

2024 Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 119

BY REPRESENTATIVE MIKE JOHNSON

AGRICULTURE: Authorizes and requests the chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture and Rural Development to appoint a subcommittee to study and address the devastation of the forest industry due to the infestation of beetles

1 A RESOLUTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

29 (1) Forest devastation caused by beetle infestation.

1 (2) Problems related to dead, weakened, or infested trees on private properties
2 near power lines and other issues and effects on public right-of-ways caused by the danger
3 and effects of such trees.

4 (3) Possible suspension of certain regulations by the Department of
5 Environmental Quality during emergency situations caused by natural disasters.

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

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

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

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

22 (1) The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

23 (2) The Louisiana Public Service Commission.

24 (3) The Louisiana Forestry Association.

25 (4) The Police Jury Association of Louisiana.

26 (5) The Louisiana Municipal Association.

27 (6) The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality.

28 (7) The Louisiana Division of Administration.

29 (8) The office of the governor.

30 (9) The Louisiana Loggers Association.

1 (10) The Louisiana Department of Insurance.

2 (11) The Louisiana Arborist Association.

3 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of the subcommittee shall advocate
4 to support the Congressional bill, S.3838 of the 118th Congress (2024), also known as the
5 Emergency Beetle Response Act of 2024 and request the Louisiana Congressional
6 Delegation support this Resolution and all other Congressional instruments that address the
7 solutions and remedies of this dangerous and growing beetle infestation issue.

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

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

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

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

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

DIGEST

The digest printed below was prepared by House Legislative Services. It constitutes no part of the legislative instrument. The keyword, one-liner, abstract, and digest do not constitute part of the law or proof or indicia of legislative intent. [R.S. 1:13(B) and 24:177(E)]

Requests the chairman House Committee of Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development to appoint a subcommittee, entitled the La. Emergency Beetle Committee, to study and recommend rules and actions to address forest devastation caused by beetle infestation, problems related to dead trees on private properties near power lines and other issues and effects on public rights-of-way caused by the danger and effects of such dead

trees, and to consider whether certain regulations by the Dept. of Environmental Quality may be suspended during emergency situations caused by natural disasters.

Provides that the state representative for House District 27 serve as the chairman of the subcommittee and specifies that he shall have all the rights and privileges of a member of the standing committee on the subcommittee.

Requires the subcommittee to solicit the input, recommendation, and advice of the following entities:

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

Provides that the subcommittee advocate in support of the Congressional bill, S. 3838 of the 118th Congress, also known as the Emergency Pine Beetle Response Act of 2024, and to request the La. congressional delegation to support such Act as well as any other Congressional instruments that address the issue of beetle infestation; and to focus its study on raising public awareness on beetle infestation, the dangers of it, and making recommendations on prevention or a remediation plan.

Provides for the subcommittee to convene its first meeting by Aug. 1, 2024, and to hold such meetings as may be necessary to fulfill its duties. Requires the House Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development to provide staff assistance to the commission upon the request of the chairman of the subcommittee.

Requires the subcommittee to submit a report of its findings and recommendations of rules and actions by Jan. 15, 2025, to the House Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development, the commissioner of the La. Dept. of Agriculture and Forestry, and the David R. Poynter Legislative Research Library.

Summary of Amendments Adopted by House

The Committee Amendments Proposed by House Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development to the original resolution:

1. Make a technical change.

The Committee Amendments Proposed by House Committee on House and Governmental Affairs to the engrossed resolution:

1. Add La. Arborist Assoc. to list of entities to be solicited for input, recommendations, and advice by the subcommittee.
2. Specify that the chairman of the subcommittee shall have all the rights and privileges of a standing committee member of the subcommittee.