

LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION
VIA TELECONFERENCE OR VIDEOCONFERENCE
SEPTEMBER 8, 2020
MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The Louisiana Forestry Commission meeting was called to order by Chairman Scott Poole at 10:06 a.m.

ROLL CALL

The roll call was conducted by Epney Brasher.

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, Patricia Dayberry, Don Smith, and Tyler Cloud

Guest(s) Present On Call: Buck Vandersteen

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 June 9, 2020; Dr. Alan Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Bill Jenkins made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting held on August 4, 2020; Wayne Hagan seconded the motion. All were in favor.

BUDGET

The Office of Forestry is looking into the \$36,000.00 that is in travel charges that is noted on the budget, since we know that we have not traveled due to COVID and are waiting on Management and Finance for details. Forest Protection Plan fund currently has approved five million in funding and letters have been sent to landowners. We are waiting on for approval for the additional one million budget request, before those letters for that funding can be sent. We have six million hopefully that will be obligated and a little over nine million in the fund. The new threshold max goes into effect June 2021 and that approval cycle will begin April of 2021.

DIVISION REPORTS

Forest Health – Trapping programs on going; southern pine beetle and other annual trapping programs, all good, no flags gone up, we look good. **Management** – Fairly routine, the timber harvest on the state forest is still ongoing, we are dealing with the RCW colonies as request by Wildlife and Fisheries. We have contacted the contractor doing that work and we have shifted to the salvage harvest going on at the state forest, there was not a whole lot of damage, but some. David is to update the management plan, with the harvest reflected and with any damage or salvage work that is ongoing. **Enforcement** – We have several citation hearings that are pending, which we have deferred to we are able to have an in person meeting. **Aviation** – Pilots are flying fire patrol and fire crew teams, which are assisting with damage assessments, sketch mapping uploaded to US Forest Service program database and we have a deadline for tomorrow and they will give us the overall damage assessment from the storm that we have received across the state. We will take that information and provide it for a supplemental grant and funding

through FEMA that will be coming into the state for state agencies and particularly for the landowners. In the management prospective we are going to see some things happening as a result of this reporting. We will see who we will be partnering with other agencies, such as FSA and NRCS to get these funds available to the landowners through the programs. **Protection** – Fire crews are working rotations in Texas; dozer and ground crews possibly the forth rotation, usually six to eight employees at a time, partnering up with Kisatchie National Forest personnel as a compact unit and going over to Texas. From a protection stand point from this storm, we are going to be looking at the fuel loading and potential fire hazard; burn bans are in place in some areas of the state, that were most dramatically impacted from the storm. We are working to get the word out to proceed with caution.

Scott inquired as to whether aviation is being able to take off and refueling. Wade explained that we did top off the fuel tanks, both vehicles and planes, prior to storm and those areas were the first to be cleared, so that we are not having problems in taking off or landing. Forestry did have one pilot that was not able to return home due to the damage, he lived in Lake Charles, but we are covering the state grid. Power has been restored to most of our offices and they are up and running, Deridder is running off a generator until it can get back on the grid. Communications in the areas were damaged; commercial towers and base towers have received damage and we are in the process of getting those repaired, assessments have been done by radio technicians and whether it is in-house or outside assistance requests are being instituted.

Damage assessment numbers are being crunched to get the information to be included with the damages that were done in Iowa to be included in the damage assessment to get funding. We are using a template from Florida to use a checklist to make sure that we are not forgetting anything. It is in our best interest to get this done as quickly as possible to be included in the first request for funding and not as a supplemental to the original or as mostly noted as an afterthought. Forestry is providing the raw data to the USFS to get the number of acres that were damage. The Office of Forestry has tablets, which we call sketch mappers, which show the map areas that we are currently flying over on the tablet and marking the maps were we see damage immediately. When they return to the offices, this information is uploaded to GIS in Atlanta. The maps are overlaid and with other data that has been received to show the species damaged, wind, etc., that the state received. We are hoping to ask for a waiver for matching funds so that we will be able to assist the public. Epney sent the updated reports from USFS to the Commission members as meeting was in session. FIA data is being used for the plots currently throughout the state, estimate varies. Discussion followed about areas of damage, averages, and best solution for requesting the percentages of the funding for landowners including values, evaluations and the damages will vary and how the disaster declaration is written. A decision was made that the base value to be used will be the current established severance tax rates that are in place for establishing losses. Ideas for funding spending could be evasive treatments, damaged assessments, and boundary lines with firebreak lines under mitigation, tax consultant workshops contracted with a CPA that specializes in timber value. Possibly request some money to repair the communication towers across the state that was damaged. Forestry has two systems in place; statewide and our system which is independent. This is the first time that all systems had ever been taken out completely, but we are able to get ours up and running faster than the statewide system through Louisiana State Police. We have already done upgrades that allow us to link our towers together and the only expenses we would have are lightning damage or theft, besides the annual rental leases. The wind resistance is what took most of those towers out. Keep in mind it may take years to determine the losses due to the long term effects to the trees, etc., when requesting the funds.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Buck Vandersteen mentioned about the timber that is down in waterways and obstructing the flow of the water. NRCS has been notified of the trees down in waterways to see what resources they might have to clear the debris. Wet decks might be a good idea, if fresh wood is not being able to be located in the next several months, and they would then have an ace in the hole to get it from. A Hurricane Laura task force has already been established which consists of landowners, large and small, consultants, loggers and

industry and there is a meeting scheduled for today at 4:30, please email Buck if you would like to attend. A webinar has been set up for tax information from Paul Spillers, LSU alumni and is also a board member of the Louisiana Forestry Association, on how landowners can claim losses from hurricanes. We have reached out to Shaun Tanger, who left LSU and is now at Mississippi State and he would be happy to assist, but he is also very busy at the moment. Eric McDonnell, who was with Louisiana Tech, has left and is now at Mississippi State as well. American loggers clean up and salvage is going to be very slow process and to latch on to what the Council was saying that the loggers may need financial assistance.

OLD BUSINESS

Wade did mention that we are uncertain about budget cuts at the present time, due to COVID and hurricanes, but we are looking at some sort of budget cut to come in January.

NEW BUSINESS

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

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dr. Allen Rutherford made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Gradon Clemons seconded the motion. All were in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 11:21 a.m.