

**LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION
BATON ROUGE, LA
DECEMBER 4, 2023
MINUTES**

CALL TO ORDER

The Louisiana Forestry Commission meeting was called to order by Michael Hudson at 10:07 a.m.

ROLL CALL

The roll call was conducted by Wade Dubea.

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

LDAF staff present: Wade Dubea, Epney Brasher, Steve Bary, Tyler Cloud, Patricia Dayberry, Matthew Polk, Roy St. Pierre, and Jade Saunders.

Guests Present: Buck Vandersteen

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Deferred to later in meeting. Recognition was given to the passing of a long-time board member, Bill Jenkins.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Gradon Clemons made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting on June 6, 2023; Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Severance Tax Rates

Setting up severance tax rates: Much discussion on the categories and how the amounts are reported and the process. The Commission has the authority to set the rates and the Department of Revenue will collect the tax. The Department of Agriculture and Forestry gets a report on what Revenue collects. The commission went into executive session to discuss severance tax. Commission resumed meeting at 10:42 a.m. and after a brief discussion, the severance tax rates were set for 2024.

ADOPTED SEVERANCE TAX VALUES FOR 2024

<u>PRODUCT</u>	<u>VALUE PER TON</u>	<u>TAX RATE</u>	<u>TAX PER TON (2023)</u>
Pine Sawtimber	\$32.55	2.25%	\$0.73
Hardwood Sawtimber	\$34.49	2.25%	\$0.78
Pine Chip-n-Saw	\$18.84	2.25%	\$0.42
Pine Pulpwood	\$7.90	5.00%	\$0.40
Hardwood Pulpwood	\$7.13	5.00%	\$0.36

MOTION: Gradon Clemons made a motion to accept the tax rates as stated; Dennis Aucoin seconded the motion. All were in favor.

BUDGET

Epney gave the report. Seed money has been requested to put back some of the expenditures on this fire season. The Office of Forestry will be responsible for 25% of the total. So, any money put back will only

replace some of what was spent, but not put the budget back to what it should be this time of the year. The rain has given us a break, but there is no way to report on the direction we may go because it is dependent on the weather. If it stays wet, good, but if it dries out, we may have to ask for more budget to handle it. There is a change in leadership coming in January, so that could change our budget position also. The dozers are funded half by general fund and half by federal grant. The transport trucks are 100% funded by federal grants. The dozers will be in before the transport trucks, so the old trucks will be fitted with lower tires to get the height down to specs. The problems will be using the budget authority and not being able to re-spend it when we are reimbursed.

DIVISION REPORTS

Protection Branch: The number of fires is very close to last year, but the number of acres is very different. For the first time since we've been in our positions, we had to ask for help from the state to state compact. Because of the drought and conditions, the fires were crown fires and constant. The compact brought in contract work and equipment along with tanker and air water drops and help from the US Forest Service. With the compact's resources, they were able to get the fires back down to the ground so that we could work with our equipment and extinguish those fires. Three separate overhead teams came in and helped manage the larger fires so that our people could manage protecting our own areas. There were a couple of minor injuries to our people, but no loss of life to our folks or the public. Mike Hudson commented that the fire fighters did their job. Homes were lost, but many more were saved. Our employees, the fire department employees and the out-of-state fire fighters are to be commended for all that they were able to save. We are looking forward to how we can improve and what we can do. We had the top three priority fires in the country for water drops.

Enforcement Branch: The major fires were suspected of arson and one arrest has been made with more investigations going on. The arrest got a lot of attention and the burn bans helped to get the public's attention.

Management and Forest Health Branch: FPP is the major program that Management handles. Because of the drought, we are seeing more replants than usual. Prescribed burns did not happen over the summer season. Hopefully, the wet weather will continue, and we can get back on schedule for the prescribed burns. There were some Ips beetle attacks, but the beetle traps showed that the good beetles outweighed the bad ones. Eight parishes had elevated numbers of Southern Pine Beetles. That was to be expected because Mississippi had a devastating Southern Pine Beetle season this year and these were the Florida parishes. There are a lot of trees under significant stress from the drought along with a lot of dead trees that will need to be removed. Corporations are not eligible for FPP help, but we are reaching out to private landowners who need assistance. The USDA and NRCS have programs to reach out to those affected by the fires. There are not many options available to landowners with tight parameters to qualify.

Aviation Branch: The planes flew so many hours over the summer that it advanced engine replacements. The engines have not been received yet. There are two that should be by the end of January. The new state radio system needs to be installed in the planes. One plane is done, and it is working well. Once the rest of the planes get installed, they will be able to communicate with the ground crews. Our planes stay over the fires and direct the ground crews. Drones just get in the way over the fires. We had communication issues because of the air tankers being used in the state. The National Guard used black hawk helicopters and then used tanker drops. These were new experiences for our new employees as well as good experience for our more experienced firefighters. We used some cooperators – contractors with dozers and some landowners with their own dozers. The National Guard could not do the initial attack, but they did the mop up for us.

OLD BUSINESS

None currently.

NEW BUSINESS

None currently.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Buck Vandersteen from the Louisiana Forestry Association thanked all for the firefighting efforts and the great work they did on the fires. The LFA is working to meet with cooperators to get them organized again. The Enforcement division was assisted with offering reward money for information leading to arrests. We are looking forward to trying to bring the firefighters together for recognition in early 2024. LFA needs a new Smokey sign replacement. The LFA was established in 1947 and we are now growing 70% more timber than we are taking out. We are looking to open new mills and get them established. LSU has made a map to show the larger mills. He spoke on the ecosystems that the forest provides. He spoke about the new administration coming in and that we need to let them know what we do.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dennis Aucoin made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 11:33 a.m.