

LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION
BATON ROUGE, LA
SEPTEMBER 13, 2022
MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The Louisiana Forestry Commission meeting was called to order by Chairman Michael Hudson at 10:09 a.m.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Wade Dubea

Members Present: Gradon Clemons, Peggy Hagan, Michael Hudson, Bill Jenkins, and Glynn Pittman.

LDAF staff Present: Wade Dubea, Epney Brasher, Steve Bary, Garrett Booksh, Ben Booth, Brent Cutrer, Walter Daigre, Patricia Dayberry, James McGovern, Baleigh Olah, and Roy St. Pierre.

Guests Present: Buck Vandersteen, George Tiley, Alicia Wheeler from Dept of Justice.

PUBLIC COMMENTS - Deferred to later in the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Gradon Clemons made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting held on June 14, 2022; Glynn Pittman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

ADJUDICATORY HEARING

Alicia Wheeler, Assistant Attorney General with the Louisiana Department of Justice office was the hearing officer at the adjudicatory hearing. No one was present on behalf of either respondent. Baleigh Olah, LDAF legal counsel, conducted the questioning and admitted into evidence on each case.

Continued Matter: Case No. 20-000117 – Lionel Washington

- 1) Case No. 22-000108 – Craig Nelson Watts – First Violation – 1 Count - \$350.00 Fine; LDAF Enforcement Agents were sworn in and testified regarding Mr. Watts violation - failure to keep a loaders log.

MOTION: Mike Hudson made a motion to charge him with one violation; Bill Jenkins seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION: Gradon Clemons made a motion to impose a \$350.00 fine; Glynn Pittman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

- 2) Case No. 22-000119 – Will Henry Brown Jr. – First Violation – 1 Count - \$350.00 Fine; LDAF Enforcement Agents were sworn in and testified regarding Mr. Brown's violation - failure to keep a loaders log. There is still an ongoing criminal investigation against Mr. Brown.

MOTION: Glynn Pittman made a motion to charge him with one violation; Bill Jenkins seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION: Gradon Clemons made a motion to impose a \$350.00 fine; Glynn Pittman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

The adjudicatory hearing was adjourned at 10:38 am.

BUDGET

The new budget year began July 1. The office did receive additional funding for equipment purchases not replacements. We are allowed to increase the fleet without trading in the old units. The request was for 11-15 dozers and transports. John Deere is waiting for their contract to be approved before delivering the dozers. It may be as much as two years before they are all delivered. We are waiting for the letter to come from the Natural Disaster and Recovery Fund. That will be around eight million dollars for use in the parishes affected by hurricanes Laura, Delta, and Ida. That money is not awarded yet, but the equipment bought with those funds will have to stay within those parishes. The authority and budget obligation must be approved also for us to use the money. We are looking at radio upgrades for all the units, trucks, transports, planes, and dozers as well as handhelds. It will take about 1.5 million to do this and will take 18-24 months to complete. This will allow the

money spent on radio towers and leases to go back into the budget to be used on other items. The new system will be utilizing the same system as state police statewide. On aviation, two new engines and props have been received and are being installed. Currently we have a plane in the shop for the Garmin navigation system upgrades; we have two more planes to send for those upgrades. We need two additional engines that may take up to two years to get them in.

There was much discussion on the FPP program, which seems to be right on target using the increase in cap and the change to not being a cost share program. Hopefully with an article and assistance from LFA we can get the word out about this program and all the benefits it offers landowners in Louisiana.

DIVISION REPORTS

Protection: Currently all is good even with the increase in fire numbers. We had teams working in Texas to help with their wildfire situations.

Enforcement: Agents are busy with investigations of timber theft and with the loader log inspections it has heightened awareness.

Management: A meeting was held with the foresters before the LFA annual meeting. Each forester is to write a minimum of five stewardship plans each year. District offices have been conducting prescribed burns when weather conditions allow to prevent backlogs. The state forest has been too wet for logging. As soon as the ground dries some, the logging operation will be continued. There were 1400 acres burned and we are getting the forest into a position to be managed well.

Forest Health: The biggest concern has been reports of southern pine beetles which turned out to be IPS beetles. So, no alarm over the southern pine beetles. Red River parish has been added to the list of quarantined parishes over the emerald ash borer.

Aviation: The engine and prop swaps were covered earlier in the budget. Aviation is no longer providing flights for the inspectors on the medical marijuana program. We were fully staffed, but a pilot has just resigned, so we have one opening.

Overall, enforcement is fully staffed. At any given time, we are needing 4 or 5 crew members. One forester is needed in St. Helena parish.

OLD BUSINESS

Nothing to present currently.

NEW BUSINESS

Next commission meeting will be December 5. We will get the numbers for the commission to preview for severance tax rates to be adopted for calendar year 2023. Epney reminded the commissioners that the training on Sexual Harassment is a requirement and needs to be done annually. Regarding severance tax rates the new facilities need to be informed about the severance taxes as they come into the state. There was much discussion on how to get the definitions of what type of timber is sold, how to get old timber out of the way and how to get the Department of Revenue on board to collect the taxes. Economic Development needs to give incentives to new mills to come in. They are getting much better incentives in Mississippi. The National Guard is taking a more active role in doing their own prescribed burns on the military bases. The largest concentration of green ash is in the Atchafalaya Basin. So, the quarantine is covering 12 states in hopes of keeping them out of the basin.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The legislature renewed the Main Street Logger Program and will be opening again next week with fewer restrictions. The LFA had their 75th anniversary meeting completed last week with over 600 attending the meetings and the help from all within the forestry office was much appreciated.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Glynn Pittman made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Bill Jenkins seconded the motion. All were in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 11:58 a.m.