

**LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION  
BATON ROUGE, LA  
MARCH 13, 2018  
MINUTES**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The Louisiana Forestry Commission meeting was called to order by Chairman Scott Poole at 10:04 a.m.

**ROLL CALL**

The roll was called by Epney Brasher

**Members Present:**

Chairman Scott Poole, Gradon Clemons, Wayne Hagan, Michael Hudson, and Bill Jenkins

**LDAF Staff Present:** Wade Dubea, Epney Brasher, David Campbell, Damian Johnson, Don Smith, and Roy St. Pierre

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**MOTION:** Gradon Clemons made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting held on December 14, 2017; Bill Jenkins seconded the motion. All were in favor.

**BUDGET**

Epney Brasher reported on the budget. The budget is in good shape so far this year. It has been really wet, so the expenses for fuel and equipment maintenance have been down. The painting of the aircraft has begun with two of the four expected to be finished this fiscal year along with installation of the new electronic equipment that was purchased. There is some discussion of purchasing some new enforcement vehicles. The Enforcement Division will be getting a restitution check for a case that it worked. We would like to turn around and purchase one and maybe two new enforcement units with that restitution.

Wade Dubea explained that the Legislative session is starting. The Legislators are planning to go about halfway through the regular session and get all of the non-financial matters out of the way. Then go into a special session to handle the budget matters. This is not a fiscal session, so they have to go into a second special session to handle the budget. The talk and numbers coming out so far does not look good for the Department of Agriculture & Forestry. The number that was shared with Wade for the Department as a whole could be up to a five million dollar cut from the state general fund. There are three offices that are primarily dependent on the state general fund: Office of Forestry, Management & Finance and Animal Health. That means that the Office of Forestry would have to absorb the lion's majority share of whatever cut happens. It is going to be critical. The goal in all of this is to maintain our personnel numbers and protect our positions first and foremost and to absorb the cuts wherever else we can. He is hoping to absorb the cuts that way and not have to get into personnel. The potential to have to deal with this is real. Everything is on the table this time. The statutorily dedicated funds are being discussed along with some bills that would impact agriculture which would impact forestry.

The question came as to how to raise funds for the Office of Forestry other than rely on the general fund. There was discussion of Mississippi, Texas, and Oklahoma and how their state forestry offices are funded. In Louisiana, the Office of Forestry has been set up to take on the management of lands for the smaller landowners that consultants would not want to work on. That way we are not in competition with consultants and private industry. We need to look further into other sources of income other than relying on the state general fund. The only way that we can generate money at this point is prescribed burning and preparation for prescribed burning. As for federal grants and funds, that money has to be spent out of the state funds and then be reimbursed by federal funds. If the state funds are not available to spend first, they cannot be reimbursed by federal funds.

We are still able to send personnel out of state. With fewer personnel, we try to send six to eight at a time taken from all over the state and not get too many out of one area at a time. We do get reimbursed for their base pay, so that is a savings to the state. They get the opportunity to earn some money by getting paid time and a half for their overtime while on those details. So they look forward to that. So far this year, we have had six or eight two-week rotations.

The bottom line is that we are at bare minimum. If we lose any more ground, then we will have to give up something. We cannot continue to provide the services and the support that we do across the board with any less funds.

Scott Poole made statements about all that the Office of Forestry has given up with all these past cuts. We have already closed all the state nurseries as a step in reducing a \$23 million budget to a \$16 million budget. We are steadily giving up positions and salary increases and completely restructured the way we do fire control.

Fire suppression is the one service that we are not reimbursed. That's where our expense comes in. It is a service that we provide. There was much discussion on taxes and revenue collections. There was discussion of creative means of "borrowing" money for seed monies each year. The discussion of charging one dollar per home owner and collecting through insurance policies was discussed again. There was a discussion on how the budget is decided each year along with how budget authority and revenue authority are handled. Possibilities of a foundation for forestry funds were discussed.

#### **DIVISION REPORTS**

FPP reports were given showing a 50/50 cost share and what the costs would have been if the share was a 75/25 cost share. The cap is at \$15,000 now. If the reimbursement rate compares to the federal programs, it will be easier for landowners to decide which program to enroll in. The influx on severance taxes is pretty consistent, so the program should not run out of funds if the cost share goes to 75/25. There was a discussion of the constraints on when the applications are approved along with when the work is done along within the state's fiscal year.

Severance tax reporting and stumpage reporting are thought to be one and the same, but they are different. Stumpage reporting is what is used to set the rate of severance tax for the next year. The stumpage reports that we are getting are not complete or accurate. The prices for each type are not accurate either. Options were discussed to make the reporting more accurate.

**MOTION:** Scott Poole made a motion to utilize a third party (outside of LDAF and Revenue) to report stumpage rates to the Forestry Commission and pursue legislation to remove our requirement to publish the quarterly market report to report stumpage; Wayne Hagan seconded the motion. All were in favor.

There was a short discussion on the division reports. The traps have been deployed to sample the infestation of southern pine beetles. The cycle is about six weeks of trapping. There will be some training for our foresters along with our pilots to be able to spot the southern pine beetle damage. There will be training for cogongrass identification and control too. The goal is to have a program to work with applicators and landowners to hopefully eradicate it.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** Gradon Clemons made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Wayne Hagan seconded the motion. All were in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.