

LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION

SEPTEMBER 10, 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 10:00 a.m.

ROLL CALL

The roll call was conducted by Wade Dubea.

Members present: Glynn Pittman, Dennis Aucoin, Michael Hudson, and Peggy Hagan.

LDAF staff present: Wade Dubea, Epney Brasher, Roy St. Pierre, Steve Bary, Matt Polk, Jeannie Severio and Jade Saunders.

Guest present: Buck Vandersteen.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Deferred to later in meeting after informing the commission on the passing of Mr. Bob Carrol.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Glynn Pittman made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of June 11, 2024. Dennis Aucoin 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, requested a continuance for Mr. James Rowland, case #23-FOR-000005. He needed additional time to provide the hard copy of the stipulation. Mike Hudson moved to accept the continuance and it was seconded by Peggy Hagan. The continuance was approved.

Stipulated: Case #23-FOR-000036 - James Hamilton III

First violation - 1 count - \$350.00 fine - failure to keep loaders log

Glynn Pittman made the motion to accept, seconded by Dennis Aucoin. Fine was accepted by the commission.

BUDGET

Epney Brasher gave the budget update. There have been more transports and dozers ordered and we hope they will be in early in 2025. Forestry did receive five million in state general funds to expend on equipment. We have ordered some 450 trucks that will carry 300 gallon water tanks used for fire suppression as well as mop-up. We can also use them when we are called out to help other states. We have also ordered some smaller side by sides instead of ATVs. They are easier to obtain than the ATVs and are safer and can carry water tanks. We are hoping to obtain the funds again next year to help with

our equipment purchases. On the federal funds, we have to spend that money and are reimbursed by the feds. The extra funds for equipment are 100% and we do not have to provide a match.

DIVISION REPORTS

Protection Branch: Wade Dubea gave the report. The report shows the fire season has been more reasonable, closer to normal. We have been able to get some of our personnel to go out of state on assignment to get that experience. We have assisted in Texas and in the southern region as well. We have some grant opportunities coming our way because of the fire season that we had last year. We are still in pursuit of the F-Mag mitigation funds. When they become available, we hope to purchase weather stations to be placed throughout the state. There will be training opportunities for our employees as well as joint training with cooperators and fire departments. Also we will distribute Smokey Bear fire danger signs to fire departments and the LA Forestry Association. We have received all 22 new dozers that we ordered in 2022 and are waiting for the transports to come in. We have one prototype to use and several others are at the fabricators to fix the new beds on them. We hope to have all of those new units by next year. We have 98 older dozers. We will be maintaining the old fleet. We have the undercarriage repairs done on the J dozers. We want to diversify the fleet. We have had to use some of the oldest ones for parts to keep the others running. The old dozers are from 2007. The hours on them are low but the use has been intense that aged them considerably. Staying fully staffed has been an issue for us. We have 181 positions with 8 to 10 vacancies at any time. 80% are firefighters.

Enforcement Branch: There is a more normal case load now, more timber theft instead of arsons.

Management and Forest Health Branch: This signup had 538 FPP applications for 34,865 acres. Typically we go through three million dollars each season. This year we did not have to stop for lack of funds this year. The prescribed burn certification meeting was held and well attended. We now have to be recertified for forestry burning every five years. We do site prep and other burns. If it is needed, we will do BMP work. We have a fee schedule for use of our equipment.

On Forest Health, trapping for moths and beetles is ongoing. The biggest issue now is the Ips beetle. A forest service representative stated that "The drought killed the trees and the Ips beetles are the pall bearers at the funeral." There is a misunderstanding with the public that the beetles killed the trees and that is not so. This is more of an urban problem, taking out dead trees. The Emerald Ash Borer is still in north Louisiana and has not spread in the state.

Aviation Branch: We now have a budget for aviation maintenance for the first time. We have 2 engines coming in October. It is taking two years to get the engines in. If we switch brand of engines, we would have to change all the gauges and it would cost as much as a new plane. Because we are not commercial, we have some leeway on the number of hours on the planes. We are fully staffed on pilots.

NEW BUSINESS

Jade Saunders discussed two new acts put in place by the legislature. In the first, there were changes in definitions and information on the prescribed burns. By the end of the year, these should be in effect. Act 214 states that there must be a written contract between the landowner and the harvester with both signing the contract. This will be for the protection of both parties. It was suggested that a plat map with description be included with the contract.

Management service fee structure has not been updated since 2015. The commission is asked to approve the changes to the fees to bring them up to cover the expenses since fuel has become so expensive. Most of the work is done on 20 acres or less, but the biggest expense is moving the equipment to the different sites. There may be an added fee to cover the fuel used to move the equipment. Glynn Pittman made the motion to accept the new fees with the possibility of adding a fee to move equipment. Mike Hudson seconded the motion. All were in favor, so it passed and will be submitted as a rule change.

Indian Creek Recreation Area rule changes were discussed. This clarifies the rules regarding campsites and pets and horses. It also updates fees to cover cost and maintenance. The motion to accept the changes was made by Mike Hudson and seconded by Dennis Aucoin. All were agreed.

OLD BUSINESS

The commission asked that the LSU Ag Center economist provide the market data prior to the December meeting. The forest to market data is what is needed to help set the rates at the December meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Buck Vandersteen of the LA Forestry Association thanked the department for the new Smokey sign for the Alexandria office. The 77th meeting of the LFA was in Lake Charles in August. It was well attended and informative. Teal Lumber Company is now open and ready to accept logs for milling. Buck stated that the public needs to be educated on the ecosystem value of the forests in Louisiana. The Dept. of Revenue is to accept timber severance reports online only starting in January 2025.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dennis Aucoin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Glynn Pittman seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:47 am.