**LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION**

HELD AT

LOUISIANA FORESTRY ASSOCIATION

ALEXANDRIA, louisiana

**mARCH 18, 2014**

**Minutes**

**Call To Order**

The Louisiana Forestry Commission meeting was called to order by Chairman Scott Poole at 10:08 a.m.

**Roll Call**

The roll was called by Epney Brasher.

**Members Present:** Scott Poole, Sam Pruitt, Mike Merritt, Mike Wolff, and Tina Meiners,

**Not Present:** Kenny Ribbeck and Dr. Allen Rutherford

A quorum was present.

**LDAF Staff Present:** State Forester Wade Dubea, Associate State Forester Epney Brasher, Don Smith, Jr., Dena Ginn,

& Randy Rentz

**Others Present:** Buck Vandersteen & Janet Tompkins, Louisiana Forestry Association

**Public Comments**

Buck Vandersteen said that Commissioner Mike Strain went before the Appropriation Committee asking for some resources to help fund the department. Buck also stated that Wade Dubea would be addressing this with the Committee so he would leave it for further discussion from Wade.

**Approval of Minutes**

**Motion:** Mike Merritt made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting for December 9, 2013. Mike Wolff seconded the motion. All were in favor.

**budget**

Wade Dubea reported that at the request of the Commission he had a column added to the budget report to account for how the protection tax monies were being spent. According to the statute, the money can be used for the acquisition of maintenance and firefighting equipment. Wade reported that for further explanation under the “Other Charges” column they have an arrangement for the forestry vehicles to be rotated in now. They are moving toward all the vehicles being purchased by the Louisiana Finance Authority Office (LAFA) and leased back to each office of, not just Forestry. These funds will be assigned to that column. The purpose behind this is that the lease will be the difference between the purchase price and the trade-in price. Wade explained that the fleet/equipment will be set on a three year cycle and every third year the vehicle will be replaced. Wade said that he is trying to keep newer equipment in the field and this will cut down on maintenance/fuel prices. Wade also stated that the department did not receive a mid-year budget cut this year. Due to a really wet season they have had fewer fires and it has helped to keep fuel cost down. Discussion followed.

Wade stated that as Buck Vandersteen had mentioned earlier, Commissioner Strain went before the Appropriations Committee and they reviewed the budget. Wade reported the department as a whole is about $3.9 million short of what they feel they need just to stay status quo. When you look at the cut in terms of state general funds, the Office of Forestry, Office of Management and Finance, and the Office of Animal Health are the three offices that are dependent on the state general fund. The Office of Forestry is dependent on about half of what comes in and the other two offices make up about a quarter of that. AES, ACS and Soil & Water are basically self-funded because they collect fees and penalties. Wade said the $3.9 million or around $3.5 million will have to come out of those three offices. The proposed cuts to Forestry include 15 positions. Wade explained that the 15 funded vacancies that were valued; those positions were valued at a greater value than they would have actually paid those positions. So in essence it’s coming into our “other salary money”. Discussion followed.

**Division Reports**

Due to time restraints Wade Dubea said he would take any questions that anyone may have on the division reports and he would address them at that time.

* Mike Merritt asked about FPP cost share program funding through April. Wade explained and discussion followed.
* Sam Pruitt asked about Enforcement Division in regards to “prompt payment investigation.” Wade explained and discussion followed.

**New Business**

Buck Vandersteen said that during the Appropriations Meeting he heard Dr. Strain tell them that he has no authority over the commission boards, i.e. LFC, Sugar, Rice & Strawberry Board. He is responsible for them, but he has no say in how the money is spent or who sits on the board. Epney Brasher explained that since this Commission has no money it is not an issue. What Dr. Strain was saying is that he is responsible for the actions of the board. The other boards that have funds, he has no say in how they spend their money for promotions. Epney said some of the boards have a budget. This board doesn’t. Buck Vandersteen stated he thinks that Dr. Strain works well with the LFC Board. He also said he thinks that the Commissioner’s preference would be to get the legislature to give him authority over any spending by the Commissions and authority over who is selected to sit on the boards of the commissions. Discussion followed.

Wade Dubea passed out a new brochure that Forestry has had published through a grant, “Keeping Louisiana Landscapes Healthy & Vibrant”. Wade said that these were handed out to the Appropriation Committee members. The members of the LFC stated that they were very alarmed at how many acres (564,179) each 2-man crew is responsible for as stated on the back of the brochure for “Wildfire Response”. They stated that it is just unacceptable and frustrating. Discussion followed.

Mike Wolff asked about the roads in the parishes and who should address that. He stated that in past discussions with the legislators are some issues that maybe the industry should cover more cost. Mike also added that he was wondering how we compare to other industries or agencies on an economic impact. He asked if they are putting such a burden on infrastructure and public service and does that out-weigh the benefit that they are bringing back. Wade said he doesn’t think so.” Agriculture in general is lumped into one category and we have recently had some discussions about that in regard road bonds. Wade said that they have a judgment that was rendered by their executive council. The statutes that support it basically state that timber and the removal from the woods to the processing facility is part of an agricultural operation and therefore exempt from road bonds. Mike Wolff stated that he thinks there may be a disconnect on the message of the value of the industry and who should cover those costs or how it should be done. Mike said some of the legislators think we should pay all of the cost and that we are not paying our fair share. Wade said, “The answer is in severance tax. If all the severance tax would be sent to the Office of Forestry for its operation OOF would be self-funded from that particular means of funding.” Wade said that he knows that would never happen. It would meet too much opposition. Wade said they need a way to address the issue, get the word out, and get the funding in. Mike Wolff asked if they could get an economic model of their industry in comparison to other agencies, their cuts, and some overall economic modeling. Discussion followed

***Motion:*** A motion was made by Mike Wolff to get the LSU Ag Center, LFA & OOF to develop an economic analysis plan of action for the industry. Tina Meiners seconded the motion. All were in favor.

**Old Business**

Chairman Scott Poole mentioned that at the last meeting Wade Dubea was asked to research and see about the statutory restrictions on amending stumpage values for severance tax purposes. Scott said that Wade was going to look into seeing if there are any constraints existing in the statute that would prevent them from bringing in third party information on making that decision. Wade stated that he has found none to date. He had Pat Aronstein research also and Pat said he has not come up with anything that says we can’t use that for a comparison. Wade said this will be new waters for them. Wade stated that it is up to the LFC to set the rate. Wade also stated that as long as there is justification as to why you want to make the change and have supporting documentation, then it can be considered. Wade said he would have some of the documentation for the LFC that they need in October. Discussion followed.

**Adjournment**

**Motion:** Motion was made by Mike Wolff to adjourn the meeting. Mike Merritt seconded the motion.

All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 a.m.