**Louisiana Forestry Commission**

**5825 Florida Blvd.**

**Baton Rouge, LA 70806**

**September 11, 2012**

**Minutes**

**Call To Order**

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

**Roll Call**

The roll was called by Scarlet Arceneaux.

**Members Present:** Chairman Sam Pruitt, Vice Chairman Scott Poole, Mike Merritt, Dr. Allen Rutherford, Kenny Ribbeck and Mike Wolff.

**Not Present:** Tina Meiners

A quorum was present.

**LDAF Staff Present:** State Forester Wade Dubea, Commissioner Strain, Associate State Forester Epney Brasher, Scarlet Arceneaux, Don Smith, Charlie Greer, Mark Singleton, Randy Rentz, Gus Rowland, Dena Ginn, James Baldwin, Kevin Finley

**Others Present:**

**Approval of Minutes**

**Motion:** Vice Chairman Scott Poole made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting for June 19, 2012.

Dr. Allen Rutherford seconded the motion. All were in favor.

**Budget**

Epney Brasher updated the LFC Board on the budget. She reported that both salaries and benefits are higher than normal

this quarter due to the retirement incentive package that was given as a layoff avoidance measure. Epney said they had a total of nine employees in the forestry office that took the package and a total of thirty departmental wide.

Wade Dubea reported that he was able to open up nine fire crew positions across the state and those positions are open now. They are working on finishing the interviews at this time and getting those positions filled. Wade stated that he is looking for there to be a mid-year budget cut. The Commissioner has assured him that there will not be any layoffs. He said that they will do what they can to have our salaries covered and get through it accordingly.

Dr. Strain addressed the budget question about the possible shortfall for mid-term and the mid-year budget cuts. He stated that at this point he will not know until possibly after November. There was an expenditure of approximately $120 million dollars for the storm. He stated that he believes it is 75% reimbursable by the federal government. He also said that there may be an increase in the overall state revenue as a result of the storm. He said he had discussions with Paul Rainwater and Mr. Rainwater stated that he does not anticipate a mid-year budget cut. If there is a budget cut, it will have to come by the second or third week of December. If it lingers past that, it will be difficult to deal with because of all the logistics of it. Dr. Strain stated that at this point he does not anticipate a budget cut, but we cannot rule one out right now. Discussion followed.

Dr. Strain reported on storm related issues due to Hurricane Isaac. He also reported that he is on his way to Des Moines, Iowa to meet with other commissioners and talk about the storm related issues and problems. The incident command system worked wonderfully and went very smoothly. All the generators worked, so we had everything up and running smoothly.

Dr. Stain said he had returned from the Bio Fuels and Bio Processing Summit and they were talking about bio energy for the future. He stated they also discussed the chemicals, products, biodegradable paper products and the new mandates the federal government is putting into place for vendors that want to do business with them. Forest products are very high in the overall realm. Sun drop fuels will be using biomass alone by injecting it with natural gas. They will harvest physical oils from that. That is a $450 million project. We have a number of other entities that are looking at this arena. They will be here in Louisiana because we have a large supply of biomass, whatever type they wish to choose, plus we have inexpensive natural gas. We also have the industrial corridor to further refine those products along with the river, the rail and the highways to ship it. We are in a pretty good place for that arena. Discussion followed.

**Public Comments**

There were no public comments at this time.

**Division Reports**

Wade asked if anyone had any questions on the division reports:

**Protection**

Don Smith reported that there were 713 fires for 4,211 acres with an average fire size of 5.9 acres. He also said the fires are down considerably from 2011, and this is attributed to the rain we have been getting. We also participated in the Governor’s Office of Homeland Security response for Hurricane Isaac. We attended the Southern Group of State Forester’s summer meeting that was held in Louisville, Ky. The new in-house fire reporting system is complete and the districts have begun entering data through the computer. He reported that there are nine fire fighter positions being announced to replace some of the recent retirees. Also the 2012 VFA application awards are underway for processing.

Don stated that the new radiators, quick release grill latches, and perforated engine side shields to fix the John Deere dozers from overheating have been received. We are working with the manufacturer on the final prices of the radiators.

The FEPP program held an auction to dispose of the unwanted excess federal firefighting equipment. Discussion followed.

**I & E**

Don Smith reported that the teacher’s tour has been completed and there were 29 teachers that attended this year. Whitney has done two other workshops in Red River and in Shreveport with 22 other teachers trained.

Don stated that the 2011 Urban and Community Forestry grant year is wrapping up and 2012 is right around the corner. They will start working on getting that out. Don reported that Whitney Wallace attended the SGSF meeting in Kentucky also. Whitney is the current chair of the Southern Group of Urban and Community Forestry and has been very busy. Also, the PLT Silent auction will be held August 28th – 30th in Marksville, La. and the proceeds from that will benefit Louisiana Project Learning Tree program. Whitney has been very busy collecting items for the silent auction.

Wade also reported that he, Kenny Ribbeck and Allen Rutherford have been contacted by the National Project Wild office. That office would like us to be a part of getting Project Wild reestablished in Louisiana. Wade said that they have agreed to do that.

We have gotten some sponsors from the National Wild Turkey Federation, NRCS, and also the Louisiana Forestry Association.

Wade stated that he did a workshop a couple of weeks ago at UL in Lafayette, and it was one of the best workshops he has ever been a part of. Wade said that they presented all three workshops in one (Project Wild, Project Wet and PLT) and it went over very well. We are bridging the gap between habitat, wildlife and water quality all in one setting. We are trying to present a unified front for all of the programs.

**Management**

Don report on Forest Health and stated that there were no Southern Pine Beetles collected during this year’s trapping period. We are continuing the SPB flights in the districts. We continue to monitor Cogan grass infestations. We also have Gypsy moth traps set out across the state and they are being monitored.

Don stated that there have been 256 FPP plans written for a total of 16,782 acres on the Cost Share Programs. Our foresters are continuing to provide the technical assistance for CRP by writing the management & practice plans.  We have handled assessments & planning for 71 landowners totaling 4102 acres this quarter.  On the Non-Cost Share Management Plans, 36 Forest Stewardship plans have been completed this quarter for a total of 5,830 acres.

On the Forest Legacy Program we are working on the “Florida Parishes Project Area”. The sale will be complete by the end of September.

Don said that as far as the Prescribed Burning this quarter, we have completed 3 prescribed burns for a total of 134 acres.

We have prescribed burned three tracts for a total of 330 acres on the Alexander State Forest. We have conducted 3 site-prep burns this quarter for a total of 70 acres. Fire crews have installed fire lines on 221 acres that are to be burned by personnel other than LDAF. This totals 5,413 acres for the year.

Contractors have been lined up to start the site preparation and planting on the 97 acre tract in the Alexander State Forest.

This area will be planted in longleaf pine during the 2012-2013 planting season.

We just bid off another 95 acres bordering this track to the south to be clear-cut. The highest bid was approximately $379,000 dollars. We plan on regenerating this stand in longleaf as well once the harvest is completed.

Chairman Sam Pruitt asked about the FPP program. Wade Dubea reported that Pat Aronstein has 504 FPP outstanding open new contracts right now for about $2.5 million dollars. Discussion followed.

**GIS**

Gus Rowland went over the GIS report and the various activities that his division is assisting with. Technical support issues through the summer included using the Stewardship plan template built for Microsoft Word, hardware setup and networking, GPS issues, and general computer functionality. The GIS Section has also recently assisted the Office of Management and Finance with mapping LDAF jobs around the state by Parish and mapping a comparison of the department’s various office district boundaries. Gus stated that the GIS section has regularly updated Louisiana’s outdoor burn ban map as needed.

They continue to attend the Louisiana State GIS Council meetings as a representative for the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry and participate with Southern Group of State Foresters GIS Task Force conference calls when pertinent. Additionally, Gus Rowland stated that he attended the 2012 International User Conference for Esri in San Diego.

Map book creation for the state is ongoing and work has progressed beyond the initial district used to establish the framework needed. Training gained over the summer at the Esri User Conference was indispensable towards completing this task.

The GIS section has been diligent through the summer to remain up-to-date on all wildfire and management data acquisition and assimilation. Geodatabases for wildfire, management programs, and practice implementation continue to be regularly maintained. The LOF GIS Flex website is regularly updated with wildfire data. A long-term project focused on creating Stewardship data for plans developed before the use of GIS continued through the summer.

Gus also stated that they will be conducting a training session at this year’s LFA conference in Marksville, LA. The training, organized by Steve Templin of Templin Forestry, will be focused on using the Louisiana Stewardship plan writing template.

Discussion followed.

**Aviation**

Wade stated that Jeremy Coffey is out on a flying mission and that his division report has been handed out if anyone had any questions. There were no questions at this time.

**Enforcement**

Charlie Greer reported that they had an arrest for Lloyd Rusty Triche of Pine Grove, LA, for failure to remit payment of $14,000 for timber to the landowner. Also we had a fire related arrest for Stacy James George in Oak Grove, La., for “Simple Arson” of 600 acres in Kilbourne. We also have a couple of warrants out, one in Desoto Parish.

Charlie stated that they also had one of our enforcement guys, Charles Earl that took the retirement package. We have three more that are retiring in the near future. Wade stated that they planning on bringing more officers on board prior to the others retiring. Discussion followed.

**Reforestation**

Randy Rentz reported on the reforestation that this has been a pretty good year so far growing the seedlings and re-germination.

Sales have been a little sluggish. He stated that he believes people are still worried about drought conditions when it comes to planting. Randy said so far this year we have booked sales of over two million hardwoods and five million pines.

The incoming crop should be an average crop. The orchards are continuing to be upgraded as much as possible, both stock and facilities. Randy stated that he thinks they will pull out of Monroe nursery this year and just use it for a hardwood seed orchard, shipping area, storage and seeding. This will help to streamline personnel and equipment. Over all, everything looks good.

Discussion followed.

**Old Business**

No old business at this time.

**New Business**

Louisiana will be hosting the Southern Group of State Foresters Winter meeting in November here in Baton Rouge. We will have 11 states represented there.

**Adjournment**

**Motion:** Motion was made by Mr. Mike Merritt to adjourn the meeting; Vice Chairman Scott Poole seconded the motion.

All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 12:12 p.m.