

## LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION

DECEMBER 2, 2024, 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 10:10 a.m.

### **ROLL CALL**

The roll call was conducted by Patricia Dayberry.

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

**LDAF staff present:** Wade Dubea, Epney Brasher, Roy St. Pierre, Steve Bary, Matt Polk, Tyler Cloud, Nicole Hawes, Patricia Dayberry, Jade Saunders, Jessica Ratcliff, Patrice Lanaute, Kelly Ransome, Ansel Rankins, Tabitha Gray.

**Guest present:** Buck Vandersteen, Tanika Starks, George Tiley, Dr. Gao from LSU.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:** Deferred to later in meeting. New employees were introduced.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**MOTION:** Gradon Clemons made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of September 10, 2024. Peggy Hagan seconded the motion. All were in favor.

### **ADJUDICATORY HEARING**

Tanika Starks, Assistant Attorney General with the Louisiana Department of Justice was the hearing officer. Jade Saunders, LDAF legal counsel, stated the case. **Stipulated:** Case #23-FOR-000005-James Rowland, Rowland Timber. First violation - 1 count - \$350.00 fine - failure to keep loaders log. Mike Hudson made the motion to accept, seconded by Gradon Clemons. Fine was accepted by the commission.

### **SETTING OF SEVERANCE TAX RATES FOR 2025**

The commission thanks Dr. Gao from LSU Ag Center for the information relating to the timber market along with his analysis. His analysis shows the market trend from 2012 thru 2024. This study shows the statewide average. The lag time and lack of sawmills in southeast Louisiana along with lumber going to Mississippi to be processed makes tracking the market harder. Severance tax is still due in Louisiana because it was cut here. The proposed tax rates were discussed. The motion to accept the values was made by Mike Hudson and seconded by Dr. Allen Rutherford. The following were accepted:

PRODUCTS	VALUE PER TON	TAX RATE	TAX PER TON
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PINE SAWTIMBER	\$33.79	2.25%	\$0.76
HARDWOOD SAWTIMBER	\$36.56	2.25%	\$0.82
PINE CHIP N SAW	\$17.16	2.25%	\$0.39
PINE PULPWOOD	\$6.48	5.00%	\$0.32
HARDWOOD PULPWOOD	\$5.76	5.00%	\$0.29

## **BUDGET**

Epney Brasher gave the budget update. On the acquisitions, the funds include the carryover from past fiscal years that has been obligated for equipment ordered but not received yet. On the FPP program, we are beginning to receive requests for payments. On the FPP program, we can use 10% for salaries. The Hurricane Supplemental has been closed out. We are beginning to receive the transport trucks that have been ordered. We are waiting for approval from DOA to order more transport trucks. The National Disaster Recovery equipment will be located in southeast and southwest Louisiana. The northern part of the state will receive equipment bought with state general fund and the funding from a grant. The slot machine money was to pay for aviation and then to state general fund amount that we should receive.

## **DIVISION REPORTS**

**Protection Branch:** Wade Dubea gave the report. The fire numbers are typical for this year. We have been able to send personnel out of state to assist the compact. The Volunteer Fire Department grants for this year have 77 qualifying departments with the average being \$6500 to \$7000 each. Most of them use the funds for protective equipment and brush trucks with water tanks. We have done some in state training as well as sending some out of state. We have the heavy equipment academy every quarter and have trained most all of our employees and opened up invitations to other company employees or others who would be involved in firefighting. We have implemented a version of dispatch and it is a work in process. There are no cameras on the trucks, but the dozers are equipped with cameras. The Office of Risk Management has not mandated that we need them yet. Robbie Harris has put together an introduction to wildland firefighting training course and is cross training some volunteer fire departments. The main emphasis is that wildland fires are different from structure fires. This will have them work to help us on these fires and to protect structures and such. All of our fleet has first aid kits and we have more advanced first aid kits available. We have a first responder trained in each area and an incident management trailer available for use. We are training more employees to be able to provide the first aid as needed. We do not send a single individual on a fire. They have to be at least teams of two.

**Enforcement Branch:** The stipulation was a carry forward from the last meeting. One warrant issued for an arson arrest. It is in process in the courts. On the compliance hearing docket, we are still waiting on Jim Hamilton to pay his fine. When the debtors have been invoiced three times and we receive no response, it is turned over to the Attorney General's office.

**Management and Forest Health Branch:** Expenditures and revenue are in play constantly with the FPP program. Usually we have about 3.5 million dollars each year. Our foresters are encouraging stewardship plans to the landowners. We have been able to do site prep burns and plowing lines for others. A large portion of the last timber sale proceeds has gone to limestone to improve the roadways. We have been taking out the dead standing trees from the areas where they would cause injury or damage structures.

On Forest Health, the laurel wilt is a problem with red bay and the disease affecting sassafras trees has killed many trees. We are still monitoring the spongy moth, previously called gypsy moth. Traps have been put out for them and for southern pine beetles. We do have flights surveying for tree damages. We do get a few calls for cogongrass in some areas. We do have some education materials as part of the master gardener program. All of our areas are tied to some committee with the Southern Group of State Foresters. So our foresters do represent the state of Louisiana in that capacity. Tyler Cloud answered questions about tree damages. The consensus from the legislative committee was that the drought that killed or stressed them so bad that the beetles attacked them. The beetles were the pall bearers at the funeral. Commercial owners were not hit as hard as single dwellings. Those trees that died had to be taken down carefully and could not just be cut down because of the structures, which made it very expensive for individuals.

**Aviation Branch:** We are still waiting on engines to come in. The planes are being rotated in to change out the radios. It is a lot of work to change to a digital radio with wiring harness and all of the changes that have to be done to make them work. Rep. Jack McFarland's assistance has kept us afloat with the additional money he was able to get and we are hoping for a renewal in the budget. We have 12 planes with 8 pilots with the additional planes stationed across the state. We can get help from the National Guard if needed or we can get a pilot and plane from another state.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

The meeting dates for the new year are set by law.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

None

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Buck Vandersteen commented on the major tax reform that the legislature implemented. The sales tax exclusion for food, fiber & timber and equipment for the state. But they put in a provision that local government can put a local sales tax on those. The European request has been postponed regarding the timber harvesting GIS data. The Farm Bill is not just for food and nutrition, 20% goes to agriculture and forestry to assist landowners. The US Forest Service has awarded a grant to Southern University for urban tree growing and planting. He wished everyone and very Merry Christmas and a productive 2025.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** Dennis Aucoin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Rutherford seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:33 am.