too dangerous. Michael Hudson asked if Wildlife and Fisheries officers could assist. Roy explained that we do have joint ventures that involve their office and also that the sheriff's office will assist as well when they can. It is crucial that we get the enforcement officer positions filled in the southwest and the one in the Florida parishes, since they are our two biggest areas.

Scott Poole wanted to know where we stand on the Forest Protection Plan fund. Currently we do not have the exact numbers since our accountant is out. We have 3.2 million allocated and currently no one is being turned down and that is with a \$15,000.00 max and 75/25 cost share. As soon as Wade is able to

get a budget sheet, he will forward on to the Commission. Scott Poole asked if there is a possibility of getting an annual overview report of the FPP program that would show the number of applications received, the distribution type, acre parcel size, and the ending balance. This would help show the economic health of the program to the people that do not understand how it works and even when we need to request support for the program. Scott is leaving it up to Wade to decide on a time frame for when to be completed, and it will be broken down by fiscal years. As a Commission, we know we inherited gray areas of FPP and we have nothing that is informative for the public. Buck Vandersteen opened up the discussion about the application period, not getting request for reimbursement in on time and can it be extended. April and May is the application period, landowners have until June 30<sup>th</sup> to get in their request or it goes back into the fund. This is a one year program, consultants and foresters doing letters in chunks, this cycle around because of COVID we are getting requests, and under certain circumstances and situations as they apply, currently we have given extensions, but we are not going to adjust the extension permanently.

### **DIVISION REPORTS**

The number of fires has been a consistent up and down for 2019 and 2020. Prescribed burnings are subject to weather and those numbers are also down. Management of the timber harvest on the state forest began in March with pulp wood and we are now into saw timber. In the RCW area we have the long leaf species to remove. We are estimating the proceeds from the timber sales to be about \$400,000 and that money will be reinvested in the state forest as needed for replanting, roads, etc. Enforcement hearings have been postponed due to COVID, since not everyone is back up fully functioning as a whole and those hearing will convene at a later date face to face.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Representative from the Revenue Department is not available currently due to pandemic situation to discuss the severance tax reporting. Statutorily the Department of Revenue was obligated to enforce severance tax, the Office of Forestry can assist, but the concern of trying to capture the money escaping the budget from out of state sales, etc. needs to be addressed.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

There is no new business to be discussed at this time.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Buck Vandersteen brought up the subject of landowners qualifying for tax exemptions through the Department of Revenue; the procedure not supported by law, but reminded them about sales tax exemption for landowners on Schedule F for forest land owners and chemical sprayers. Under the Forest Agreement they need to check with their accessor's office and they will grant that exemption to them. On the Parish issues charging \$500.00 a truck to operate in that parish, what are we going to do to straighten that out for loggers? Discussion followed about possibly forcing logging industry to come to table and talk and if someone was to push with a lawsuit to get this addressed, like class discrimination, statue violations and this was intended for road maintenance but only forestry production is paying. New members are coming in and we need to be proactive and not reactive. Possibly, if one of the Parish Forestry Associations where to file suit and get blanket contract precedent to stop this selective targeting of Forestry. A class action suit to initiate to get the message out that the forestry industry is not going to just sit back and take this.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** Gradon Clemons made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Wayne Hagan seconded the motion. All were in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 11:09 a.m.