

TENTATIVE MINUTES (PENDING COMMISSION APPROVAL)

LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION

September 9, 2025, 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 SEPTEMBER 9, 2025, 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.

ADJUDICATORY HEARING

Jade Saunders was presenting in the matter of James H. King – Case No. 25-FOR-000042. LDAF has charged the respondent with one violation of LA Forestry Laws and/or Rules and Regulations. Specially, the respondent is charged with one violation of La. R.S. 3:4278.6a and LAC 7:XXXIX.1507. Jade presented LDF1 which is the charge letter issued August 4, 2025, with personal service attached, and LDF2 the fully executed adjuration. The department asks that the commission find the facts and conclusion of the law set forth in this stipulation and that the penalty be seconded.

MOTION: Mike Hudson has recused himself. Gradon Clemons made a motion to approve; Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.

OLD BUSINESS

Epney Brasher gave review. Commission to complete Sexual Harassment training and submit certificates by October 1, 2025. Wade Dubea is currently out of the office, expected to return on October 13, 2025. Epney will remain in the Baton Rouge office for the time being.

DIVISION REPORTS

Protection Branch: Matt gave the report. For this quarter, fire numbers are still low with adequate rainfall. Anticipate fire numbers to increase as we go into fall. All 2024 VA grants were processed, and payments were issued to the fire departments. A total of 78 qualified for grant awards in 2024. 2025 VFA grants were reviewed, and award letters were mailed to approved fire departments on September 1, 2025. A total of 91 applications were received and reviewed. Matt attended the 2025 Southern Group of State Foresters meeting during June 2025. Mike Hudson questioned Matt on the changes on the federal side and what those changes mean to us. Matt responded that we are not sure what changes will be made but we are preparing for changes in the grants we now receive. To his knowledge, we do not know of any changes that will affect the department at this time. Our goal is to cut back on spending and have more fiscal responsibility for the funds that we are awarded. It leaves us with a lot of questions locally with our agreement with KNF and our grants coming from USFS. Gradon Clemmons questioned Matt about the effect of the explosion as Smitty's in Roseland. Matt responded that at this time we are monitoring the situation, but we are not actively involved. Epney stated that the investigation results are pending and as far as she knows it has not been released yet. Mike Hudson asked if there was a moratorium for crops at this time. Epney responded that there was not one to her knowledge. Matt continued with out of state assignments. We sent a total of 7 firefighters to assist other states with wildfires (2 to California, 1 to Oregon, 4 to Washington state). A total of 31 dozers, 36 transports and 30 plows have been ordered since 2022. To date, we have received 31 dozers, 17 transport trucks and 29 plows. We are waiting for beds to be installed on the transport. Staffing is a big concern now. Office of Forestry currently has 24 vacancies, including 19 firefighter positions (2 foresters and 12 crew personnel). CDL training is now required for current employees driving transport. We have a contract with Coastal Driving Academy to offer training to our employees. We sent 10 employees in August for the CDL training. Mike Hudson questioned if we are actively recruiting for the vacant positions. Matt responded that we cannot post at this time. We are waiting for the approval to post vacant positions. Mike expressed concern about the upcoming weather conditions and possible fire activity in the regards of the vacancies. Matt responded that it is more of an issue with the ability to train new employees before fire activity begins.

Enforcement Branch: Roy gave the report. Enforcement division currently has one vacancy. Enforcement is usually staffed with six employees and there are currently five employees on staff. There has been a total of 11 complaints received (2 in Central Louisiana, 5 in North Louisiana, 3 in Southeast Louisiana, 1 in Southwest Louisiana). Of the complaints, there is one arson wildfire complaint in Allen parish. A few complaints of damage to property have been reported as well. One of the current four complaints may potentially be a criminal matter. Three timber thefts were reported. Two are currently in litigation. Search warrants have been issued for equipment theft reported. Next week, Enforcement will be attending a recertification POST training and a medical training. There will also be some additional training handled internally in the coming months. Epney stated that we are trying to purchase three, if not four, new vehicles for Enforcement. Gradon Clemmons questioned on the loaders logs that the timber haulers are mandated to have when transporting timber. Epney responded that we have many drivers from Mississippi that are not aware of the law of Louisiana. Roy stated that we are educating

drivers as we move forward. Roy reported that the officers have been writing a lot of warnings and citations on the missing documentation and the issue is improving.

Management and Forest Health Branch: Tyler gave the report. Management is two foresters short, which was included in Matt's count. There have been 505 FPP plans written for a total of 33393 acres. There have also been 131 plans written for a total of 17883 acres. During this quarter, there have been 22 stewardship plans completed for a total of 2158 acres. Foresters have referred 54 landowners to consultant forests in a total of 3761 acres. Our personnel have plowed 210 acres for burning to be completed. Forestry personnel have conducted 13 site prep burns for 943 acres.

On Forest Health, we are monitor for Laurel Wilt, which has heavily affected sassafras trees in infested parishes. We deployed 170 spongy moth traps throughout the state and will be collected this month. Pilots continue to perform bug flights with foresters to monitor the overall health of the forest. We continue to work with USFS, local universities and states across region 8 to monitor Brown Spot Needle Blight. The Cogongrass Treatment Program had a successful season so far with its spraying efforts. Personnel have sprayed 108 spots for a total of 12.45 acres so far. We continue to distribute to LDAF Forest Health Field Guide booklet. This "flip book" includes Louisiana's current and potential future forest pests and diseases.

Aviation Branch: Steve gave the report. This season has not been as busy as usual. Aviation has flown 205.8 hours in this reporting period. Of these hours, 116.7 hours were fire patrol, 43.8 hours for maintenance, 40.7 hours for forest health, 3.9 hours for flight training and 0.7 hours for enforcement flight. We are currently bidding for the Garmin GI-275 EIS for 10 of the 12 aircraft. There are currently 2 aircraft out of service. We currently have 8 of the 9 pilot positions filled and no aircraft mechanic on staff. Two aircraft have 100 hours left on the engine. One engine has 200 hours remaining and one engine has 400 hours remaining. We have 5 more engines on order in two separate shipments. The pilots will attend the CDL training if offered to help the crew members with duties. Epney reported the estimated delivery time for the next 3 engines is the middle of May 2026 with the remaining 2 engines being delivered in August 2026. The additional funds in the budget will allow us to make these purchases along with keeping up with the routine maintenance required.

BUDGET

Epney Brasher gave the budget report. If you review the budget, you will see a reduction in numbers of employees and some of our expenses. The department is strictly moving forward to make sure what is ordered is needed, not just wanted. The maintenance and repair of the firefighting equipment have not been put on hold for us. The federal portion will probably continue to go up on revenue received as the transport trucks are brought in. The majority of these were bought with grants that covered 100%. The third order has a small percentage that will come from our Fire Protection fund. We are at 11% of our overall budget spent. There are some big contracts that we are discussing and should be working on in the next few months. We are waiting for our funds to be listed in the system to be able to allocate for purchases. We also have a contract pending with LSU Ag Center where they will be conducting research regarding invasive species and some landowner outreach education. We recently signed a contract with the conservation fund to assess needs for the Legacy program. The assessment of needs is attached to our State Forest Action Plan. We are at year 15 or 16 mark in a 20-year plan. We will begin a five-year revision of this plan. As the plan is written, it will be released in stages, and we will probably present it to the commission in the future. We have received our 2025 grant funds, but 2026 funds are currently in

limbo. We typically receive the funds in October 2025. We anticipate receiving the funds but expect the amount to be lower than previously awarded.

NEW BUSINESS

Epney reported on new business. In January of this year, the Department of Revenue decided they will no longer issue paper reports to us. They will now be given electronically. This will increase our workload. The number of submissions has dramatically increased. The amount of information available to the commission will possibly be different next year due to this change. The positive point is we will have more information to provide to make a more informed decision. We do not know how the online submissions will be accessible or processed. Hopefully this time next year, the new system will be performing correctly, and it will be a smooth transition. Regarding the grants, our final Hurricane Impacted Landowner Meeting will be held December 2nd. We will have several different programs available. There will not be a speaker. There will be a postcard invitation sent out as before. At the state foresters meeting we attended in June, one of the topics was a program called Submittable. This is a program used by other states in the south to manage funds and grants. We are curious about its function to help with FPP and the VFA programs. After having several different conversations and a demonstration, we are excited about what they could offer. We also addressed the use of Submittable for landowner requests for tasks performed that we typically invoice for. This will help us allocate the duties of personnel who currently process these functions. This is pending approval from the department. We are hopeful to have approval and be able to move forward with this in January 2026.

Buck Vandersteen of Louisiana Forestry Association reported on new business. 600 attendees of the Louisiana Forestry convention with a large Office of Forestry attendance. On October 18th, the Fall Fest of the South Forest Heritage Museum is occurring in Long Leaf. Buck recommends the public and the commission sit down with the commissioner to discuss the issues stated in today's meeting. On October 30th, the Brown Spot Needle Blight committee will meet in Alexandria. It will be offered as a zoom connection if you cannot attend the meeting. Department of Revenue will audit severance tax paid by loggers.

Jade reported on new business. We are in the summer report phase and will be finalized in December. By December meeting the management services should be finalized.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dennis Aucoin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 12:02 pm.