

LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION
BATON ROUGE, LA
JUNE 14, 2022
MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

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

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Wade Dubea

Members Present:

Michael Hudson, Bill Jenkins, Glynn Pittman and Dr. Allen Rutherford

LDAF staff Present: Wade Dubea, Steve Bary, David Campbell, Walter Daigre, Patricia Dayberry, Bret Lane, Roy St. Pierre, and Amy McInnis

Guests Present: Buck Vandersteen

PUBLIC COMMENTS - There were no public comments at this time and moved to later in the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Glynn Pittman made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting held on March 8, 2022; Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.

BUDGET

Wade reported that we are right in line with the revenue and expenditures for this fiscal year which ends June 30, 2022. The new budget has been approved by the Legislature for the new fiscal year which begins July 1, 2022. The funding has been approved for the replacement of some of our equipment, which include some dozers, transports, and as well as repairs to the undercarriage on others. The bid process has been started. There is also grant funding to be used for equipment replacement. It may be a long wait for the delivery of this firefighting equipment, since other states that are using the same funding, we will be ordering new equipment as well. The request was for 10 units from state general funds, but the trade-in value was not taken into consideration so we are hoping to increase that by 3 units. We are trying to diversify the fleet by not ordering all of them within the same year. The specifications have been updated to include everything we need with no real changes to the units. The 650 dozers are a good size for us to use and we will be able to reuse the plows that we have. We have an increase in federal funds for now, but not sure how long those funds will last and hopefully, grant money will fill in if needed. The budget for next fiscal year is the same as per operating budget. The Mack trucks must be run for maintenance to keep them going. Fuel costs have doubled, and fuel costs come of the supply budget, so when that is gone, we may have to go back to the legislature to get an increase.

DIVISION REPORTS

Protection: Fires have increased and exceeded previous years. We have had some 300- and 600-acre fires which are concerning. Some were prescribed burns that got out, debris burns that got out and some were arson. The last couple of years the average size of fire was about 10 acres which is below our goal of 13 or less. The average size so far this year has been 16. Drought conditions are still in effect. We have been having a higher heat index and winds drying out what little rain we have received.

We had two crews that went to West Texas, with Texas being as far as we have gone, for two weeks each to help them out. Texas has not had any of the rain that we have had, so we are on standby to help them. The income generated from that helps us and if we need their help, they will help us. We are up to 107

personnel; fire crews are staffed except for retirees or resignations that just occurred. We are fortunate to have the state's portion of the timber severance tax that went to the state general fund now comes to the Office of Forestry, which is used for the additional salaries for 14 positions. Our crews are rotating and on any given day, one third are on standby while two thirds are on duty and available for wildfire suppression or other duties. It was suggested by the Commission that we add the number of structures either threatened or lost to our reports; so that we can get information out to others, so that the citizens of Louisiana know that we are important agency assets to the state for the protection that we add.

A rule change has been submitted and being finalized now. Two new requirements have been added. The listing has been purged and only current certified burners are listed. A recertification will be required every five years and LSU Ag center will put on the course. This will help us stay current and the certified burners will be up to date with their training. August 20 will be the published effective date. Notifications have been sent out to the prescribed burners and notification will be sent at the five-year mark for recertification. The new card will have a five-year expiration date on it.

Enforcement: Fires investigations have picked up, as well as summons being issued, and one suspect has been taken into custody. So far for this year we have had 94 complaints. We have had all the stipulations paid from the adjudicatory hearings expect one. We are fully staffed now with five agents, Jimmy McGovern, who came from the Tangipahoa Sheriff's Office, has been hired to cover southeast Louisiana.

Management: For fiscal year 2023, FPP signup applications closed on May 10 with 511 applications being approved for \$3.5 million. Tomorrow is the deadline for receipts to be in for the 2022 FPP funding. The money not used remains in the FPP application fund for additional money expenditure. FPP is on a cash in, cash out basis to use that authority for those funds and no more than that. Demand is still high for FPP funding and there were some applications that did not get funded because we cannot exceed that budget authority, so those application were sent back. With the recommendation of the Forestry Commission, the changes made it an incentive program with a \$10,000 cap and it has helped us fund landowners and use the program as it was designed to be used.

Aviation: Steve Bary, is the new Fleet Command Pilot, and he introduced himself to the Commission. The pilots flew 820 hours with 650 hours being fire patrol. There were 45 hours flown for the medical marijuana program, which involves flying a AES specialist to Ruston to take samples for testing at the facilities in Baton Rouge. Some flights are looking for insects for forest health, some investigations and some flights are for Dr. Strain. A new pilot was hired for Jena., he has many hours of flying but not on fire patrol, so he is being trained for firefighting. The pilot to replace Steve at Natchitoches began work the day before. She has 20 years of experience in firefighting on the ground and she had the qualifications to be hired as a pilot and is now being trained on flying fire patrol. We finally have all 9 pilot positions filled, will an aircraft fleet of 12 airplanes. One is getting a new engine now and another one is to get a new engine next month. We are getting avionics upgrades to the planes, one being replaced at a time, as to not deplete the use of our fleet. The pilots have looked at 1637 smokes and 288 of those were fires, including Steve, who flew about 50 of those fires.

Forest Health: Southern pine beetles have shown up and we are continuing bug flights. We have put out requests for bids to do the spraying for cogon grass but have not had anyone put in a bid. We are looking into possibly running that program like FPP as a cost share, where the landowner would get a sprayer to spray the cogon grass and then turn in the receipts to us to be cost shared. That has not been approved yet, but we are looking into it. The landowners could hire anyone with an applicators license to do the spraying, that would open the field to getting this work done rather than having just one person spraying. There are many concerns to work thru to work this out. We are still monitoring the emerald ash borers with traps out, but no quarantines.

OLD BUSINESS

The Commission asked for a fee schedule for stipulated fines. The Southern Arson Task Force is waiting for Louisiana to be the lead on this. On the first proposal: first offense \$500, second offense \$700, third offense \$1200. The two violations we are dealing with are maintenance of records and loaders logs. Maintenance of records is the mill's responsibility, and the loaders logs are the logger's responsibility. These can be considered separate or together. The pesticide section has many more rules and has their violations broken down into three different levels. Minor violations: first offense \$250, second offense \$500, third offense \$1000. Moderate violations: first offense \$500, second offense \$1000, third offense \$2500.

Major violations: first offense \$1000, second offense \$2500, third offense \$5000. There was much discussion on the issue. It was decided to make a proposal draft from warning to maximum using the offense. The warnings need to be written citations more than verbal and need to be added to the division report to the commission. Many states look at Louisiana as the model for enforcement to help get their laws passed for their issues.

NEW BUSINESS

Currently nothing to present.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Buck Vandersteen, with the Louisiana Forestry Association provided the following public comments; The articles on forestry have been appreciated. The educator's tour has been completed with Project Learning Tree and Project Wild. There was a good Legislative session that helped clarify the severance tax issue. There has been a good show in interest in young men and ladies showing support for agriculture and we have many scholarships. The revision of best management practices will be finished by January 2023. The 75th Jubilee Anniversary meeting of the LFA will be held August 30 thru September 1 in Lake Charles and he urged all to attend the convention.

Wade added that we had hosted a group who came from the United Kingdom to audit the wood pellet supply chain in the US, checking on the sustainability. The LFA supported us and sponsored that group and Wade wanted to thank Buck and LFA for that.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Bill Jenkins made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.