**Louisiana Forestry Commission**

**5825 Florida Blvd.**

**Baton Rouge, LA 70806**

**May 28, 2013**

**Minutes**

**Call To Order**

The Louisiana Forestry Commission meeting was called to order by Chairman Scott Poole 10:05 a.m.

**Roll Call**

The roll was called by Scarlet Arceneaux.

**Members Present:** Chairman Scott Poole, Vice Chairman Mike Merritt, Mike Wolff, Dr. Allen Rutherford

and Kenny Ribbeck

**Not Present:** Tina Meiners, Sam Pruitt. A quorum was present.

**LDAF Staff Present:** State Forester Wade Dubea, Commissioner Mike Strain, Don Smith, Jeremy Coffey,

Charlie Greer

Randy Rentz and August Rowland.

**Others Present:**

**Approval of Minutes**

**Motion:** Chairman Scott Poole made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting for March 12, 2013.

Kenny Ribbeck seconded the motion. All were in favor.

**Budget**

Wade Dubea presented and reviewed the state of the budget. He reported that he believes Forestry’s budget will be approximately $16 million for next fiscal year. He said they can expect maybe a quarter of a million dollars cut from last year’s operating budget. The protection tax money trickles in throughout the year and that money goes into a dedicated account and does not carry forward. Wade said they are going to purchase four-wheelers and other equipment that is in need of being replaced. Maintenance costs are starting to eat into operation of the equipment so we are going to be replacing them for the crew personnel. The funds will need to be expended by the June 15. The protection tax is around $830k. If we do have funds remaining in that account we can pay down on the bond for the bulldozers. Forestry just submitted the narratives for next year’s grants with a 5% reduction from last year. Scott Poole asked Wade if he would give a line item break down of the funds used from the protection tax money for the next meeting. Discussion Followed.

Wade Dubea reported that they are looking at vacancies being eliminated. Thirty positions will be taken. Those positions are not filled at this time. That would leave us twelve vacant positions Forestry will have for consideration to fill.

Kenny Ribbeck asked about the $16 million dollar budget. He asked if this was Forestry’s budget from the beginning of the year or an adjusted budget for cuts that were received. Wade stated that it is what was given at the beginning of the fiscal year and no, if it was from cuts it was minor. Forestry had some equipment sales that had taken place and also some money that was owed them from the department for the emergency response. Kenny Ribbeck also stated that according to the budget sheet Forestry has about $4.5 million dollars left from now to the end of this fiscal year and that money could possibly be left on the table. He asked if that money could possibly be used to pay back some of the FPP money that is owed to that fund. Wade said that yes that is an option; he would have to look into it. There is a bill that Representative Schroder introduced that would allow a merit increase if there were funds left. Wade stated that he will make a note and talk to the Commissioner about possibly paying back into that fund. Kenny Ribbeck said that he thought it would show the legislature good intent on your part to put the money back into the fund. Discussion followed.

**Public Comments**

There were no public comments at that time.

**Division Reports**

Wade Dubea said that the packets were mailed out several weeks ago and he would take questions on the Division Reports. If anyone had questions, please ask at that time.

**Management**

Wade Dubea stated that they have $40k remaining in the Forestry Legacy Program. He said that he would like to use the funds to possibly purchase tracts of properties around the State Forest to either add on to it or to possibly use the funds to expand the education facilities of Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries that are located there. The money has to be committed or obligated by September 30, 2013. Discussion followed.

Mike Merritt asked how the FPP program was going at this time. Wade Dubea reported that they have 180 applications at this time at around 8000 acres. He said that they will more than likely do an extension period again this year like last year for a period of about three weeks. Discussion followed.

**Gis**

Scott Poole asked about an update on the ArcGis mobile technology. August Rowland explained that it allows you to create user friendly interface in the field that can be uploaded back to a central depository. You can use it to collect any sort of data after a hurricane or wildfire for example and the data will be sent back to the server. Discussion followed.

**Enforcement**

Charlie Greer stated that they were called by the FBI to assist them in following brokers out of Texas and Louisiana for non-payment of severance tax. The timber was supposedly cut in Louisiana and was turned into Louisiana mills. It turned out that the wood was cut in Texas. This case was turned in to the U.S Attorney’s Office and depending on how deep this goes it could have long range ramifications on the Louisiana industry. The entire purpose of this act was to avoid severance tax. Charlie also stated that the U.S. Attorney is looking for a dollar value so they can get this case moving and prosecuted. Discussion followed.

**New Business**

Wade Dubea reported that the Teacher Tour is set and if anyone is willing to sponsor a teacher this year please do so. We are in need of sponsors and would greatly appreciate it. We will be starting mid-week and going to Saturday. The field day this year will be held at Kisatchie National Forest.

**Old Business**

**Personnel Updates**

Wade Dubea gave an update on the Enforcement positions. He said they had two vacancies in the Enforcement sections were announced to be filled. We made offers to two of the candidates for the Allen and Rapides Parish positions but, both candidates declined due to the salaries that were offered. Both candidates accepted positions somewhere else with much higher salary ranges. As a result, we allowed those positions to close. He stated that he made the decision to hold off re-announcing the positions for the short term. The reason, LDAF is entertaining a proposal with Civil Service to allow substitution for experience, right now it does not. At this time it requires a degree, certain courses and experience but does not allow for substitution of experience. Wade said that once they get those changes in place, then they will re-announce the positions. Wade stated that they have three enforcement officers at this time that are going to retire any day now. Wade reported that he has talked to Commissioner Strain and he has agreed that as soon as the positions become vacated they will be announced with the new job requirements in place. Scott Poole asked if they were going to do anything about the pay scale. Wade replied that Civil Service said, those positions have what is called “progression track pay”. After they become post certified they will advance in pay. It will go before the Civil Service board at the June meeting and it is already on the agenda. Charlie Greer stated that in his opinion Civil Service needs to adjust the entry level pay also not just the experience. “The entry level pay for those positions is $25k a year and you are not going to get anyone to take the jobs for that rate, not anyone good that can do the job anyway.” Discussion followed.

Wade reported about the Tax Commission bill proposal (everyone received a copy of prior to the meeting) that went in as HB166. Representative Anders authored the bill for Forestry. It went to committee and they added the amendment to the bill. Because the bill was dealing with severance tax, they wanted a definition of severance. The bill with the amendment went to the floor where it was pulled because they realized it was dealing with trees and not oil or gas. The amendment did not need to be there anyway, so that all was corrected. The Senate will now consider it. Wade said he doesn’t anticipate there being a problem from here on out.

On the nurseries, Wade reported that they were able to fill some of the vacant positions that were vacant for quite some time. We moved the Beauregard operation to Monroe. He said they have the equipment that was in Beauregard set up and in operation at the Monroe Nursery so they can grow their containerized seedlings there. As for the bare root stock, Wade said some was left in Monroe, but the majority is at Columbia. He also said they are still hanging on to the Beauregard facility as it still has the Seed Orchard located there. It will be used as a distribution point for seedlings. We did move some positions up to Monroe and Columbia. For the vacancies that were created due to the all of this, Forestry was able to hire two Forman I positions, one at Columbia and one at Monroe, and two technician positions also at Columbia and Monroe. Discussion followed

Wade Dubea also added that he has six other fire crew level positions that have become vacant in the past couple of months. He said that he does have approval to announce those positions starting July 1.

Wade Dubea asked the Commission for approval to go into the rules that govern FPP and specify that any applicant who is receiving cost share funds under FPP use state nursery seedlings as long as they are available and as part of the application process. This will guarantee a set income annually. Discussion followed with the Commission stating that there would be issues using tax payer dollars to cut private growers out. Randy Rentz added that the mission for the state nurseries is to provide seedlings to land owners, at cost. Mike Merritt commented that with what he is hearing today he just can’t make a decision on this action. Wade then stated that he would put together a proposal for their consideration so they could have a clear understanding of the facts and details before any decisions were made. Wade stated that this would help them to make a fair decision knowing all the pros and cons for the proposal. Discussion followed.

**Adjournment**

**Motion:** Motion was made by Dr. Allen Rutherford to adjourn the meeting; Mike Merritt seconded the motion.

All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 11:52 a.m.