

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY
OFFICE OF FORESTRY



PERFORMANCE AUDIT
ISSUED JULY 9, 2008

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LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
STEVE J. THERIOT, CPA

July 9, 2008

The Honorable Joel T. Chaisson, II,
President of the Senate
The Honorable Jim Tucker,
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Dear Senator Chaisson and Representative Tucker:

This report provides the results of our performance audit of the Office of Forestry within the Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry (LDAF). The audit was conducted under the provisions of Title 24 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, as amended.

The report contains our findings, conclusions, and recommendations on the Office of Forestry's management of its personnel, equipment, and budgetary resources. Appendix A contains LDAF's response. I hope this report will benefit you in your legislative decision-making process.

We would like to express our appreciation to the management and staff of the Office of Forestry for their assistance during this audit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve J. Theriot", written over a circular stamp or seal.

Steve J. Theriot, CPA
Legislative Auditor

SJT/sr

LDAF08

Office of Legislative Auditor

Steve J. Theriot, CPA, Legislative Auditor

Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry,
Office of Forestry

July 2008



Audit Control # 40070022

Executive Summary

We conducted a performance audit of the Office of Forestry, located within the Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry (LDAF). The objective of this audit and overall results are summarized below.

Objective: Is the Office of Forestry effectively managing its personnel, equipment, and budgetary resources?

Results: Although there have been improvements since this audit began, the Office of Forestry (Forestry) needs stronger management processes to ensure that it effectively manages its personnel, equipment, and budgetary resources. Our audit findings describe issues the new LDAF administration¹ and Forestry need to address to ensure the office manages its resources effectively and accomplishes its mission to protect, conserve, and replenish the forest resources of the state. These findings are as follows:

- Forestry officials have had limited decision-making authority over the management of their resources.
- Forestry officials' current decision-making authority over the management of resources is not defined.
- Forestry officials have not had the information necessary to effectively manage their resources.
- Some Forestry employees are receiving supplemental hazardous duty pay despite not qualifying for such pay.
- Because of their limited decision-making authority, Forestry officials do not adequately collect or use performance data to manage resources.

Audit Initiation, Scope and Methodology

We conducted this performance audit under the provisions of Title 24 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, as amended. Louisiana Revised Statute (R.S.) 24:522 requires, in part,

¹ Commissioner Mike Strain and his administration took office on January 14, 2008.

that the legislative auditor establish a schedule of performance audits to ensure that a least one performance audit is completed and published for each executive department agency within a seven-year period beginning with the 1997-98 fiscal year. In accordance with this requirement, the legislative auditor developed a plan scheduling a performance audit of the LDAF. The scheduling of this audit was approved by the Legislative Audit Advisory Council on July 30, 2003.

In consultation with the new LDAF commissioner, we decided to focus our audit on the effectiveness with which the department manages its resources. We plan to conduct a series of audits within LDAF, each focusing on an individual office.

In conducting this audit, we followed the generally accepted government auditing standards as promulgated by the Comptroller General of the United States. To answer our objective, we performed the following audit steps:

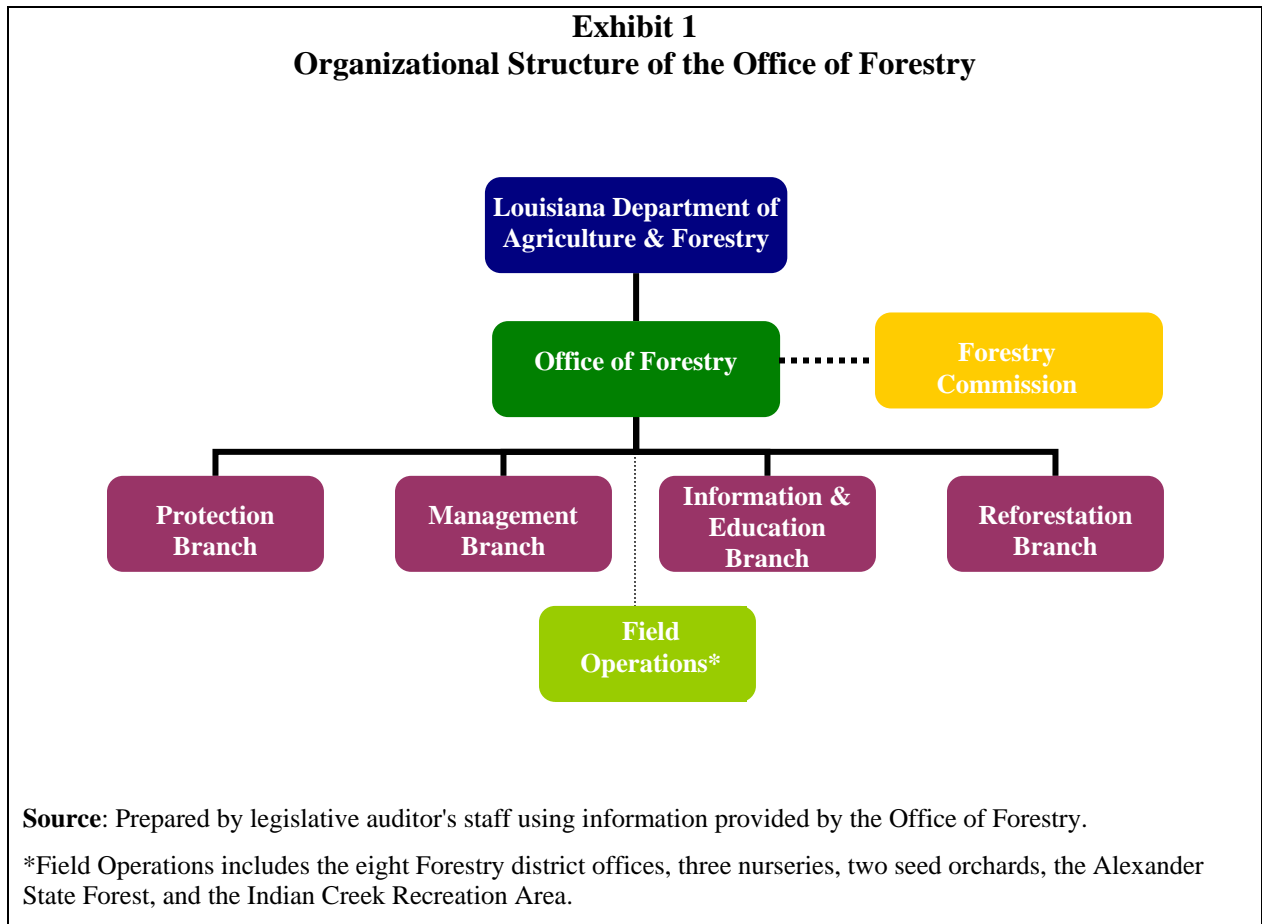
- Researched state law, the administrative code, executive budget documents, and the LDAF strategic plan to determine Forestry's legal authority, responsibilities, mission, goals, and objectives
- Interviewed Forestry officials (associate state forester, branch chiefs, and district managers) regarding management of the office's personnel, equipment, and budgetary resources
- Interviewed other key personnel within LDAF's Office of Management and Finance (e.g., Human Resources, Property Management) regarding issues related to Forestry's management of its personnel, equipment, and budgetary resources
- Interviewed relevant agencies within the Division of Administration (e.g., Louisiana Property Assistance Agency, Office of Risk Management) regarding issues related to Forestry's management processes
- Obtained and reviewed data from Forestry and Office of Management and Finance regarding Forestry's personnel, equipment, budget, and federal grants
- Toured Forestry District 1 in Hammond, Louisiana
- Attended a meeting of the Louisiana Forestry Commission
- Obtained and reviewed information on best practices in government from the Advisory Services Division within the Louisiana Legislative Auditor and from Louisiana's Office of Planning and Budget

Appendix A contains LDAF's response to this report.

Overview of the Office of Forestry

Legal Authority. According to R.S. 36:628(F), the Office of Forestry, under the direction of the LDAF commissioner, is responsible for performing the functions of the state relating to the practice of forestry, in accordance with the policies established by the Forestry Commission. R.S. 36:802.10 provided for the transfer of both the Office of Forestry and the Forestry Commission from the Department of Natural Resources to LDAF in 1986.

Mission and Organizational Structure. The mission of the Office of Forestry is to protect, conserve, and replenish the forest resources of the state. The Office of Forestry accomplishes its mission through four main branches (see Exhibit 1). These branches are Protection, Management, Information & Education, and Reforestation.



Functions and Responsibilities. Exhibit 2 on the following page summarizes the main functions and responsibilities of each Forestry branch.

Exhibit 2
Office of Forestry
Functions and Responsibilities, by Branch

Forestry Branch	Main Functions and Responsibilities*
Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wildfire protection, detection (e.g., aerial surveillance), and suppression throughout the state • Conduct enforcement/investigative functions with regard to arson and timber theft • Administer the Federal Excess Property Program
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct activities related to forest management including providing landowner assistance (e.g., management plans, timber marking, prescribed burning, etc.) • Administer federal and state cost-share programs • Prepare and collect data for statistical reports and forestry publications • Monitor forest health • Develop best management practices
Information & Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase public awareness of the value and management of Louisiana’s natural resources and the need for improved forest management and protection from insects, disease, and fire • Administer programs such as Urban Forestry, Louisiana Firewise, Project Learning Tree, and the Louisiana Forestry’s Teacher Tour
Reforestation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce inexpensive, quality tree seedlings for landowners through three nurseries and two seed orchards
<p>*Note: While not formally placed under a specific branch, the Office of Forestry is also responsible for managing the Alexander State Forest and Indian Creek Recreation Area located in Woodworth, Louisiana. Source: Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using information provided by the Office of Forestry.</p>	

Personnel. As of January 2008, Forestry had approximately 313² full-time employees and 52 part-time seasonal employees.³ In addition to the state office in Baton Rouge, Forestry has eight district offices located throughout the state, three nurseries, and two seed orchards. The foresters in the district offices perform the functions for each of the four branches. For example, when not performing wildfire detection and suppression activities for the Protection branch, district foresters work with landowners to develop management plans for the Management branch, assist with various educational outreach activities for the Information & Education branch, or collect seed and distribute seedlings for the Reforestation branch.

Equipment. Forestry uses various types of equipment to accomplish its fire protection, detection, and suppression activities. Exhibit 3 on the following page lists Forestry’s major firefighting equipment,⁴ as of February 2008.

² Of the 313 full-time employees, one employee was on leave until retirement, two employees were receiving worker’s compensation, and four employees were on extended leave due to illness.

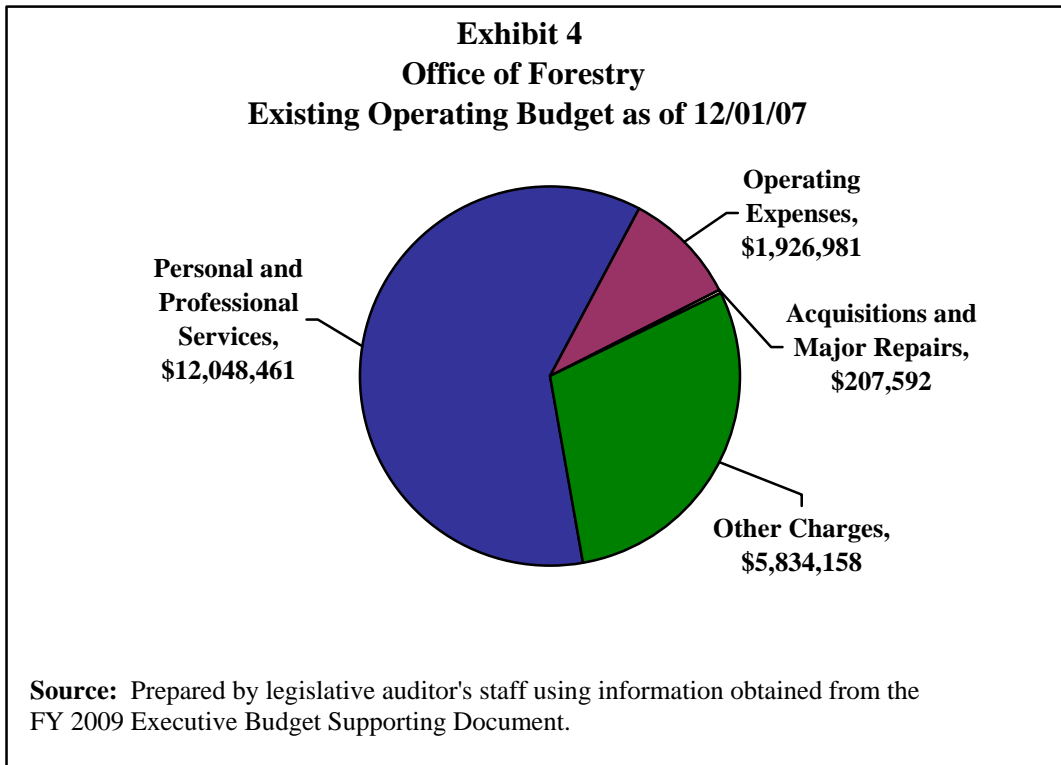
³ The part-time seasonal employees assist the nurseries and seed orchards annually from approximately December through March and July through September.

⁴ The total in Exhibit 3 does not include the fleet vehicles or non-firefighting equipment assigned to Forestry.

**Exhibit 3
Office of Forestry
Major Firefighting Equipment**

Type of Equipment	Quantity
Model 650 Bulldozers	96
Transport Trucks (for Model 650 Bulldozers)	96
Model 750 Bulldozers	8
Transport Trucks (for Model 750 Bulldozers)	8
Brush Trucks	17
Airplanes	20
Total of Major Equipment	245
Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staffing using information obtained from the Office of Forestry and the Office of Management and Finance.	

Budget. Forestry's operating budget for fiscal year 2008 is approximately \$20 million. Exhibit 4 shows the breakdown of this budget.⁵



⁵ The \$20 million does not include the approximately \$5.3 million in federal hurricane supplemental grants available to Forestry during fiscal year 2008.

Objective: Is the Office of Forestry effectively managing its personnel, equipment, and budgetary resources?

Although there have been improvements since this audit began, Forestry needs stronger management processes to ensure that it effectively manages its personnel, equipment, and budgetary resources. The following describes our audit findings and includes recommendations that are intended to assist the office in strengthening its management processes.

Forestry officials have had limited decision-making authority over the management of their resources.

Forestry officials have not been given the authority to make decisions regarding their personnel, equipment, and budgetary resources. Instead, the previous LDAF administration made these decisions with little or no input from Forestry officials. As a result, it has been difficult for Forestry officials to effectively manage their resources and perform the functions of the state relating to the practice of forestry.

Personnel. According to Forestry officials, the previous LDAF administration made decisions regarding when to hire, who to hire, and where to allocate staff with little consideration given to Forestry's input on the staffing needs of particular districts. Over time, the number of firefighters in some of the forestry districts became critically low. To alleviate this shortage, the department used one-time federal hurricane supplemental money during fiscal year 2006 to hire full-time, permanent firefighters. Forestry is currently using two federal hurricane supplemental grants to fund the salaries of 31 full-time personnel. Both of these grants will expire on September 30, 2008. Combined, these grants fund approximately \$787,000 in salaries, annually.

Equipment. According to Forestry officials, the previous LDAF administration also made decisions regarding when to purchase forestry equipment and the quantity/type of equipment to purchase (e.g., number of bulldozers, types of bulldozer blades, etc.) with little input, if any, from Forestry management. In addition, the previous LDAF administration used Forestry equipment, and sometimes personnel, to assist with construction activities. These activities were outside of Forestry's mission to protect, conserve, and replenish the forest resources of the state. Unless there was an immediate fire-related need, Forestry management said that it could not refuse to provide resources. According to an LDAF official, the new administration ceased the practice of using non-maintenance personnel to perform construction-related activities in January 2008.

Budget. Forestry's lack of decision-making authority also extended to the office's budgetary resources. For example, during the fall of 2007, Forestry generated \$1.8 million by sending firefighters to Georgia to assist with wildfire suppression. At the beginning of this audit, Forestry officials were unsure if the previous LDAF administration would place the \$1.8 million Forestry generated into the office's budget or if the department would use the money for another purpose.⁶

⁶ The new administration placed the \$1.8 million Forestry generated in the office's budget in January 2008.

For Forestry to accomplish its goals, its management structure needs to have the authority to fully participate in decisions regarding the allocation and use of its personnel, equipment, and budgetary resources. A lack of such authority can result in ineffective decision-making, inefficient use of resources, low morale, and an atmosphere of mistrust and uncertainty. In addition, without an appropriate level of decision-making authority, Forestry cannot ensure that it achieves its mission nor can the department justly hold it accountable for doing so.

Recommendation 1: The new LDAF administration should assess the decision-making authority assigned to Forestry to determine if management has the appropriate and necessary level of decision-making authority to ensure the office achieves its mission.

Summary of Management's Response: LDAF agrees with this recommendation and has already increased Forestry's participative decision-making authority.

Forestry officials' current decision-making authority over the management of resources is not defined.

Neither LDAF nor Forestry has formal policies and/or procedures that define Forestry officials' current roles, responsibilities, or decision-making authority. LDAF's only manual is an employee manual that pertains to personnel issues such as attendance and leave policy, promotions, benefits, and grievances. Forestry's last set of formal policies and procedures was revised by the Louisiana Forestry Commission in 1977, prior to Forestry being part of LDAF.

Formal policies and procedures provide management with guidance on how to effectively manage its resources. This guidance helps ensure standardization and consistency in operations. It also helps ensure that organizations do not lose information regarding management processes when key employees retire. Forestry experienced such a loss during the first half of fiscal year 2008 when both the state forester⁷ and associate state forester⁸ retired. These retirements combined with the administration change in January 2008 and a lack of formal policies and procedures left Forestry officials with little guidance on how to manage their resources.

Recommendation 2: Forestry should work with the new administration to develop, implement, and regularly update policies and procedures that support its mission and address essential management functions at both the office and district level. These policies and procedures should include areas related to budget, personnel, and equipment management.

Summary of Management's Response: LDAF agrees with this recommendation and is assessing and updating policies and procedures to better meet the needs of Forestry and the rest of the department.

⁷ The previous state forester took leave beginning 10/24/07 and retired on 12/28/07. The Louisiana Forestry Commission did not appoint the new state forester until March 2008.

⁸ The previous associate state forester took leave beginning 7/2/07 and retired on 10/5/07. The previous LDAF administration appointed the current associate state forester in June 2007.

Recommendation 3: The policies and procedures Forestry and the new administration develop should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of Forestry management, including its decision-making authority.

Summary of Management's Response: LDAF agrees with this recommendation. The department is currently modifying its policies and procedures to give Forestry decision-making authority and the responsibility that accompanies this authority. This same authority and responsibility will be given to each Office within the Department.

Forestry officials have not had the information necessary to effectively manage their resources.

To effectively manage its resources, Forestry needs access to reliable information in a timely and consistent manner. In the past, Forestry officials did not have the information they needed to effectively manage their resources. The following describes the issues the new LDAF administration and Forestry officials need to address regarding the availability and flow of budgetary and personnel information within the department.

Budget. According to officials in Forestry and the Office of Management and Finance (OMF), the previous LDAF administration did not give Forestry management at the state office information about the office's budget. Instead of routinely providing Forestry with budget updates, OMF contacted Forestry management when the office was running low on funds. Without current budget information, Forestry management cannot proactively and efficiently address funding-related issues that could impact the office's ability to accomplish its mission. Currently, the new LDAF administration is providing Forestry management with training on how to use the Integrated Statewide Information System (ISIS)⁹ so it can track/monitor Forestry's budget.

In addition, the district managers do not receive the budget information they need to formally track their districts' major expenses such as equipment repair reports and fuel usage reports. Of the eight district managers, one said his secretary annually receives a copy of the budget, five said they have never seen their districts' budgets, and two said they have not seen their districts' budgets in several years. One district manager stated that district managers were discouraged from asking for additional budget information under the previous LDAF administration. According to their Department of Civil Service job descriptions, however, district managers are to "*assume responsibility for fiscal management of the district including budget preparation and oversight, preparation of requisitions and supervision of purchasing and other expenditures.*" District managers cannot accomplish their duties if they do not receive current budget information in a timely and consistent manner.

Personnel. In addition to lacking budget information, Forestry officials do not have the information they need to effectively manage personnel. For example, when the audit began, Forestry did not have accurate organizational charts or information on the number of funded

⁹ ISIS is an integrated information system that handles the majority of state agencies' accounting processes.

vacancies within the office. Forestry management, in consultation with the audit team, developed accurate organizational charts to help them monitor and manage the allocation of staff throughout the state. As a result, Forestry management identified three LDAF employees who, while organizationally located within Forestry, do not work for Forestry.

Recommendation 4: Forestry should determine the types of information it needs to effectively manage its budgetary and personnel resources and coordinate with OMF to ensure it receives this information in a timely and consistent manner.

Summary of Management's Response: LDAF agrees with this recommendation. Forestry has developed organizational charts and procedures to better track personnel placement and needs. Additionally, LDAF has granted Forestry officials access to reports on ISIS that will allow Forestry to track the office's budget. Starting with the 2009 fiscal year, Forestry will give districts their own budgets and expect the districts to remain within their budgets.

Recommendation 5: The new administration should ensure the district managers receive the training and resources they need to manage their budgetary resources.

Summary of Management's Response: LDAF agrees with this recommendation. Forestry administration will receive access to in depth budget information and will be trained to use this information to analyze their budgetary status. This administration will use that training to help district managers establish procedures to track their spending to help them remain within their allotted budget.

Some Forestry employees are receiving supplemental hazardous duty pay despite not qualifying for such pay.

We found that seven Forestry employees are receiving supplemental hazardous duty pay¹⁰ despite their regular job duties not requiring the performance of fire detection/suppression activities. The Department of Civil Service has approved the specific forestry job titles eligible for supplemental hazardous duty pay. LDAF's policy on hazardous duty pay further requires that those who receive such pay perform fire detection/suppression activities on a regular basis. Specifically, the policy states that supplemental hazardous duty pay shall not be granted to or continued for any employee in an approved job title "*whose regular job assignments are tasks which do not require the performance of fire detection/suppression activities.*"

Human Resources, within OMF, assigns supplemental hazardous duty pay based solely on an employee's job title. However, there is no communication between Human Resources and Forestry regarding the regular job duties of employees receiving supplemental hazardous duty pay. As a result, there are no controls to protect the department against the occurrence of such erroneous payments. Forestry officials informed us that they are working to correct this problem.

¹⁰ Employees who receive supplemental hazardous duty pay receive an additional \$1.73/hour which totals approximately \$300 per month.

Recommendation 6: Forestry officials should immediately stop non-eligible employees from receiving supplemental hazardous duty pay.

Summary of Management's Response: LDAF agrees with this recommendation and, effective June 9, 2008, has stopped giving supplemental hazardous duty pay to these non-eligible employees.

Recommendation 7: The new LDAF administration should consult with its legal counsel regarding the need, if any, for Forestry employees to reimburse the department for the supplemental hazardous duty pay they received erroneously.

Summary of Management's Response: LDAF agrees with this recommendation and consulted its legal counsel. The LDAF legal counsel determined that, if the department stopped paying the hazardous duty pay immediately, those employees would not need to repay the past hazardous duty pay they previously received. The hazardous duty pay they received is the result of a misinterpretation of the policy by the previous administration and is not the fault of the employees.

Recommendation 8: Forestry should coordinate with Human Resources to establish a formal process for assigning supplemental hazardous duty pay to ensure such pay is allocated according to department policy.

Summary of Management's Response: LDAF agrees with this recommendation. The supplemental hazardous duty pay policy was incorrectly applied by the previous administration with regard to staff assignments. Forestry and Human Resources will review the assignment of supplemental hazardous duty pay for new employees before LDAF grants this pay in the future.

Because of their limited decision-making authority, Forestry officials do not adequately collect or use performance data to manage resources.

Forestry collects performance indicator information regarding its protection, management, information/education, and reforestation functions from the districts on a monthly basis. The performance data Forestry collects is thorough and relevant to its mission. However, according to Forestry management, some districts do not submit their reports in a timely manner. In addition, Forestry does not store this information in a central location. For example, while wildfire data is available on the LDAF intranet, the Management branch keeps its data on an employee's computer and the Enforcement branch keeps its data in a file cabinet. As a result, not all performance data is easily accessible or readily available to Forestry management.

Although Forestry collects performance data on all its major functions, it does not use this information to monitor performance or guide management decision-making. According to *Manageware*,¹¹ some benefits of performance accountability are as follows:

- Allows more accurate assessment of the resources needed to support activities
- Drives effective allocation of existing resources
- Increases credibility when requesting new resources
- Supports informed decision-making
- Encourages delegation rather than micro-management
- Motivates employees and makes everyone more accountable

By using performance data, Forestry could improve performance accountability and increase management effectiveness within all branches and divisions. For example, Forestry does not currently have formal staffing criteria or guidelines for the districts. Instead, Forestry management bases the districts' staffing levels on professional judgment and budgetary resources. By using the performance data it already collects, Forestry management could ensure that it is allocating its personnel in the most effective manner.

In addition, the use of performance data would also assist Forestry management to conduct needs assessments and ensure it has the necessary equipment and personnel to accomplish its mission. For example, Forestry management has expressed a need for a GIS (geographic information system) specialist as many of the federal cost-share programs in which the office participates now require spatial data. Without a GIS specialist to publish spatial data, Forestry will not be eligible for some federal cost-share funds. Performance data would provide Forestry management with support when requesting this position.

Recommendation 9: Forestry should ensure that its performance data is collected and reported in a timely manner.

Summary of Management's Response: LDAF agrees with this recommendation. Forestry officials have since met with the district managers to clearly define reporting requirements and expectations. Compliance will be assured.

¹¹ *Manageware* is the state's management manual that describes Louisiana's integrated processes for policy development, strategic planning, program budgeting, capital budgeting, and performance accountability.

Recommendation 10: Forestry should ensure that performance data is centrally located and that it is readily available and easily accessible to management.

Summary of Management's Response: LDAF agrees with this recommendation.

Recommendation 11: Forestry should use performance data to develop formal staffing plans for the districts to ensure that current personnel are allocated in the most effective manner.

Summary of Management's Response: LDAF partially agrees with this recommendation. However, because of Forestry's wildland firefighting responsibilities and legislative mandates, certain staffing levels must be maintained in each district regardless of performance data. The performance data will allow Forestry to determine the possibility of assigning certain districts more diverse duties to compensate for lower performance indicators in certain categories.

Recommendation 12: Forestry should use performance data to conduct needs assessments and ensure that the office has the necessary equipment and personnel to accomplish its mission.

Summary of Management's Response: LDAF partially agrees with this recommendation. However, as stated in LDAF's response to the previous recommendation, Forestry must maintain a certain level of equipment and personnel within each district to meet its wildland firefighting responsibilities. Performance data can be used to analyze non-fire related activities conducted by the districts.

APPENDIX A: MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE



LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY
MIKE STRAIN DVM
COMMISSIONER



June 18, 2008

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Mr. Steve Theriot, Legislative Auditor
1600 North Third Street
Post Office Box 94397
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Dear Mr. Theriot:

On behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, thank you and your staff for the professional manner in which they conducted the performance audit of the Office of Forestry. Following our initial discussions, it was determined that the objective of this audit would be to determine how well the Office of Forestry was managing its personnel, equipment, and budgetary resources.

In the past, Forestry officials have had limited decision-making authority over the management of their resources. They also were not given the information necessary to effectively manage those resources. My administration took office on January 14, 2008 and the results of this audit will provide us the tools necessary to correct these deficiencies and redefine our Forestry officials' role in the decision-making process related to their resources.

We have reviewed the draft recommendations and offer the following to be incorporated into the final report:

Recommendation 1: The new LDAF administration should assess the decision-making authority assigned to Forestry to determine if management has the appropriate and necessary level of decision-making authority to ensure the office achieves its mission.

We agree with this recommendation and have already placed participative decision-making authority back in the hands of our Forestry officials. We hold a staff meeting of all Executive Staff every week to provide our Assistant Commissioners, which includes the State Forester, the opportunity to voice their needs and any issues current to their Office's operation. At those meetings, we address issues that affect the entire Department in addition to the issues affecting our various Offices.

Recommendation 2: Forestry should work with the new administration to develop, implement, and regularly update policies and procedures that support its mission and address essential management functions at both the office and district level. These policies and procedures should include areas related to budget, personnel, and equipment management.

We agree with this recommendation and the Executive Staff is assessing current policies and procedures and updating them to better meet the needs of Forestry and the rest of the Department. Forestry and the Forestry Commission need to work towards better defining the role of the Commission since Forestry is a part of LDAF and not a stand alone agency.

Recommendation 3: The policies and procedures Forestry and the new administration develop should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of Forestry management, including its decision-making authority.

We agree with this recommendation. Policies and procedures are being addressed and modified if necessary to place decision-making authority and the responsibility that accompanies that authority back in the hands of Forestry. This same authority and responsibility will be given to each Office within the Department.

Recommendation 4: Forestry should determine the types of information it needs to effectively manage its budgetary and personnel resources and coordinate with OMF to ensure it receives this information in a timely and consistent manner.

We agree with this recommendation. Forestry has developed organizational charts and procedures to better track personnel placement and needs. It also is being granted access to the reports on ISIS that will allow them to track their budget. Training will be provided in the use of this program. The districts will be given their own budget beginning the new fiscal year and will be expected to remain within it.

Recommendation 5: The new administration should ensure the district managers receive the training and resources they need to manage their budgetary resources.

We agree with this recommendation. Forestry administration will receive access to in depth budget information and will be trained to use this information to analyze their budgetary status. This administration will use that training to help district managers establish procedures to track their spending to help them remain within their allotted budget.

Recommendation 6: Forestry officials should immediately stop non-eligible employees from receiving supplemental hazardous duty pay.

We agree with this recommendation. We identified and notified the seven employees who were non-eligible and effective June 9, 2008, those employees are no longer receiving hazardous duty pay.

Recommendation 7: The new LDAF administration should consult with its legal counsel regarding the need, if any, for Forestry employees to reimburse the department for the supplemental hazardous duty pay they received erroneously.

We agree with this recommendation and consulted our legal council. It was determined that if we stopped paying the hazardous duty pay immediately, those employees would not need to repay the past hazardous duty pay they previously received. The hazardous duty pay they received is the result of a misinterpretation of the policy by the previous administration and not the fault of the employees.

Recommendation 8: Forestry should coordinate with Human Resources to establish a formal process for assigning supplemental hazardous duty pay to ensure such pay is allocated according to department policy.

We agree with this recommendation. A formal policy already is in place that clearly defines the assignment of supplemental hazardous duty pay. It was incorrectly applied by the previous administration with regard to staff assignments. The assignment of supplemental hazardous duty pay to new employees will be reviewed by Forestry and Human Resources before it is granted.

Recommendation 9: Forestry should ensure that its performance data is collected and reported in a timely manner.

We agree with this recommendation. Reporting of performance data has always been a requirement but the enforcement of this reporting has been inconsistent. Forestry Administration met with all District Managers and the reporting requirements and expectations were clearly defined. Compliance will be assured and must be received in Baton Rouge by the tenth of each month.

Recommendation 10: Forestry should ensure that performance data is centrally located and that it is readily available and easily accessible to management.

We agree with this recommendation. Forestry is analyzing its spatial data needs since most of the Federal grants received are now requiring that their accomplishments be reported in that manner. Once the hiring freeze is lifted, Forestry has been granted the authority by the LDAF administration to hire a GIS manager/specialist to assist with meeting this Federal requirement. Having all reporting built into this type of system will make the data more readily available and accessible to management. There is, however, certain information collected by Forestry's Enforcement Branch that is deemed confidential and must be maintained in a secure location.

Recommendation 11: Forestry should use performance data to develop formal staffing plans for the districts to ensure that current personnel are allocated in the most effective manner.

We partially agree with this recommendation. However, because of our wildland firefighting responsibilities and legislative mandates, certain staffing levels must be maintained in each district regardless of performance data. The performance data will allow Forestry to determine the possibility of assigning certain districts more diverse duties to compensate for lower performance indicators in certain categories.

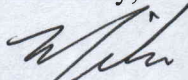
Mr. Theriot
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Recommendation 12: Forestry should use performance data to conduct needs assessments and ensure that the office has the necessary equipment and personnel to accomplish its mission.

We partially agree with this recommendation. As stated in our response to recommendation 11, Forestry must maintain a certain level of equipment and personnel within each district to meet its wildland firefighting responsibilities. Performance data can be used to analyze non-fire related activities conducted by the districts.

Again, we appreciate the professionalism and thoroughness with which your staff conducted this audit and we plan to use the results to redefine Forestry officials' role in the decision-making process as it pertains to their resources. The timing of this audit is extremely helpful in analyzing a complex part of my Department. We will continue to use the results as a tool to improve Forestry's overall operations and make it an integral part of this agency's overall operation.

Sincerely,



Mike Strain DVM
Commissioner

cc: Wade Dubea, State Forester
Richard Hart, Deputy Commissioner
Craig Gannuch, Assistant Commissioner