

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF
WHITE LAKE PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Friday, February 10, 2006

Chairman Steve Linscombe opened the White Lake Property Advisory Board meeting held at the LSU Ag Center Rice Research Station in Crowley, Louisiana, and asked Ms. Lana Guidry to call the roll. The following members, and a quorum, were present:

Steve Linscombe
Richard Hines
Sammy Noel
Don Hale
Cindy Brown
Sean Gayle
Gay Gomez
Darwin Miller
Beverly Wade
Eddie Young

The following members were absent:

Karl Connor
Nathan Granger
Buddy Leach
Annie Smith

Approval of Minutes of December 9, 2005 Meeting

Chairman Linscombe called for a motion for approval of the minutes of the December 9, 2005 meeting. Since all board members had not had an opportunity to review the minutes, approval of the minutes was delayed until later in the meeting.

Property Status Update

Mr. Wayne Sweeney updated the Board on the damages caused to White Lake from Hurricane Rita. He stated there has not been a tremendous amount of change in the property due to finishing up the waterfowl season. Mr. Sweeney said that he has met with department staff regarding levee breaches along White Lake, around the refuge area, and the pump area. He stated they have decided to utilize department equipment and staff to complete this work. They are currently working on obtaining the needed permits

to perform the work. He anticipates on having equipment on-site within a month and this equipment will include a barge and a dragline. He stated that department staff will also be utilized to dismantle pumps in the areas that are needed. He said there are seven total breaches in the levees along the White Lake refuge (area C) that will be repaired. He would like to have this project completed by mid-April and then they will begin pumping out the refuge area. He stated that soil sampling and salinity testing will be performed once the refuge area has been pumped out.

Mr. Sweeney stated he has met with EPA and DEQ several times in the last couple of months and is currently working with these agencies in cleaning up hazardous materials debris in the east side marsh. He said he hopes there will not be too much impact to the marsh once the debris is recovered. He stated this clean-up project should be completed in a couple of weeks.

Mr. Sweeney stated there is still salt water on Mr. Glenray Trahan's lease that hasn't been pumped off yet. This property is located east of the Florence Canal. Mr. Sweeney said that he spoke to the FSA and was informed the Emergency Conservation Program is going to pay \$38 per acre for up to 3 feet of water to assist with pump off costs. He stated that he spoke to Mr. Trahan yesterday who said if he receives that aid he will have that property pumped off.

Mr. Sweeney reported to the board that with department personnel and equipment being utilized to complete the levee and pump station repairs rather than contractors, we will be saving approximately \$200,000 to \$225,000.

Update on Farm Lease Payments

Mr. Parke Moore addressed the Board and reported that as to date, we have only received \$3,000 in lease payments this year. He stated that he and department staff have been working with the Office of Facility Planning and Control and Division of Administration attorneys regarding the lease payments. He said Mr. Don Puckett had received a verbal on their decision to assist us with interpreting mechanisms by which we can work with the farmers to reduce out-of-pocket costs. Mr. Moore stated this would entail some type of in-kind performance of work on the property, on their lease, which is beneficial to the property and is not a part of what duties they are responsible to fulfill under their lease agreement.

Mr. Puckett addressed the Board and stated that he has been in contact with the attorneys from the Division of Administration and he feels confident at this point that we can proceed with an Addendum to the Current Lease to each farmer who is willing to do so, to allow deferral of the rental payments which will be necessary since their first payment is already delinquent. He stated that also in the context of the Addendum the Department could forgive the interest on overdue rental payments and could allow an in-kind payment of rental in lieu of cash; in other words, work done on the property by the farmer that he is not otherwise required to perform under his current lease. Mr. Puckett stated the process is that an Addendum to the Current Lease would be executed between the

Department and the individual farmer who wishes to participate, and after signatures are obtained, the Addendum to the Current Lease would then be submitted to the Division of Administration and signed by the Commissioner for final approval. Mr. Puckett stated that the Division of Administration has emphasized that it is important for the Department to ascertain that the works done are true value for the rental. In other words, we would have to ascertain that the value of the work was equal to the amount of rental they owe in cash.

Mr. Sammy Noel inquired when would we be able to present the farmers with the proposal and Mr. Moore stated that we are now ready to begin talking with them at their availability. Mr. Moore asked Mr. Noel to contact the farmers to begin setting up meetings with the ones interested.

Mr. Sean Gayle inquired what types of in-kind services were we talking about and if it will be only on the agricultural area of the property. Mr. Moore answered that the work would only be on the agriculture lease, specific to the individual farmer's leased property. Mr. Gayle stated he would like to see if work to a particular road could be considered in the in-kind service work. This road is located north of the Intracoastal.

Mr. Noel informed board members that some of the farm lands are unsuitable for planting rice and will remain unsuitable for farming this year. Mr. Noel expressed tremendous interest in retaining the current farmers and doing whatever possible to help them through this financial strain the farmers have encountered.

Chairman Linscombe stated that approximately 75% of the agricultural lands are unsuitable for planting in 2006.

Dr. Beverly Wade asked what the amount of money owed by the farmers was and Mr. Moore stated that right now the farmers are in arrears of \$90,000 and in March the amount will increase to \$180,000 and by this November will total \$270,000.

Chairman Linscombe stated that it is a very complex issue regarding subsidies from the federal government. He said one problem we have with the tenants on White Lake is that a lot of these subsidy payments are tied into what is called historical yield. Historical yield is not what you produce today, but rather where your yields have been locked in at during the previous years. He stated the historical yields on all of the tenants' farms down there are very low and even though these farmers have had yield increases, their payment yields are still based on the lower end; therefore, they are not receiving much government subsidy because of that.

Dr. Wade asked if the request to BP for a humanitarian grant to aid the farmers had been submitted. Chairman Linscombe said he had not heard back from Ms. Annie Smith regarding this request.

Dr. Wade asked if the Department had explored the legality of forgiveness of the rental payments. Mr. Puckett did not pose this question Division of Administration.

Mr. Eddie Young moved to have the Department explore the legality of the following issues:

1. Explore legality of rental lease payment forgiveness for November 2005 rental lease.
2. Explore legality of dividing the November 2005 rental lease payment into ten increments, and space those ten increments over a period of five years, and add an increment to each regular rental lease payment beginning in 2007 and ending in 2011.

Mr. Gayle seconded the motion and the motion passed with no further discussion.

Update on Lottery/Youth/Group Hunts

Mr. Sweeney addressed the Board and reported the following:

1. The youth hunt had 13 participants. Sixteen participants were selected, but 3 participants cancelled.
2. The marsh lotto had 119 participants.
3. The rice field lotto had 157 participants.
4. The group hunt had 81 participants.

Mr. Sweeney stated overall he thinks that this hunting season was outstanding and was better than they had averaged as far as ducks per hunter. He stated the marsh field lotto hunts averaged approximately 5 ducks per hunter. The rice field lotto hunts averaged approximately 2.3 ducks per hunter this year, which is a 50% improvement from the previous years. He stated that the goose count was down a little this year due to flooding in the refuge. He said he received a lot of positive comments from the hunters and that they all appeared happy when they left the hunt. He believes there should not be any problems selling 10 to 12 group hunts for the next hunting season.

Lt. Bobby Buatt reported that law enforcement officers have been working closely with Mr. Sweeney and his staff. Lt. Buatt stated that the enforcement division performed overt and covert surveillance on the property during the hunting season and is happy to announce that there were no violations reported on White Lake this past year.

Update on Public Fishing

Mr. Moore reported to the Board that Mr. Sweeney had drafted a public notice for advertisement for the public lottery fishing permit. Mr. Moore stated that the permit will cost \$30 and there is a \$5 application fee. Mr. Moore stated that as to date we have

received 25 applications and that the application deadline is February 13, 2006. Mr. Moore stated that public fishing will begin March 1 and end on August 15.

Mr. Moore reported that staff from the Office of Fisheries has been to the property and taken samples on several occasions, and from these results we feel the quality of fishing will not be good this year.

Mr. Richard Hines asked Mr. Moore if there had been any further advancement in either the research or funding for a boat dock facility around White Lake. Mr. Moore reported that at this time, we are at a standstill. He stated that we are intending to take the 10 acre spot that is just east of the boat landing and permit that area and connect it across the drainage ditch that parallels the parking area. This will insure that we have ingress and egress to an area that can be used not only for extensive parking for boats and trailers, but also possibly a kiosk or some other facility for support services. Mr. Moore said we are also looking at the possibility of utilizing the residence that we double as an office and meeting space for educational purposes in the interim. For instance, this location is accessible without having to get on a boat and can be used as a meeting place where visitors can get to the area by vehicle and go back home, as opposed to using watercraft to get to the camp or to the various managed areas. He stated we can have displays within that building to illustrate the history of White Lake. Mr. Moore stated there is a federal source for boat funding that goes through the Office of Fisheries, but it is extremely competitive.

Mr. Gayle inquired if there is a process within the Department to solicit funds from private corporations. Mr. Moore informed him there is the Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation and that such donations made can be earmarked for certain projects, such as a boat landing at White Lake.

Budget Report

Mr. Moore reported that as of February 3, 2006 the projected revenue is \$1.1 million, but the actual revenue to this point is estimated to be about \$1.08 million. He stated that a big deficit in revenue is from the agricultural leases. Mr. Moore said this budget is a little skewed because the transfer from White Lake Preservation, Inc. was \$317,000 rather than the \$200,000 that we were expecting. Mr. Moore reported that actual expenditures are presently at \$287,000 and the approved budget is just below \$800,000.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Finance Committee

Mr. Donald Hale reported the committee discussed making recommendations to the board to work with Mr. Noel and Mr. Moore in assisting the farmers with their rental lease payments.

Education and Outreach Committee

Dr. Wade addressed the Board and provided them a handout outlining the goals of the committee. She stated the Education and Outreach Committee met December 9. Dr. Wade said the committee discussed several education and outreach projects they would like to see accomplished. She stated that Mr. Gayle attended an educational retreat this week at White Lake and met with the staff from the education division within the Department. Dr. Wade stated they see four broad areas they would like to focus on which include: 1) continue to provide the recreational and educational opportunities that focus on the significance of wetlands and ecosystems; 2) utilize the conservation area as a teaching tool; 3) assist the state to promote White Lake as one of Louisiana's natural resources; and 4) continue to promote positive attitudes about the area, and access and use of the property.

Dr. Wade reported some of the ideas the committee is researching are as follows: 1) K-12 curricula and research development; 2) ecotourism development; 3) website expansion to include additional educational information and history of White Lake, as well as pictures; 4) create a power-point presentation on White Lake for seminars and workshops; 5) establish an exhibit on "White Lake Wetlands – Environmental Education" in the Gueydan Town Museum Building; 6) develop printed informational materials/brochures and maps of White Lake; and 7) construction of a kiosk, birding trails, and a research station.

Mr. Gayle addressed the Board and reported that he met with Mr. John Sturgis and other staff members of the LDWF education division, as well as five individuals from the Vermilion Parish School System earlier this week at an educational retreat held at White Lake. Mr. Gayle said the Vermilion Parish School Board has agreed to work with the Department on providing educational brochures and information on a website which would allow schools to download the documents, saving the Department money for not having to print these documents. He said this website would have a separate section for teachers and students. This will enable teachers to obtain curricula and students to obtain a variety of educational information. Mr. Gayle said he has already spoken to Mr. Bo Boehringer regarding the website. Mr. Gayle stated that Mr. Sweeney and Mr. Sturgis concur that hands on science is important and there is a need for an education center to accommodate the younger students.

Mr. Gayle reported that for the power-point presentation for White Lake that was discussed earlier, they would like it contain multiple presentations for all different age groups and have it put on the website. He said the public would be able to download the presentation themselves at no cost to the Department. Mr. Gayle stated this would be a great start to make White Lake visible to the public.

Dr. Gomez addressed the Board and informed the members of a newspaper article that came out over the AP wire in Chicago and was reprinted in the Baton Rouge Advocate which referenced American birders. This article stated American birders are spending more than \$32 billion annually on this hobby and approximately 18 million travel to see

birds, according to a 2001 study performed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Dr. Gomez offered the thought as we seek additional revenue for this property not to forget ecotourism as a possibility. Dr. Gomez recommended the Department consider offering a non-lethal hunt for birders, similar to the marsh maneuvers program offered to the 4-H students. She feels birders will be willing to pay a good sum to be able to participate in a non-lethal hunt at White Lake. Dr. Gomez stated that large conservation organizations could possibly put together a group of non-lethal hunters, which would bring in additional revenues to White Lake. Ms. Cindy Brown stated the Nature Conservancy organizes and participates in field trips all over the world and believes they could accomplish some sort of a partnership in this effort.

Natural Resources Committee

Mr. Hines addressed the Board and informed them that there has not been a committee meeting since the December 9 meeting took place, but he plans on having one in March. Mr. Hines indicated that he is attempting to get some money from the Department of Natural Resources, which they received in bonus money for mineral leases granted within the White Lake Conservation Area. He stated it is a long shot, but he is going to try. Mr. Hines reported that Clear Lake, which is down on the south side near White Lake, falls within the Conservation Area and had some mineral leases granted in 2005.

Mr. Hines reported that he recently received a phone call from a gentleman interested in drilling a well within the Conservation Area and he believes it is the same location that several companies have expressed interest in. Mr. Hines said he informed the caller that we did not own the mineral rights, but White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area may be able to extract a user fee. Mr. Hines stated the caller was very much aware of the mineral rights ownership and was amenable to the situation. He stated they are going to try to schedule to meet within the next two weeks to explore this opportunity.

Mr. Hines also reported that Hilcorp contacted him and stated they would like to sit down with the committee to discuss their obligations to White Lake due to the production they have there, whether it be roads, levees, etc.

Agriculture Committee

Mr. Noel addressed the Board and stated that he did not have any further comments because his issues were addressed in the Update on Farm Lease Payments discussion.

Other Business

Mr. Moore addressed the Board and suggested it may be best for the Board to consider, at the Department's request, regulating themselves and refrain from participating in public activities that are consumptive in nature. Mr. Moore stated that we would like to insure to the public that the Board's objective is the preservation of the property and that board members do not gain from their position.

Mr. Noel made a motion restricting board members, and their immediate family members, from participating in any consumptive activities on White Lake, including lottery hunts or fishing, but excluding the private leases. The motion was seconded by Mr. Gayle, and passed with no opposition.

Mr. Gayle moved to accept the December 9, 2005 meeting minutes and it was seconded by Mr. Noel. The motion passed with no opposition.

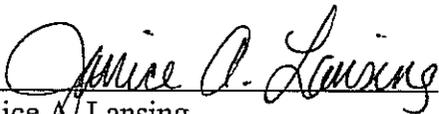
The next regular Advisory Board meeting has been scheduled for Friday, April 28, 2006 and will be held at White Lake. Board members are to meet at the boat landing at 9:00 a.m.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairman Linscombe asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Gayle moved to adjourn the meeting and it was seconded by Mr. Noel.



Janice A. Lansing
Acting Secretary

JAL:lg

(The preceding constitute minutes of the Advisory Board Meeting and are not a verbatim transcript of the proceedings.)