**Louisiana Forestry Commission and**

**Louisiana Tax Commission Joint Meeting**

**5825 Florida Blvd.**

**Baton Rouge, LA 70806**

**March 12, 2013**

**Minutes**

**Call To Order**

The Louisiana Forestry Commission meeting was called to order by Chairman Scott Poole 10:04 a.m.

**Roll Call**

The roll was called by Epney Brasher.

**Members Present:** Scott Poole, Sam Pruitt, Mike Merritt, and Mike Wolff.

**Not Present:** Tina Meiners, Kenny Ribbeck and Dr. Allen Rutherford

A quorum was present.

**LDAF Staff Present:** State Forester Wade Dubea, Commissioner Strain, Associate State Forester Epney Brasher,

Don Smith, Jeremy Coffey, Charlie Greer and Dane Morgan.

**Others Present:** Buck Vandersteen, Louisiana Forestry Association

**Approval of Minutes**

**Motion:** Sam Pruitt made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting for December 10, 2012.

Mike Wolff seconded the motion. All were in favor.

**Budget**

Epney Brasher updated the Commission on the state of the budget. She said not much has changed since the last meeting in December. She stated they have had a few fires recently. One large fire that was reported in Allen Parish was 246 acres.

Dr. Strain introduced Dane Morgan, Management and Finance to the LFC board.

Wade stated that the Legislative Session will begin soon and the budget will be decided for the year.

**Motion:** Mike Merritt made a motion to approve the budget. Sam Pruitt seconded the motion. All were in favor.

**Public Comments**

Buck Vandersteen thanked the Commissioner and Wade Dubea for concentrating enforcement people in forestry related activities and targeting arson timber theft and vandalism. Discussion followed.

**Division Reports**

Wade Dubea said that the Division Reports were in the packets that were mailed out several weeks ago. He asked that if anyone had any questions to please ask.

**Aviation**

Scott Poole stated to Jeremy Coffey that in December’s meeting he had reported a budget of $630 thousand dollars. Scott Poole asked if that was still true for this quarter, as of today. Jeremy stated that to his knowledge he still has that amount in his budget for this fiscal year with 34.6% of that spent. Discussion followed.

**Management**

Mike Merritt asked how the FPP program was going at this time. Wade Dubea reported that Pat Aronstein has been processing the applications and payments are making their way through the system. They also extended the application period for a couple of months because they had additional funds available. Wade said they are going to begin accepting applications April 1st. Wade noted to the board that they have new updated application forms they are going to be distributing to the consultants soon. The new application will require Wade’s signature instead of the foresters. Epney Brasher stated that this is, in a legal sense, more of a cooperative endeavor and not a contract. Mike Merritt asked if there could be a consideration about the funding in the way it is worded for different procedures, or practices, or are locked in. Wade said that it would be a considered rule. Epney explained that you could do two procedures are more on the same application as long as it does not exceed ten thousand dollars. Dr. Strain said that they can change the rules of the program. Wade said he would get with Pat Aronstein and Mike Merritt and come up with a draft of potential suggestions for rule changes and present it to the board for review and approval. Discussion followed.

Wade reported on the 2013 BMP survey results and stated that the survey form was updated to be less subjective to the forester that is out doing the inspection. It became more of a dichotomy, so we decided to change the form. Wade reported that due to changing the form and with some additional training, they had a 96.4% compliance rate, compared to the old form with only a 74% compliance rate. Wade said that he is pleased with the results of the survey and they will be posting the results on the website. Discussion followed.

**Fire Protection**

Sam Pruitt commented on the average size of fires for the fiscal year and the number of fires being considerably lower than in previous years. Don Smith responded that it is due to the unusually wet year we have had. Scott Poole asked about how the dozer radiator installations were going. Don said that they put in about half of the radiators so far and they won’t know until the heat of the summer if the new radiators are going to work properly. Don said he was working with his counter parts in Texas with their dozers and they have the same radiators. The radiators worked well, bringing the engine operating temperature down. Don said he thinks the dozers will do well now with these problems alleviated.

Buck Vandersteen asked about fire-fighter positions. Wade reported that they have at this time 114 firefighters with only four vacancies scattered across the state. He also said that they are not increasing capacity; they are filling vacancies at this time. Discussion followed.

**Information & Education**

Scott Poole asked how the Teacher’s Tour for this year is coming along. Epney Brasher stated that they are putting together the agenda for the conference. They currently have the hotel and buses lined up. They are getting our locations and stops for the conference lined up and on-board. We have reserved the restaurants for catering or on-site meals. We have a very full schedule this year. We are working with the USFS this year again and adding a couple of more activities to the agenda. The date for the tour is June 12, 2013 to June 15, 2013, Wednesday through Saturday. These days have been chosen in order to work around the Commissioner’s event so we will be able to attend both. We also have numerous sponsors for this year. As far as teachers, we have had a good response so far, but we need more.

**Reforestation**

Scott Poole asked if Forestry sold everything that they had planted. Wade said that they are still taking orders at this time. They had a couple of species that were planted and then the orders were cancelled as a result of weather, so they are doing some last minute shuffling.

**New Business**

Wade told everyone that he had several items he wanted to discuss with them about the nurseries. He stated that they have had some issues in the past with the nurseries in a break-even proposition. They are now looking at consolidating some services, and how to better serve the public and still have the nurseries be self-sufficient. As a result they are requesting pricing information from our neighboring state nurseries within Southern Group. They are looking at procedures as far as receiving orders, deposits on orders that would need to be paid, terms for payment and so on. They anticipate having some changes to the nursery system sometime between now and the end of the legislative session. Wade said that they are looking at only growing the species that sells, not growing a species just for a certain few vendors that are in need of specific species. They will be looking at what the demand reflects. Wade stated that he will send out a draft of what changes they are proposing to the board for consideration. He said they can’t keep running the nurseries the way they are being ran. They have to be self-sufficient. They receive no general fund dollars. They are still obligated by the statute to have two nurseries, one north and one south. Personnel is a huge issue right now as far as hiring and retaining qualified individuals to work at the nurseries. Discussion followed.

Wade reported that the next LFC meeting is scheduled for June 11. This month is very busy with Teacher Tour and the Commissioner’s conference among other obligation and he and Epney Brasher would like to move the meeting forward to May 28th if possible. Everyone agreed. The next meeting will be May 28th at 10:00.

Chairman Scott Poole wanted to thank former Chairman Sam Pruitt for his years of serving as Chairman and for his dedication to the industry and the individual stake holders that he represents.

**Old Business**

**Personnel Updates**

Wade said, he would like to wait until the legislative session begins to see where the budget is before he fills the firefighter positions that a vacant at this time. He said he doesn’t think the budget will interfere with those positions being filled, but said he thinks it would be wise to wait for now. Discussion followed.

Wade mentioned that they have announced the two enforcement positions and interviewed for those positions and are now negotiating with Civil Service on salary concerns for filling one of those positions. One of the candidates for the southwest Louisiana position has accepted a job with Probation and Parole before we were even able to offer him the job. Now I believe we are going to wait to see how the negotiations go with Civil Service. If this doesn’t work out we will re-announce the positions and try again. Wade reported that they also have several of the employees positions in Enforcement that will be retiring and they plan to fill those positions as they become vacated. Enforcement officers Charlie Greer, Mark Singleton and Jim Hilton are all up for retirement. Charlie Greer commented that the entry level positions salary needs to be looked at before trying to fill the positions they are vacating. The pay level is much too low to get someone qualified in those positions and with college degrees. Wade agreed and stated that he would get with Human Resources and Civil Service. Discussion followed.

**Review Previous Legislation**

Scott Poole was absent during the last meeting when this legislation was brought up before the board for discussion. Wade Dubea reported to Scott Poole that this was the new legislation dealing with whether the Tax Commission needed to be in attendance at the December joint meetings. At the December 2012 meeting the Louisiana Tax Commission board had commented that they felt they did not need to be in attendance. At that last meeting they discussed changing the legislation that mandated that. Wade stated that they are going to ask Representative Anders to file the bill to reflect the board’s wishes for that. Wade said they have taken the requirement for the Tax Commission to be present at the December meeting out; but added the language that the Tax Commission may assist in determining the value of the severance tax. “We certainly do not want to shut them out if they want to be there,” he said. Commissioner Strain stated that Rep. Anders has accepted it and it should be no problem.

Mike Wolff stated that maybe they should also look at changing the mandated meeting times for the second Monday of December to the second Tuesday. After some discussion it was determined that the mandate would read that the meeting to determine the severance tax would be sometime in December. Dr. Strain wanted to give some flexibly to the meeting dates. Also discussed was the changing of the wording in the legislation in paragraph 3 to strike “exclusively on” and replace it with “with consideration of sales of timber as reported by the Louisiana Department of Revenue… Dr. Strain stated that he would get with the attorney for the department and then hand it over to Rep. Anders. They also discussed how the Department of Revenue reports the sales of timber and how they compile the information. Discussion followed.

**Adjournment**

**Motion:** Motion was made by Mike Merritt to adjourn the meeting; Sam Pruitt seconded the motion.

All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 12:19 p.m.