

Approved 7/13/05

Texas Forest Service Employee Advisory Council
Minutes From
April 13, 2005

Members Attending:

Clay Bales	Sarah Brooks	Yolanda Lopez
Carrie Chesbro	Sandy Santana	Paula Cadena
Daniel Duncum	Richard Dottellis	Nick Harrison
Linda Alford	Bobby Weaver, Jr.	Kenneth Myrow
Ronnie Hamm	Brad Moore	Jill Lipsey

Members Absent with Notification: Steve Anderson

Members Absent without Notification: None

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Tom Owen Don Cumbie

Guests Present: None

Ronnie Hamm, EAC Chair, called the EAC meeting to order at 9:00am.

1. **Approval of minutes from January 2005 EAC Meeting:** The minutes from the January EAC meeting were approved by unanimous vote.
2. **Working Issues from January 2005 EAC Meeting:**

The Council reviewed the following working issues:

- i. **Telephone Policy Modification:** A response from Travis Zamzow stated: The administrative procedure will be modified to clarify that "telecommunications costs incurred for official agency business, amounting to \$6.00 or more per voucher, must be supported with itemized receipts or a log." Additionally, a statement will be added to the administrative procedure, which states: "Employees may be reimbursed only for allowable expenses incurred for official agency business." This clarifies the concern regarding a potential loophole allowing agency reimbursement for person telephone calls.

- ii. **Blanket Travel Policy:** Robby Dewitt will modify the administrative procedure as follows: Travel in a personal auto must have an approved Travel Authorization form if reimbursement will be sought. No Travel Authorization form is required for travel in a personal auto when reimbursement will not be sought, but the employee must obtain verbal approval from their supervisor.
- iii. **Brush Jackets:** Memo from Chair to Bill Rose requesting he consider future grants was favorably received. The Council will be updated as appropriate.
- iv. **Pay Raises:** Memo sent from Tom Owen to Robby Dewitt requesting the merit pay process close the loop with all first-line supervisors, especially after their input is requested. Robby indicated he understands the concern and is supportive of our recommendation.
- v. **Reimbursement of Seasonals (Work Capacity Testing):** Tom Owen reported the FRP working group involved with work capacity testing decided to continue the current procedure of reimbursing seasonal employees needing medical clearance prior to taking a work capacity test at the same rate as full-time employees.
- vi. **Employee Suggestion Program:** Mr. Hull will consider adding an additional Director's Award to recognize those who improve a process, procedure, etc. resulting in a cost savings to the agency. Tom Owen will draft a document for the Director's review.
- vii. **Vacation/Comp Time to Cover R&R:** Still under reviewed. More to follow. Tom Owen will research issues will TFS fronting the money to an employee if agency will be reimbursed.
- viii. **Conduct More Meetings Over Telephone or Internet:** Clay Bales provided a discussion on the possible use of Net Meeting as a tool to conduct meetings over the internet. Yolando Lopez also reported on the costs involved with setting up a teleconference on Centrex. The Council decided to have the subcommittee get together before the next meeting and discuss alternatives for possible use, including

discussions with the IR Manager and groups within the Agency willing to take part in a pilot project.

6. **New Items:**

- a. **Create a TFS Honor Guard:** The Council unanimously agreed to have the Chair send a memo to Bobby Young requesting he consider formation of an Agency honor guard and developing appropriate protocols for its use.
- b. **Reimbursement for employees to purchase safety glasses:** The Council unanimously agreed to forward this recommendation to the TFS Safety Council for their consideration. The Chair will prepare a memo for the Chair of the Safety Council.
- c. **Leaving early from work if breaks not taken:** Tom Owen will discuss this issue with the supervisor involved to get more information.
- d. **Agency policy on outside employment:** The Council discussed an employee concern regarding outside employment. Don Cumbie summarized the TAMU System policy regarding outside employment. The Council asked Tom Owen to follow-up with TICC regarding outside employment with a federal agency (AD pay rate).
- e. **Use of seasonal employees for yard maintenance and office cleaning:** The Council unanimously agreed to take no further action regarding this concern.
- f. **Mandatory use of credit cards for purchase of uniform items from Lion Apparel:** The Council unanimously agreed to take no further action regarding this concern.
- g. **Personal use of cell phones:** The Council addressed an issue from an employee regarding use of Agency cell phones for personal use. Specifically, the employee was requesting a specified amount of minutes be authorized each month for emergency use of Agency cell phones. Current policy prohibits this practice. The Council unanimously agreed to take no further action on this issue. It was discussed that any employee who must use a personal cell phone for Agency business is able to get reimbursed for that expense.

- h. **Hiring of Foresters:** The Council unanimously agreed to take no further action on this issue.
 - i. **Direct deposit of travel advances rather than overnight check:** Travis Zamzow is considering a pilot project to use direct deposit rather than overnight check. An update will be provided at the next Council meeting.
 - j. **Use of beepers and cell phone:** The Council discussed an issue from an employee questioning why employees had to carry both pagers and cellphones. The Council unanimously agreed to to no further action on this issue realizing coverage and comfort issues dictate the need for both items.
 - k. **Implementation of travel savings plan similar to USFS:** The Council discussed a recommendation that the Agency implement a travel savings plans similar to what is used within USFS. The Council unanimously agreed to take no further action on this issue.
 - l. **Paying of registration fees for Finance and Administration Division classes:** The Council discussed the concern of an employee about the \$25 registration fee for Finance and Administration Division classes. Tom Owen explained the registration fee (this FY) is being reimbursed to each program. It is necessary to charge the fee in order to purchase materials for the classes. The Council unanimously agreed to take no further action on this issue.
 - m. **Petty Cash:** The Council discussed a recommendation from an employee allowing for petty cash to be used for travel advances and for two people to have access to the cash. System policy does not allow for two person access or for the cash to be used for travel advances. The Council unanimously agreed to take no further action on this issue.
 - n. **Outprocessing of employees:** The Council discussed a recommendation from an employee that direct supervisors should always complete the out processing checklist for a departing employee. The Council discussed this issue and unanimously agreed to take no further action since Agency policy calls for the supervisor to complete the checklist.
7. **Next Meeting Date:**

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July 13, 2005—Lufkin: 9:30am start time

8. **Future Meeting Dates:**

Oct 12, 2005

Jan 11, 2006

9. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:30pm.