

TENTATIVE MINUTES (PENDING COMMISSION APPROVAL)

LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION

MAY 20, 2026, 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 MAY 20, 2026, 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: Peggy Hagan, Dennis Aucoin, Gradon Clemons, Michael Hudson, Tyler Bosworth.

LDAF staff present: Wade Dubea, Epney Brasher, Matthew Polk, Jade Saunders, Steve Bary, Tyler Cloud, Nicole Hawes, Commissioner Mike Strain, Dane Morgan, Ashley Dupree, Kiara Moore, Sarah Dubea, Tabitha Irvin.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Recognize Service of Current State Forester

Mike Hudson thanked everyone for coming to the specially called meeting is of mixed emotions. Wade has announced his retirement after nearly 19 years of service as State Forester. He mentioned that several individuals were attending the meeting via Zoom. The primary focus for today's meeting is to recognize Wade's service as State Forester. Mike gave a little personal interaction. He has served since 2014 on the commission with Wade and has known Wade for a number of years prior to that. From his perspective as a fellow forester and as a member of the commission, he notes that Wade has done an outstanding job over the years and we owe him a debt of gratitude for dealing with a number of things. Mike invited anyone else to speak on Wade's behalf or any comments from the public.

Dr. Mike Strain took this time to recognize Wade's service. Dr. Strain and Wade have been working together since he was first elected. He has worked with Wade for more than 18 years, through thick and thin, with a lot of great times and trying times. They have been through everything from dealing with insects to multiple forest fires and of course the great drought and fires of 2023, which will never be forgotten. They spent a lot of time together working and some very difficult situations at times. He states Wade has done an outstanding job and is a good

friend that will be sorely missed. He took the time to reflect on personal experiences with Wade. One certain experience reflected on the fires of 2023 in Calcasieu Parish where LDAF was able to hold the line. He thanked Wade for working together for a good outcome.

Emily Andrews of the governor's office spoke next on behalf of Governor Landry. She read the commendation given to Wade by the governor.

Buck Vandersteen spoke next. He stated that Wade has many great accomplishments over the years for landowners, loggers, and the forest industry throughout Louisiana. Wade has served the department very well. Buck recognized him as an honorable man of integrity, one that has the spirit of the department and has helped Louisiana grow in our forest industry, our logging industry, not only in Louisiana, but also in the southern group of state foresters and the National Association of State Foresters that have recognized Wade's integrity and commitment to the practice of forestry and representing Louisiana. He also stated during the annual convention at the end of August, Wade will be recognized before the 500 members of the Forestry Association for his service as Louisiana State Forester. Buck stated he has served distinction with honor and we are so proud to call him a friend and a strong member of the forestry community throughout Louisiana.

b. Appoint Interim State Forester

Jade Saunders, LDAF attorney, read the resolution into the record. The resolution is to appoint the associate state forester, Epney Brasher, as the interim state forester, to carry out the duties and responsibilities set for within Louisiana Resolution 34:276. The state forester is appointed by the Commission, according to the Louisiana Constitution, Article 9, Section 8. This resolution shall remain in full force in effect until the appointment of the state forester by this commission, unless revoked by this commission. The motion to adopt the resolution as read was made by Gradon Clemmons and seconded by Peggy Hagan. All approved.

c. Review qualifications and duties of the State Forester position

Wade read the 18 items listed on RS 34:276, listing the duties of the Louisiana State Forester. Wade states this position is very important and very challenging in a number of ways. Dr. Mike Strain thanked LDAF's team and everyone working together to start working on the issues and how to move forward with the search committee for the next state forester. In addition to serving as the state forester, the state forester also serves as the assistant commissioner of the Office of Forestry which is under the executive branch of LDAF. With this, there are additional duties and responsibilities. It is designed to work together to help administer the office with more than 150 employees and a very diversified portfolio of responsibilities. Dr. Strain suggested a subcommittee of the Forestry Commission be referred to as a search committee. The goal is that the committee will do extensive search to make sure that the most highly qualified person for the position. The search committee will be made up of members of the Forester Commission and three other members in addition to the commission members. He proposes a nationwide search for applications, with the applications coming into LDAF's human resources department to qualify the applicants to be presented to the commission. A motion to adopt this resolution to make a search committee was made by Tyler Bosworth and seconded by Peggy Hagan. All

approved. This resolution is to be presented at the June 9th meeting. At the next meeting scheduled for June 9, 2026, the resolution will list the members of the search committee along with the specifications of their duties. Mike asked for any other discussions on this topic.

At this time, George Ramsay, Cromwell Forest Resources, spoke. He asked if outside members, other than members of the commission, will be involved in the search committee, maybe from inside the forestry industry or large landowners. He thinks they should have a voice in this decision and there are several who are very interested in this. It was agreed that once the search committee was set up, individuals that would be interested in participating will be approached.

Mike stated that it's a little premature to announce what the parameters would be for the members of the search committee, but he has had discussions with LDAF Commissioner about the functional aspects of the committee. The individuals to be included in the committee will need to be contacted and agree to serve before they are appointed.

Buck Vandersteen spoke next to be clear that June 9th is the official notification of the subcommittee. Jade verified that the June 9th meeting is when the commission will make another resolution to define the terms of the search committee. The duties of the subcommittee will be confirmed at this time. The duties will be set up so the process is clear and from that point the subcommittee will be formed. The application process will come at a later date.

Buck then asked if the department would handle the communications and the paperwork for the job posting. Jade responded that it will be a joint process. The process will be for the subcommittee. LDAF will facilitate receiving the applications as LDAF has a general address making it easier to receive them. The applications will be received in LDAF's human resources as the department has the infrastructure already in place. It will be some time after the June 9th meeting that the job posting will be available for advertising the position.

Emily Andrews spoke next, asking if it would be LDAF or the search committee that's going to decide where the job is advertised and how it's advertised. Mike responded that it will be the committee who will make this decision. Wade mentioned that he suggested the job posting be made available on the Society of American Foresters and the national Association of State Foresters. Emily then asked how the applications will be qualified. Dr. Strain stated LDAF's human resources will eliminate the applicants who do not have a forestry degree as required. Emily spoke about her concern on the four years of the forestry experience as to what would be constituted as qualifying experience.

Mike stated that he encourages the current employees in the department who are interested in the job, to submit an application. He hopes they will be applicants and would encourage their application be submitted. He stated that they feel it is important to cast a broad net to advertise this position. The idea is to select the best candidate they can find to move the forestry community forward.

It is resolved that the Commission has created a search and selection subcommittee that will assist with the selection of candidates for the Louisiana State Forester position. The suggested candidate will meet the requirements that are set forth in the Constitution, Article 9, Section 8. The resolution will remain in full force and effect until superseded or otherwise revoked by the commission. The motion to adopt the resolution as read was given by Tyler Bosworth, seconded by Peggy Hagan. All approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mike Hudson stated one of the key attributes on the commission, is to have a very transparent, very vigorous search effort. He became stressed and tired just listening to the redefining of their requirements. He states he is halfway through his second rotation, and this seems like a unique challenge. It is heavy on administration, heavy on people management, heavy on liaison with stakeholders, government, non-government agencies, industry and sustainability grounds. It is a broad cross section to deal with and follow the path that suits. The selection should be made diligently as the state forester is generally a long tenured appointment. Mike thinks this speaks to the commitment and it speaks to the stability that is required.

Dr. Strain stated that he would like to thank the commission, Jade Saunders and Tabitha Irvin for the time put into tirelessly working through this issue. This is the first time LDAF has really been involved in the selection process for the state forester. He states that working with Jack McFarlane, Mr. Womack and the governor and administration, they have secured \$5,000,000 in the budget for firefighter pay raise and one of the reasons was that our firefighters across the board were at the absolute bottom of the tier in our surrounding area, with the beginning entry level salary compensation of \$28,584. So, working together, they looked at and compiled a list of what it would take to bring our firefighters to the southern average, and that would be about a 35% increase across the board in salary. Dr. Strain also states he is moving through the process, working with civil service and having further discussions in the next few days to approve a 27.5% increase. He is going to work with them and encourage them to bring them up to 25%. He states our firefighters all have CDLs, are trained in heavy equipment and may have red cards. He states he is hoping the monies will stay in the budget to be able to give LDAF firefighters a significant increase in pay. He is hoping to hold that money in place and then work with civil service to bring that up to 35% increase to pay the firefighters at the southern Arizona level, give them a livable wage for the job they do. He states that LDAF firefighters are grossly underpaid. Once this is moved forward, he will continue to work on replacing older equipment and at the end of session, look at a mechanism to replace the aviation fleet. He will also be looking at satellite technology that will allow the agency to see fires statewide.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dennis Aucoin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Grady Clemons seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:01 am.