

LOUISIANA FORESTRY COMMISSION

MARCH 12, 2024, 10:00 A.M.

**LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY
VETERANS' MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM
5825 FLORIDA BOULEVARD
BATON ROUGE, LA 70806**

Note: Because of the administration change, all members were sworn in before the meeting. Lawyer Jade Saunders handled the swearing in.

CALL TO ORDER

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

ROLL CALL

The roll call was conducted by Wade Dubea.

Members present: Dennis Aucoin, Gradon Clemons, Michael Hudson, and Glynn Pittman.

LDAF staff present: Wade Dubea, Epney Brasher, Roy St. Pierre, David Campbell, Tyler Cloud, Jeannie Severio and Jade Saunders.

Guests present: Gracee Texada

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Deferred to later in meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Gradon Clemons made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of December 4, 2023. Glynn Pittman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

BUDGET

Epney Brasher gave update on the budget. The new dozer plows are out on bids and that should be covered by a grant. The FPP reimbursement requests have not been coming in very fast. A lot of the site prep that needed to be done was not accomplished because of the burn bans and the drought. The money that is obligated is always more than what is paid out. The remainder goes back into the account. There were a lot of replants because of the drought this year. The replant is a cultural practice that we have done for years. A lot of the tracts that were devastated this year by fire, drought and bugs are not in the FPP program. There was a question on the state's gambling income. Many of the state agencies or offices do receive a small part of the gambling proceeds. The new dozers are finally coming in – six received so far. The new transport trucks should be coming in a few weeks. As for the new legislative session, we requested more people and more equipment. All our fleet of dozers were from 2003 and 2008. They were really used up this summer on the fires that we had. We need to be able to replace some equipment every year to keep the fleet in decent shape. When we get the rest of the bills for fire fighting this year, we will be looking at a \$34-35 million bill. We will have to have help to pay for the

fire fighting this last year. It was no where near a normal year of expenditures. To pay it back would have to be a supplemental bill from the legislature. There was no federal declaration of disaster because of the fires this year so there is no federal help for landowners who suffered damage.

DIVISION REPORTS

Protection Branch: There were 144 fires over four days in February. So the danger is still there because of the fuel load left over from the drought. There was much discussion on the number of fires and acres involved. We are working on more training for our firefighters along with a heavy equipment academy. A second heavy equipment academy is being planned now. Mike Hudson stated that for many years we have known that this situation could possibly happen. Funding was decreased and road blocks were in the way. He questioned if there was a way to move some of that out of the way to trigger a faster and easier response when it was needed. The help from dozers and other equipment that belongs to companies can help on their own property. But if they get off of their property, the state cannot indemnify them. It is not known if we can get a contract with them. We cannot direct them. We need a unified command or control structure so that no one gets hurt by us losing the knowledge of where they are on the fire. The National Guard will help with the mop-up, but cannot work on the fires. Mike offered congratulations to the department on how well they handled the emergency.

Enforcement Branch: A lot of the complaints for fire raising negligence are being worked out civilly and the arrests are not showing up on the report.

Management and Forest Health Branch: FPP applications for the new year will be accepted in April and May. Stewardship plans are being worked on by our foresters and they are trying to get back to their normal duties. Prescribed burn numbers are lower than usual because of the drought. Now we also have younger people who need to be trained on the prescribed burns. They will be trained as soon as it is feasible. We have been getting a lot of calls who say they have Southern Pine Beetles when they are actually Ips beetles. Mississippi has had a lot of Southern Pine Beetle activity, but it has not been bad in the Louisiana parishes close by. The Brown spot has affected loblolly pine and not just longleaf.

Aviation Branch: The main problem with aviation is buying engines. We can buy them, but getting them delivered is the problem. We flew so many extra hours with the fires that it has accelerated the necessity of engine changes. The radio swap outs is another issue. We are working on a short term solution until we can get the new radios into the planes so that they can communicate with the ground crews. So far, we have not reached the hard stop to have to ground a plane because of the hours on the engine. We looked into getting new engines instead of waiting on rebuilds. New engines are 2-3 times the price of a rebuilt engine. The rebuilt ones are about \$115,000 each. We do bug flights in April and May.

OLD BUSINESS

None currently.

NEW BUSINESS

Wade was asked to make the commission aware of the bills before the legislature. There is a bill to require a written contract between the logger and the landowner before any timber is cut or sold. This would be an agreement on price and the end date for the logging. This is to protect both the logger and

the landowner. Another bill would require anyone who does a prescribed burn who is not a certified prescribed burner to get a permit from the department to burn. This would cover timberland, marsh, farmland and land clearing. There are also two bills that will be considered. One to provide PTSD treatment for fire fighters and to train volunteer firefighters to fight wildfires. We are hoping to use already developed programs to help with both of these requirements.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Gracee Texada reminded members of the meeting at the Longleaf Museum in April and the LFA Board meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dennis Aucoin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Bradon Clemons seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:35 am.