

TENTATIVE MINUTES (PENDING COMMISSION APPROVAL)

LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION

JUNE 11, 2024, 10:00 A.M.

**LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY
VETERANS' MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM
5825 FLORIDA BOULEVARD
BATON ROUGE, LA 70806**

NOTE: THIS IS TENTATIVE MINUTES FROM THE JUNE 11, 2024, MEETING OF THE LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION. A FINAL VERSION OF THESE MINUTES WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE AFTER APPROVAL OF THE COMMISSION AT ITS NEXT REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING.

CALL TO ORDER

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

ROLL CALL

The roll call was conducted by Wade Dubea.

Members present: Glynn Pittman, Dennis Aucoin, Gradon Clemons, Michael Hudson, Peggy Hagan, and Dr. Allen Rutherford.

LDAF staff present: Wade Dubea, Roy St. Pierre, Steve Bary, Brian Nail, Jeannie Severio and Jade Saunders.

Guests present: Buck Vandersteen and George Tiley.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Deferred to later in meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Glynn Pittman made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of March 12, 2024. Gradon Clemons seconded the motion. All were in favor.

BUDGET

Wade Dubea gave the budget update. We are in the last month of this fiscal year. We are within the confines of our budget and have used up right to the limits of our budget authority. We have federal grants that are outstanding. We have three years to use them, so they should roll over to the next fiscal year. We received \$17 million dollars in seed money immediately after the fires to offset and repay contract and compact labor. The remaining \$15 million will be billed to us from the federal government to cover the expenses of the tanker drops, the different teams that came in to help us. That money is included in a supplemental bill that just went thru the legislature and the funds should be made available soon. The budget remains essentially flat for next year. We are waiting for the governor to sign the bill. We have received all eleven of the first order and four of the second order of our new dozers. The transports are running behind the dozers. We have received only two so far. We can haul

the dozers on the old transports, but the weight distribution is different and will cause us to have to replace rear tires frequently if we do it for an extended period of time. The first eleven units can be assigned anywhere in the state, but the second eleven units have to be assigned into the areas that had hurricanes Laura and Delta. So according to the grant, they have to be assigned to the southwest and western part of the state. We have 96 old units available across the state and on any given day there are 15 in the shop. We are hoping to get to a five year rotation on our equipment. So that we have new coming in and rotating out the old to keep the fleet in working order. We are aiming to have a diversified fleet.

DIVISION REPORTS

Protection Branch: The report shows the comparison of the number of wildfires and acres involved. The fuel load is different this year because of the drought and insect related damage. We are getting reports that this year will have very high temperatures like last year. We are in a good position to get everything ready ahead of the fire season this year. We learned a lot from the fire season we had last year and other states are learning from what we experienced. At the State Foresters meeting, Wade was able to work with other state foresters as they all want to get the compact ready and have all the details worked out before the compact has to be called in anywhere again.

We have had two heavy equipment academies that we put on in-house. We had 20 employees attend each one. We are teaching especially the newer employees about how to dig the dozer out if stuck, how to handle slopes and how to handle night fire fighting. We will continue to host these academies to get our people trained and then open it up to others for training. One of the bills was to help our employees deal with the aftereffects of PTSD. The second bill was to provide training for volunteer firefighters. They will be invited to come and train with us even though it is not exactly what they need for their jobs. The National Guard was the first call we made. They were the ones doing the helicopter drops. They have the big dozers and could not fight fires, but did a great job on the mop-up. They could also widen the fire breaks with the bigger dozers.

Enforcement Branch: There's a summary of the complaints and locations. There will probably be adjudicatory hearings at the next meeting. The fines that were imposed and not paid were turned over to the Attorney General's office. Discussion was had about having a contract for harvesting timber in all cases.

Management and Forest Health Branch: FPP applications were funded in April and May. We had 655 applications for \$4 million for last season. 518 did the work and were completed and \$2.9 million was paid out. We had 66 cancelled. Of that amount paid out, \$341,000 was paid for replants on 28,000 acres because of failures of planting because of the drought. The Emergency Forest Restoration Program opened in possibly mid-May. It has to do with the drought damage and tornado damage and is through the Farm Service Agencies across the state. It is a 75/25 cost share and the applications are made with the FSA for Louisiana also. We are still having the certified prescribed burn training along with LSU, La Tech and the Vo-tech schools. We are moving to a new program developed by the US Forest Service. Mr. Vandersteen added that the certified prescribed burners had the presumption of non-negligence. People who are not certified do not have that presumption. The bill was made hoping to get people to take the free course and become certified.

On Forest Health, we had 2 parishes, East and West Feliciana, that showed Southern Pine beetles in the traps. The good part is that we had an equal number of good beetles in the traps. So we are comfortable with the amount of beetles found. We still have some issues with Laurel Wilt affecting the bay and sassafras trees. Spongy moth is another one that we are trapping. Brown spot needle blight is beginning to show up in other species than longleaf. It is now into the loblolly pine. Cogongrass is still out there. The small outbreaks are sprayed by our crews. We have a contractor on standby to do the larger plots. Those should be sprayed in October.

Aviation Branch: New pilot Brian Nail was introduced to the commission. Brian completes the roster of pilots. We are having a lot of difficulty getting engines for our planes. We have seven on order and looking a 2 ½ years before they come in. This is not just an agency problem; it is nationwide. An engine can only be overhauled once, then a new engine has to be purchased. The new ones are very costly. We have never had a maintenance budget for the aircraft. An addition to house bill one provides \$1 million for maintenance, if the governor signs the bill. This will help the Office of Forestry with our budget. We are switching out planes that are close to being out of hours to fly with others that have more hours. But at the moment, all are ready to fly.

OLD BUSINESS

None currently.

NEW BUSINESS

Jade Saunders discussed three new rules put in place by the legislature. These rules are additions to already established rules and are in the process of being finalized. They apply to Title 7, the Americans with Disabilities act.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The commission was told of the death of Mark Hurst, a well-known forester and son of a former state forester. Condolences and prayers for the family. The annual Louisiana Forestry Association convention will be August 27-29 in Lake Charles. There is concern among environmentalists that biomass is not carbon neutral. The only industry looking at Louisiana now is the biomass industry. So it must be watched closely to keep them from scaring away this industry.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dennis Aucoin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Rutherford seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 am.