

APPROVED MINUTES

LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION

JUNE 9, 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 THE JUNE 9, 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 10:01 a.m.

ROLL CALL

The roll call was conducted by Epney Brasher.

Members present: Peggy Hagan, Dennis Aucoin, Allen Rutherford, Gradon Clemons, Michael Hudson

LDAF staff present: Epney Brasher, Matthew Polk, Jade Saunders, Roy St Pierre, Steve Bary, Tyler Cloud, Nicole Hawes, Jessica Ratcliff.

PUBLIC COMMENTS Deferred to later in meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Gradon Clemons made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of June 10, 2025. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION: Michael Hudson made a motion to adjust the agenda to move the New Business before the Adjudicatory Hearing as shown on the agenda. Tyler Bosworth seconded the motion. All were in favor.

NEW BUSINESS

Resolution regarding Search Committee will be discussed by Commission Strain. He advised the following. During the previous meeting, the commission created the search committee. The search committee will have no powers outside of facilitating selection process for the state forester position. Search committee will consist of three Forestry Commission members (Glynn Pittman, Dr. Allen Rutherford and Mike Hudson), and a final committee member will be Dr. Mike Strain, commission of LDAF. The committee will appoint Dave Cook, president of Walsh Timber, Lisa Lewis of the US Forest Service, and Michael Cromwell, president of Crown Forest Resources, to provide specialized and technical perspective in an advisory non-voting capacity. The committee will publicly post the job position, find candidates in places such as Glass Door, Forestry, Indeed, LinkedIn, Civil Service, LSU

Ag Center, southern AG, Louisiana Tech and other relevant places for posting. Once the application period is closed, the committee will meet to discuss all applications received and will evaluate and narrow down the applicants to top candidates. Those candidates will be invited to interview. After the interview process is completed, the search committee will select a final candidate to recommend to the Forestry Commission. In the event the final candidate recommendation is not selected by the Commission, the Search Committee will reevaluate all candidates and provide additional recommendations to the Commission.

Mike Hudson asked for Jade Saunders to read the specifications and duties of the state forest position into record. Jade read the resolution as requested.

MOTION: Mike Hudson made a motion to accept the resolution as presented. Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded this motion. All in favor.

During discussion of the commission members, Tyler Bosworth asked about the confidentiality listed in the resolution. Dr. Strain advised that as the committee conducts interviews, the person being interviewed is confidential. Also, anything related as a personnel matter would be confidential. The information pertaining to any individual or that process should be confidential. Jade stated that the subcommittee search members can only speak to search committee members about the process, meaning he/she cannot confer with the Forestry Commission board members about happenings in the subcommittee. The meetings are open to the public; anyone can come and make a comment. Dr. Allen Rutherford asked if zoom interviews would be acceptable in this search. It was noted the decision to allow zoom interviews will be voted on by the subcommittee. Buck Vandersteen, Louisiana Forestry Association, asked if there would be a time limit placed on the search for a State Forester. Mike Hudson advised that the search committee would address the more specific issues such as this once the committee is formed.

During public comments, Emily Andrews states that generally when resumes are submitted, they are considered public record. The subcommittee is a public body that is subject to open meetings. There are certain requirements that you must meet if you don't want people in those interviews. She also noted that the top one candidate as related to in the resolution is a little restrictive; maybe the top three or maybe even top two would be a better option.

MOTION: Mike Hudson made a motion to adopt the resolution. Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion.

Dr. Allen Rutherford advised that a reasonable amount of time should be allowed for people to apply. Mike Hudson agreed, stating the typical time is to post for two weeks. If a good slate of candidates is not received, the posting may be extended. Tyler Bosworth advised the commission should be advised of more than one candidate, maybe in a ranked fashion. Mike Hudson said there were conversations on this issue. The subcommittee has discussed having a top candidate with two alternate candidates to be submitted to the commission.

MOTION: Mike Hudson made a motion to accept an amendment to the resolution to bring a top candidate then two alternates to the commission for consideration of State Forester. Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All in favor.

Mike Hudson advised that the intention of this is to have a very good process that is as transparent as it can be, respecting the privacy of the candidates. This is a public position and will be managed accordingly.

Dr. Mike Strain spoke regarding current events. With the additional rain, we've seen an improvement in overall drought conditions, but we still have a significant portion of Louisiana in districts 2 and 3, generally Alexandria and above, in drought conditions. We are getting better but still have significant drought conditions. The legislature has ended funding for the Office of Forestry 2027 fiscal year stands at \$21,523,483. In addition to the payable out-of-state general funds for new equipment, \$10,680,000 will be for dozers and transport. In addition to that, that was allocated for firefighter pay raises in the amount of \$5,000,193.22. LDAF is continuing to work with Civil Service to get the firefighters to pay up to the regional average and to be consistent with our sister states. The money has been appropriated, but Civil Service must approve the pay raises. In general, they've agreed to a 27/5% increase, but we need up close to 40%, so this is ongoing. LDAF has reiterated with Civil Service the reason we are doing this and that it is the will of the legislature, with the support of the governor's administration. Once the firefighters are trained and receive a CDL, they are very valuable to the industry. So, to retain these employees, we need to pay them what they are worth. We need to bring their salaries up. In Louisiana, the entry level now is \$28,584. In Florida, it's \$44,990. We're trying to get to that \$40,000 to \$42,000 average entry level amount. Commission Strain also spoke on the continuing discussions with the United Kingdom Members of Parliament. The issues faced in the United Kingdom as one is that on the ground level, there's economic issues, there's economic pressures by the average citizen to reduce the cost of living. We have a long-term contract on the utilization of wood pellets. We must really work hard to continue that contract. At first, it was an education on the fact that we are not taking down old-world growth and cutting rainfall. They understand now. Now it's becoming its economics and the coal industry over there is pushing on the other side. We are working to continue and trying to expand our presence where we can export more in the wood space there. We are also talking to them about utilizing wood pallets such as Weyerhaeuser. The EU is difficult on the deforestation issue and to some degree, the vocal advocates against cutting down trees are closed minded. He has tried to explain to them what a sustainable forest is, but that for them they think they understand, but are unwilling to understand it. We're also looking to try to find a market in sub-Saharan Africa for wood. His last visit there, a couple of months ago, was to reintroduce them into lumber and wood. There is the ability to move products into the port. The Ivory Coast dug a canal where they can get decent sized ships in now, which is the same size ships we normally send out of Lake Charles and New Orleans. We are trying to open the market there, with an expected trip in November to their sea lab for a big conference. Dennis Aucoin asked the Commission Strain about the current situation with screw worms. The commissioner advised that as of last night, there were five cases in Texas and New Mexico combined. Back two weeks ago, the closest case was 20 miles from the United States border. There is a full court press by all states and federal agents to try to suppress it. It was found in one dog, that dog was in Mexico then came into New Mexico, then into Texas. This is being treated. Three calves and one baby goat have them, so the first case was in a herd of 700. The entire herd has been treated with Dec Tomax, which is a long acting parasiticide that has a residual effect of 25 days. This was a newborn calf, but it shows you the number of flies that are now in Texas. If it is attacking calves, then we are concerned about wildlife as well. On detections, these flies have a range of over 100 miles. The good news is we have several products that we can utilize. We will soon see the return of products such as coral that have been used before that can be used as spray or a back rub as well as the treatment options. There is immediate market disruption, people now are concerned whether they are able to move cattle. We are instituting emergency rules by

the order of the state veterinarian for further permits and inspection if you are coming from Texas or especially from the affected zone of Texas.

ADJUDICATORY HEARING

Jade Saunders was presenting in the matter of Willard D. Fee – Case No. 25-FOR-000025. LDAF has charged respondents with one violation of not entering a contract with the owner or representative of timberland prior to conducting timber harvesting operations, per LA R.S. 3:4278.6. Jade presented LDF1 which is the charge letter dated May 5, 2026, with personal service attached, and LDF2 the fully executed stipulation. The department asks that the commission adopt the finding of facts and conclusion and the penalty of \$350.00 is accepted.

MOTION: Mike Hudson made the motion to approve. Dennis Aucoin seconded the motion. All were in favor.

NEW BUSINESS

MOTION: Mike Hudson made the motion to add the quarterly market report update to the agenda. Dennis Aucoin seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Epney Brasher gave the quarterly market report update. Information reports were received from the Department of Revenue on May 12, 2026, updated from the previous report issued on April 20, 2026. More information or more data was received that made some certificate changes. The board that is currently posted with the updated information for it to be accurate reflects not only the numbers that were received, but more so to where it would reflect whenever it's time to decide about the sovereign statute. Currently, it is posted on the website. It was information tot was received prior to April 21st. It was March and April reports received on May 19, 2026. The main changes were in pine saw timber and chip and saw timber. Pine saw timber increased to \$62.48 from \$44.96; chip and saw increased to \$15.16 from \$10.46. Those numbers are important enough for us to be able to actively reflect those when it's time to determine what the severance tax rate will be for 2027. Not everyone reports, so the value is only what is reported. It is not always correct. The information is reported to the Department of Revenue. As Epney understands, Department of Revenue collection then reports it to LDAF. Those are the numbers typically that reporting the data has been very thin and when broken down in a section of the state, the data gets even thinner.

BUDGET

Epney spoke on the budget. A budget was provided to the commission in the packet. This budget is as of May 15, 2026. In the last quarter of the budget and it has not changed that much. Forestry will end well for the 2026 budget. On our FY 2027 budget, we are going to be ahead of where this year with the additional money for salaries as well as the additional money to purchase equipment. When we meet in September, we will have a very good picture of where we stand; after Civil Service makes the decision about budget, we don't have any concerns right now. Mike Hudson asked about the budget regarding the funds Commissioner Strain commented on previously. To what numbers on the budget report would we compare to the amount given by the commissioner? Epney advised that legislature would allocate more money to her knowledge, be we will probably have less money in the general budget authority because we've closed out some of our federal grants. If we can keep the replacement program as well as keep

the five million as a line item for next year's budget, then it will be 100% of a win. The additional money and the firefighter pay raises are a huge win. It's critical to success of the department. Our retention is of concern. What the Commissioner's done and the legislature has done as well is moving forward and will set us up for retention; that's going to be positive as we continue to grow.

DIVISION REPORTS

Protection Branch: Epney gave a few highlights for protection and has received our final order that was part of the five million budget allocation from two years ago. Matt Polk is going to pick up a freight liner today from LPA. It's coming with a bed instead of a wren a previous truck we got. We have 11 in total, with 10 more expected to come sometime this year. Getting prepared for the upcoming potential for active fire season, we have training scheduled in two weeks. We have some dual band PK9000 radios we are getting programmed and dealing with getting them keyed. BK will be providing a few programmers and putting all our things in them to work out any issues we may have in the field. That'll give us the capability to talk on both systems, the 800 MHz and VHF. Any US Forest Service or outside resources or employees that might go out of state will use the VHF channels and not the 800 that we use in state. We were able to purchase 21 of those to help with communication needs. The purchase of those radios was portion of a grant purchase. The ability for those to be cloned as well as to be utilized on different assignments was critical in our communication in certain areas, especially with our partners with the fire service. You can plug 2 radios together and clone them. Peggy Hagan asked about the issue with the new dozers. Matt advised the dozer issue has been resolved through warranty and insurance claims. It is now back in service.

Enforcement Branch: Reports were submitted by Roy St. Pierre. The commission did not have any questions about any of the items within the enforcement report.

Management and Forest Health Branch: Currently, we are expecting just over 300 applications for FPP for FY27. A decent amount still needs to be processed. We've been seeing a downtick in timber as people are getting their timber cut. The payments for the FY 2026 FPP season are almost finished. The number of applications we have received in the last couple of years, and our authority to fund has decreased. Tyler thinks there is 2.95 million authorities to spend this year. With the amount coming and the amount we are funding is maintained fairly level. Our budget authority for next year's budget, starting July 1, for the amount we can approve of was decreased. We're currently at 4 million where previously it was around 6.8 million. Based on the available funds, based on the reports that we've received in our updated financials for us internally, the amount goes into the Treasurer because that account has been reduced over the last couple of years, which has led to a lower amount available in the account. This has led to the budget authority being less. Tyler is at the point that he is still entering into some of the fiscal year 27 applications, and as of right now, we think we are going to be OK even with the reduced budget authority. Our budget authority was reduced because we weren't using it.

Forestry Management just finished up the southern pine beetle spring survey. We've had a significant reduction in the number of confirmed deals that we've gotten from LSU. The numbers are still trending downward for the last couple of years.

Aviation Branch: Steve advised aviation to get 1 million in the budget for next year for the maintenance of the aviation fleet and a purchase order was issued for five engines to be installed. There is currently a little bit of an issue with the engine manufacturers as far as being able to get certain parts

for the engines. Over the last two years, the shipping date has changed multiple times. Fleet readiness is 50%. Flash drought activity may pick up, and we'll be able to monitor wildfire occurrence from the air. This causes a concern. The positive is that the drought monitor does not show the whole state any longer.

LEGACY UPDATE

Sarah Howard with the conservation fund gave this update. The forest legacy is a voluntary conservation program designated to protect environmentally important forest lands threatened by conversion to non-forest use. In Louisiana, this program is administrated by LDAF. There's a requirement to have assessment of needs that guide that program. Louisiana was due to an update of that document. We've been working over the last year or so to make that updated. During the last update in December 2025, we had ongoing spatial and data analysis going on to help us inform new boundaries for worst legacy areas, which are boundaries that would deliver what land is eligible for forest Legacy program. In that meeting, we went over a program goal objectives, major threats and issues to the forestry industry in Louisiana, which would also guide the assessment of need. In January, we had a public stakeholder planning meeting where we present our proposed forest legacy areas as well as the data analysis behind those boundaries. That was a several hour workshop that we had with lots of forestry stakeholders throughout the state. Since then, we have been revising the proposed forest legacy areas based on stakeholder feedback. The revised boundaries were backed by the stakeholders in April with no major additional changes or comments received. We have provided you with a draft and it is very much a draft of the assessment of needs. This document through and simultaneously updates the state Forest Action Plan which guides our decision of making ability regarding how we apply our grant funding over the next five to ten years. So, this document, although it will eventually live as an appendix within the State Forest Action Plan, can also regulatory wisely meet all the requirements of an updated assessment of needs. We need to refine some draft pieces, additional things that will go in, but a draft will be made available to the public beginning next week for approximately a month. We also plan to share an early draft with the Forest Service just for some initial review and feedback to address any areas in question. The next action for us will be to bring a completed final document back to the Commission in September for formal approval. The back of the handout provided is the map of the forest legacy areas that will be included in the assessment of needs that were based off both a facial analysis as well as feedback form. One of the key changes is that there was an addition of priority areas. If you know that the state's limit in number of applications that they can submit on an annual basis for forest legacies, it can determine where the state should put their resources at that time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dennis Aucoin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.