

2024 Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 119

BY REPRESENTATIVE MIKE JOHNSON

A RESOLUTION

To request the chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development to appoint a subcommittee, entitled the Louisiana Emergency Beetle Committee, to study and make recommendations on rules and actions to address the devastation of the forest industry due to the recent drought and infestation of beetles and other pests that are killing pine and other trees and to address issues arising from any laws or regulations that restrict or prohibit local and state entities from removing infested trees from private properties.

WHEREAS, according to an article published by the Louisiana State University AgCenter and the Office of Research and Economic Development, the forest industry is the top agricultural sector in Louisiana worth ten to fourteen billion dollars, making it a substantial economic contributor to the state's economy every year and is one of the biggest job creators in Louisiana, creating approximately thirty-seven thousand jobs in this state; and

WHEREAS, more than half of all land in Louisiana is comprised of forests that are heavily dominated by pines; and

WHEREAS, forests are continually threatened by natural disasters, invasive species, diseases, and other factors; and

WHEREAS, due to the recent drought in this state and increasing drought frequency with extreme heat, pines and other trees have become more vulnerable to beetle and pest infestation; and

WHEREAS, the National Drought Mitigation Center has categorized a substantial portion of Louisiana's parishes as being in an "exceptional drought" state for extended periods of time which causes trees to weaken and become more susceptible to various issues, especially to pests and diseases; and

WHEREAS, according to the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Ips beetles and other types of beetles and pests are prevalent in the south, usually attacking weakened, dying, or recently felled trees and fresh logging debris; and

WHEREAS, research conducted in the southeastern United States revealed that pines are sensitive to droughts, and trees damaged from a drought may take several years to fully regain their health and vigor, which may worsen forest conditions or increase the risk of infestations of beetles and other pests; and

WHEREAS, natural disasters, such as prolonged droughts, sometimes result in high numbers of dead and weakened trees on private properties near right-of-ways, resulting in dangerous conditions despite good preventative measures; and

WHEREAS, these trees not only contribute to the beetle infestation in this state but also create danger to people and infrastructure when not removed and handled promptly; and

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality has created regulations for tree removal in certain situations which may burden arborists or other tree removal specialists as well as private citizens who may bear the costs associated with tree removal; and

WHEREAS, many infested trees are on private properties near public right-of-ways and roads; however, local and municipal entities are unable to cut or remove such trees on private properties due to current legal restrictions despite the danger to homeowners, utilities, and person traveling upon public roads and right-of-ways; and

WHEREAS, the interests of the citizens of the state of Louisiana would be served by the creation of a subcommittee of the House Committee of Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development to study and recommend rules and actions to address items and issues including, but not limited to, the following:

- (1) Forest devastation caused by beetle infestation.
- (2) Problems related to dead, weakened, or infested trees on private properties near power lines and other issues and effects on public right-of-ways caused by the danger and effects of such trees.
- (3) Possible suspension of certain regulations by the Department of Environmental Quality during emergency situations caused by natural disasters.

(4) Possible suspension of any law or regulation prohibiting a public entity from entering a private property to cut or remove dangerous, infested trees that may pose a danger to the public and to infrastructure.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Representatives of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby request the chairman of the House Committee of Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development to appoint a subcommittee, entitled as the Louisiana Emergency Beetle Committee, to study and make recommendations on rules and actions to address the devastation of the forest industry due to the recent drought and infestation of beetles and other pests that are killing pine and other trees and to address issues arising from any laws or regulations that restrict or prohibit local and state entities from removing infested trees from private properties.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the state representative for House District 27 shall serve as the chairman of the subcommittee and shall have all the rights and privileges of a standing committee member on the subcommittee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the subcommittee shall solicit the input, recommendations, and advice of the following entities:

- (1) The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.
- (2) The Louisiana Public Service Commission.
- (3) The Louisiana Forestry Association.
- (4) The Police Jury Association of Louisiana.
- (5) The Louisiana Municipal Association.
- (6) The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality.
- (7) The Louisiana Division of Administration.
- (8) The office of the governor.
- (9) The Louisiana Loggers Association.
- (10) The Louisiana Department of Insurance.
- (11) The Louisiana Arborist Association.
- (12) The Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of the subcommittee shall advocate to support the Congressional bill, S.3838 of the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress (2024), also known as the Emergency Beetle Response Act of 2024 and request the Louisiana Congressional

Delegation support this Resolution and all other Congressional instruments that address the solutions and remedies of this dangerous and growing beetle infestation issue.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the subcommittee shall also focus its study on raising public awareness on beetle infestation, the dangers associated with it, and making recommendations on prevention or remediation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the subcommittee shall convene its first meeting no later than August 1, 2024, at the call of the chairman of the subcommittee, and the subcommittee shall hold such meetings as may be necessary to fulfill its duties.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the House Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development shall provide staff assistance to the subcommittee upon the request of the chairman of the subcommittee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the subcommittee shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations of rules and actions on or before January 15, 2025, to the House Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development, the commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, and the David R. Poynter Legislative Research Library.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the commissioner of the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES