

APPROVED MINUTES

LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION

December 1, 2025, 10:00 A.M.

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

CALL TO ORDER

The Louisiana Forestry Commission meeting was called to order by Michael Hudson at 10:06 a.m.

ROLL CALL

The roll call was conducted by Wade Dubea.

Members present: Dennis Aucoin, Dr. Allen Rutherford, Gradon Clemons, Michael Hudson

LDAF staff present: Dr. Mike Strain, Wade Dubea, Epney Brasher, Matthew Polk, Jade Saunders, Roy St Pierre, Steve Bary, Tyler Cloud, Nicole Hawes.

PUBLIC COMMENTS Alex Johnson, Director of External Affairs with CO280, a company that works with carbon capture from pulp and papermills. He briefly spoke about the scope of work performed by his company in Louisiana as it relates to Forestry. Dr. Mike Strain, Commissioner of LDAF, spoke about current and upcoming events for LDAF, including upcoming legislation focusing on timber and forestation issues, millage rights, interest rates lowering coming in June, smoke management issues with sugar cane farmers to reduce "super fog". Dr. Strain reassured that LDAF is hiring in Forestry as the firefighters are not included in the hiring freeze for LDAF. He spoke on the issues we are experiencing with the bulldozers and the purchase of transport trucks. He also spoke on the budget cuts that went into effect for Forestry which has caused LDAF to be a year behind on equipment requests to replace the older units that are on hand. LDAF will continue to work on the fleet and continue to replace the equipment as they age. Mike Hudson acknowledged appreciation to Dr. Strain for the hiring that has been allowed for Forestry as that was a main concern of the commission.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Dennis Aucoin made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of September 9, 2025, as presented. Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.

OLD BUSINESS

Wade Dubea requested a quick update from Jade Saunders on the management services. The management services have been finalized. A list of the services will be made available to the commission.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

SETTING OF SERVANCE TAX RATES FOR YEAR BEGINNING JANUARY 1, 2026, AND ENDING DECEMBER 21, 2026

Dana Gibson, Assistant Director for the Louisiana Department of Revenue, answered questions posed by the board. She spoke on issues related to timber tax returns, how the taxes are distributed once received, and tax forms being electronically submitted effective January 2025. Sondra Cutno, Director of the Field Audit Division at the Department of Revenue, spoke on issues related to the process of auditing timber mills in Louisiana and answered questions from the board. She explained that the department completes random audits for companies registered within Louisiana. They will perform audits from “tips” given to their department. She also explained the processing of tax forms submitted to LDR, payment of taxes, supplemental schedules of tax payments, auditing timber coming in and out of Louisiana. Dr. Strain advised that in the past LDAF had requested legislation to allow the agency investigators to work in other states to basically go into mills, but this legislation was not successful. He suggested this could be an item that LDAF may work with LDR to be able to track the timber processing as it relates to timber logs in and out of state. LDR agreed this would be a possibility. Mike Hudson briefly spoke on the challenge of purchasing mills being able to identify the parcel of which the timber originated. Dr. Strain agreed that an electronic system would make the auditing of this much simpler and reduce the burden on loggers in the reporting process. Dr. Strain, with the board’s permission, will speak to LFA and the logger’s council about working towards some type of electronic system for timber harvesting.

Nicholas Boudreaux, Assistant Director of State Treasury, spoke briefly on how the servance tax is paid once it is received. He advised that 75% of the taxes collected go back to the parish where the timber was harvested. Of the remaining 25%, 75% of the funds go to Forest Productivity and 25% of the funds go to Wildfire Suppression. None of the timber servance tax will go into general state funds. Mike Hudson reminded the forest community that this information will need to be shared with the public as many parishes do not know that the parish is paid 75% of the servance tax for timber. Nicholas advised that in 2025, \$2.3 million in the first quarter, \$2.1 million in the second quarter, \$2.6 million in the third quarter and currently \$1.1 million in this quarter was paid to parishes for timber servance tax. It is roughly \$1 million per month that is paid to parishes in Louisiana. Dennis Aucion commented that the word “servance” should be changed for the mills to submit the tax instead of the servancer. Dr. Strain later confirmed that the language is in the constitution and cannot be easily changed. It states that the servance taxes are to be paid by the owners at the time of severance. It would take a 2/3 vote of legislation and the public to have this changed, which would be very difficult.

Dr. Guo, from LSU Ag Center, spoke on the technical advisory report given to the board and the process of the data collection for his proposed servance tax amounts. The analysis integrates 45 years of TimberMart-South market data, LDAF historical tax values from 2004-2025, and validated econometric forecasting to assess whether proposed rates align with current market conditions. Wade Dubea explained that since LDAF does not get reporting from all areas of the state, the agency has requested the assistance of LSU Ag to complete the analysis of the adjustment to the servance tax as needed. Dr. Guo confirmed that the market used for analysis is a company that provides data for the southeastern part of the USA (TimberMart-South).

The board discussed the proposed changes to the servance tax as presented with the analysis. Mike Hudson recommended acceptance of the proposed servance tax amounts. The motion was approved by Dr. Allen Rutherford to accept all servance tax rates for 2026 as proposed by LSU Ag Center. Gradon Clemons seconded this motion.

Mike Hudson requested the analysis be completed annually for the servance tax. Wade Dubea agreed that this will be provided to the commission in the December meeting moving forward.

BUDGET

Epney Brasher gave the budget report. The budget given to the commission had a slight change in the amount collected. It decreased the total but did not change much overall. Epney made a correction on the number of transports currently ordered by LDAF. The current number is 21 transport trucks, with 19 being requested for reimbursement from grants. Dennis Aucoin commented that LDAF has more bulldozers than transports. Dr. Strain advised the board that it is always good to have more bulldozers than transport trucks as it allows the agency to move personnel and equipment more easily. He revisited the issue with the bulldozer. Prior to buying the new bulldozers, LDAF had 96 650 units and 6 750 units. Currently of the 750s we have one of which is offline. Of the 650s, we have a few offline for varies reasons. We are acquiring more, but we are looking at everything as a unit. As the fleet ages, they will be replaced. Epney spoke on the federal shutdown and the effects on the processing of payments from grants. She also noted that we are preparing for the possible federal shutdown for December 31, 2025. Dr. Strain commented on the 18 years ago FPP audit versus what happened at that time. A sweep was done by the legislature of the funds. Dr. Strain explained the process of funds being swept by the legislation and the agency being able to ask forgiveness for seed funds.

DIVISION REPORTS

Wade Dubea gave the quarterly division reports.

Protection Branch: Wildfire totals offered on the attachment given to the commission. Wildfire activity increased due to the drought conditions across the state. LDAF is currently tracking burn bans as they are reported by the parishes. Dr. Strain advised the burn bans are being reported throughout the state using the broadcast community. Wade advised we have been able to announce positions. We have currently filled 2 forester positions, 9 firefighter positions and currently have 3 positions currently being processed at this time. We are also having CDL training provided for all current employees. To date, we have had 3 CDL training courses offered throughout the state with approximately 30 employees attending.

Enforcement Branch: Looking at the complaints, you will notice the hot spots were in southeast and southeast Louisiana. Enforcement has handled 24 complaints received. Arson complaints are high. We currently have an enforcement officer working with agents at Kisatchie National Forest. He is training to be able assist out of state as an investigator. Wade explained the issues we are experiencing with the burning we are currently experiencing causing issues.

Management and Forest Health Branch: There have been 12 FPP pre-approval plans written. 8 site-prep burns have been completed this quarter. These are subject to weather conditions. As well as the fire lines completed on 914 acres that are to be burned. We are continuing to monitor Laurel Wilt, Brown

Spot Needle Blight and Spongy Moths in infested parishes. Cogon grass is also being monitored and treated as reported by landowners.

Aviation Branch: Aviation flew 546.5 hours, including hours for Fire Patrol, Maintenance, training and Enforcement flights.

LEGACY AON UPDATE

Sarah Howard, with Conservation Fund, reviewed and discussed the forest legacy program assessment of needs. In this discussion, she explained the purpose of the assessment of need, threats and critical issues, and proposed goals and objectives for Louisiana's Forest Legacy program. Epney explained the process of the assessment of needs. This will be used for the update that is needed for the FPP that is upcoming. This will also be incorporated in our goals and objections for the next ten years to help with the application of grants we will be applying for. Epney's goal is to have this completed by 2028. It is a portion of the overall goal for the agency's action plan. Epney and Sarah explained the affected area and how the zones were determined. Sarah announced the Louisiana Forest Legacy lunch and work session to be held on January 13, 2026, at the LDAF Headquarters building. Epney provided the list of agencies that have been invited to attend the lunch and work session.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Jeff Zeringue, Louisiana Forestry Association, spoke to show appreciation to LDAF for the help with the Alexandria forum provided.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dennis Aucoin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mike Hudson seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 12:17 pm.