

**MINUTES
ALABAMA FORESTRY COMMISSION
January 19, 2016**

PRESIDING – Tommy Thompson, Chairman

SECRETARY – Greg Pate, State Forester

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT –Tommy Thompson, Jerry Dwyer, Salem Saloom, Ken Real, Jerry Smith, Jane Russell and Stephen May.

ALABAMA FORESTRY COMMISSION PERSONNEL PRESENT – Greg Pate, Dan Jackson, Scott Rouse, Renée Minor, Becky Jackson, Arthur Hitt, Michael Older, Benji Elmore, Hank McKinley, Ken Harbison, and Regina Miller.

GUESTS – Gary Cole, William Green, Sam Duvall, Roy McAuley.

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER – Chairman, Tommy Thompson, called this regular meeting of the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) to order at 10:00 a.m. on January 19, 2016 in the Alabama Forestry Commission's State Office Executive Conference Room located at 513 Madison Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama 36104.

Regina Miller called roll and announced that a quorum was present.

Miller announced that the meeting had been properly advertised.

MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 27, 2015 MEETING – **Commissioner Ken Real made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 27, 2015 meeting as presented. Commissioner Salem Saloom seconded the motion with Commissioner Stephen May opposing the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed by majority vote.**

ELECTION OF NEW OFFICERS – Commissioner Salem Saloom reported for the nominating committee composed of himself, Jerry Smith and ex-officio member Chairman Tommy Thompson and proposed appointing Jerry Dwyer as Chairman and as Jane Russell as Vice-Chairman. **Stephen May made a motion to approve the nominating committee's report and Ken Real seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote.**

From this point in the meeting, new Chairman, Jerry Dwyer, chaired the remainder of the meeting.

INTERNAL FIREARMS POLICY – General Counsel, Scott Rouse, stated that Renee Minor had contacted other state agencies and learned that many do not have a firearms policy. He reported that a State Personnel work rule exists specifying that no un-authorized weapons are allowed in state buildings. The Attorney General's Office reviewed the proposed AFC policy and did not suggest any changes. Rouse said that following the Leadership Team meeting last week, a statement had been added to the policy stating that the policy will not be effective for employees until they are trained on the actual policy. Rouse said he will conduct the training during upcoming regional meetings. Commissioner Saloom recommended that conflict management training also be conducted. Rouse added that employees who choose to carry a weapon must be licensed by a county sheriff and may only carry a weapon that is concealed. Further discussion emphasized that there is no cost to the agency; employees will be responsible for any costs associated with carrying a concealed weapon. Rouse said that employees should not give the appearance that they are law enforcement. The policy will only allow employees to carry a concealed weapon for protection like any other citizen. It was also determined that employees will sign a statement that they have completed a training class on this policy. **Commission Saloom**

made a motion to accept the internal firearms policy with Commissioner May seconding the motion. Commissioners Saloom, May, Thompson, Real, Dwyer and Russell voted in favor of the motion with Commissioner Smith casting a dissenting vote. The motion passed by majority vote. (Attachment #1)

VOLUNTER FIRE DEPARTMENT (VFD) CERTIFICATION – Rouse explained that the law concerning certification of volunteer fire departments needs to be amended to specify minimum equipment standards that are consistent with ISO 9 requirements. Under the proposed amendment, the AFC would also have authority to certify and decertify volunteer fire departments in Alabama. Currently, the law only gives the AFC certification authority and it is silent regarding decertification.

Rouse stated that the Alabama Association of Volunteer Fire Departments, Rural Community Fire Protection Steering Committee, and the Alabama Fire College have reviewed the proposed changes to the statute and agree with the changes as proposed.

May made a motion to approve the changes to the policy as presented. Russell seconded the motion and the motion passed by unanimous vote. (Attachment #2)

STAFFING – Assistant State Forester, Dan Jackson, presented the most recent agency organizational chart stating there are currently 250 employees and we can hire 256 employees with our approved Operational Plan (OPS Plan.) He explained that it continues to be difficult to hire foresters due to the lack of interest, even with the increase in pay last year. There are currently 3 open forester positions; we would like to hire 9 foresters but due to availability and lack of funds, we are unable to do so. **(Attachment # 3)**

STATE FORESTER'S REPORT – State Forester, Greg Pate explained that we are operating on a \$21 million budget at this time. Due to an issue with the STAARS Vendor System, no state agency can access their balances; therefore, there is no budget report today. However, Accounting Manager Becky Jackson stated that we are doing well and that regional foresters are keeping expenditures low. There had been an issue with paying 2015 purchase orders but there is no longer an issue and we can now pay those. As of today, we do not have approval to pay 2016 purchase orders.

Tommy Thompson asked for an "internal" budget from Becky Jackson. Pate agreed that we would compile a budget and email it to Commissioners.

Federal Grants – Pate reported that all federal grants through 2012 have been closed and we are currently working on FY 13, 14, and 15 grants; there is \$3.1 million remaining to be drawn down on grants. He explained that the new eSTART time program is too simplistic to track employees' time spent working on specific grants so we are continuing to use PHOENIX for that purpose. **(Attachment #4)**

VFD Radios – Pate reported that radios are working fine and that no repeaters have been requested by VFDs.

Good Neighbor Policy – Pate explained that this policy is a new initiative of the USDA Forest Service that will pay the AFC to conduct work on federal forests in Alabama. There might be a possibility of adding an employee or two if there is enough work accomplished to justify the hiring.

Legislator Request for AFC Equipment List – Senator Trip Pittman requested a list of AFC-owned equipment. **(Attachment #5)** Pate stated that the field has been instructed to turn in a piece of equipment when they receive a new piece of equipment.

FEPP Program – Pate reported that the AFC has obtained surplus equipment for the AFC and volunteer fire departments through the Federal Firefighter Program (FFP) and the Federal Excess Property

Program (FEPP). The equipment does not cost the AFC and has saved the state \$6,880,057 in acquisition costs to date. **(Attachment #6)**

Cooperative Education Program – Pate stated this program has been used by the Commission in the past for existing employees and is planned for the future to target employees at the college level who can enter an accredited BS Forestry Degree Program as a college junior. The employee would attend college for a quarter/semester, work a quarter/semester, etc. There will be a maximum of five years allowed for the employee to obtain the BS degree from a university accredited by the Society of American Foresters. The employee will be eligible for half the salary while in school. **(Attachment #7)**

Rouse stated that the employee will be required to repay the agency if the obligations are not met.

Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) Memorandum of Understanding – Pate explained that a memorandum of understanding between the AFC and ALEA has been developed to support a partnership to provide aerial support for wildfire suppression and detection. Under this plan, costs would be less than the AFC using contract pilots. **(Attachment #8)**

New CAD Fire Dispatch Reporting Program – Pate reported that the new CAD program went into service on January 1st. This program will better track field employees and equipment in real time while fighting wildfires.

Fleet Management Program – Pate introduced Kenneth Harbison, the agency's Fleet Manager, who will also continue to work his field job in Bibb County.

Scorecard – Pate discussed the new 2016 scorecard saying that additional items have been included. Amy Smith and Patrick Willoughby are working to include goals on the county level. He stated that the last two columns are acres/# in attendance/miles. **(Attachment #9)**

ESTART TIME PROGRAM - Personnel Manager, Renée Minor, shared information about the new eSTART time program that has been phased in for all employees. This program has a time clock feature to be used by all employees each day. There are several alternatives that can be used by employees who may not be at their computer each time the time clock needs to be 'punched.' Currently there is no integration between the new program and the agency's grant management database so we will need to continue to use the PHOENIX system to track grants.

Pate presented Commissioners with the 2015 final AFC Annual Report. **(Attachment #10)**

Dwyer asked if there was any new business or comments from guests.

Thompson asked that Regional Foresters schedule their meetings in advance and provide notice so that Commissioners can schedule and attend their meetings. Dwyer encouraged Commissioners to attend as many meetings as possible.

DATE AND LOCATION OF NEXT MEETING – **Stephen May made a motion to schedule the next meeting of the Commission at 10:00 a.m. on April 19, 2016 at the Commission's state office in Montgomery. Jane Russell seconded the motion and the motion passed by unanimous vote.**

ADJOURNMENT – There being no further business, **Salem Saloom made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:45 a.m. Tommy Thompson seconded the motion and the motion passed by unanimous vote.**