

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Human Resources Policy No.: 7

EFFECTIVE DATE: FEBRUARY 25, 2015

SUBJECT: EDUCATIONAL LEAVE/REIMBURSEMENTS

AUTHORIZATION: STEPHEN CHUSTZ, SECRETARY

I. POLICY

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) fully supports and encourages its employees to further their training and education in fields related to their jobs and the mission of the department. Supervisors should exercise flexibility in fixing work schedules to permit employees to take advantage of available training and educational opportunities during off-duty hours. In recommending that an employee be granted educational leave during work hours for this purpose, supervisors must remember that work responsibilities are a priority and take precedence over the individual needs of the employee.

Employees should not view educational leave or tuition/book fee reimbursements as a right or that such requests will be automatically approved. For these benefits to be granted, the public's interest must be furthered. Generally, this requires that the course taken enhance the employee's performance and improve the quality of service to the public.

II. PURPOSE

This policy serves to establish criteria and a procedure for authorizing leave and reimbursements to employees for training and education, and imposes an obligation upon employees receiving such benefits to reimburse the costs therefor in the event they fail to remain employed by DNR.

III. APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all DNR employees who satisfy the eligibility requirements set forth herein and apply for educational leave or tuition/book fee reimbursements.

IV. ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible to receive educational leave or tuition/book fee reimbursements:

- 1) An employee must be full-time, have achieved permanent status and be continuously employed by DNR for a minimum of two years;

- 2) An employee must have achieved PES ratings of "Successful" or "Exceptional" over the two prior rating years;
- 3) The training and education must be job-related such that completion of the coursework will materially assist the employee in performing customary job duties. Personal benefit to the employee is not the standard; rather, the training and education must further the business operations of the department;
- 4) An employee granted educational leave or tuition/book fee reimbursements in a prior semester must have earned a grade of "B" or better in the course for which such benefit was previously granted;
- 5) Educational leave will be granted only when hours of class attendance conflict with the employee's normal work hours and the conflict cannot be resolved despite diligent effort;
- 6) Tuition/book fee reimbursements will not be approved for a course if grant funds, stipends or the like from another source are provided or available;
- 7) Benefits are available only for courses taken at accredited public institutions;
- 8) Tuition/book fee reimbursements are dependent upon funding availability;
- 9) A grade of "B" or better in the course taken must be earned;
- 10) Educational leave and tuition/book fee reimbursements are available only for one course per semester;
- 11) Approval of educational leave and/or tuition/book fee reimbursements must be obtained for each course taken. As such, employees must re-apply for such benefits prior to the beginning of each semester; and
- 12) Employees may be required to provide proof of class attendance to support the hours of educational leave granted.

VI. EDUCATIONAL LEAVE

Educational leave may be authorized in accordance with the following:

- 1) A maximum of thirty calendar days (240 hours) in one calendar year for a qualifying course or courses; or
- 2) A maximum of ninety calendar days (720 hours) in one calendar year if DNR requires an employee to undergo special training or education.

Educational leave is to be granted only for the hours of class attendance and related travel time to and from (30 minutes each way) the educational institution.

NOTE: Annual or compensatory leave may be granted to an employee to attend classes which require travel time to a public institution beyond that allowed herein. Such approval will be granted only if the leave does not interfere with the employee's work activities or adversely impact the section's operations.

VII. TUITION/BOOK FEE REIMBURSEMENTS

An employee may be reimbursed for actual costs incurred for authorized and pre-approved coursework that is job-related and directly benefits the department's operations. Reimbursements are limited to required tuition and reasonable and necessary book fees. These reimbursements apply to courses taken after business hours, in addition to courses taken during regular work hours for which educational leave is granted.

Receipts for the costs directly paid by the employee and proof of the grade (B or better) earned must be provided. Under no circumstance will these costs be advanced or provided to an employee prior to successful completion of the course.

VIII. PROCEDURE

An employee applying for educational leave or seeking tuition/book fee reimbursements must submit a request through his/her chain of command to the Secretary. This request must be in writing and made prior to commencement of the coursework. Prior to recommending approval, supervisors and the employee's appointing authority must consider the job-relatedness of the request and the impact of the employee's absence from duty on the section's operations.

An employee's request for educational leave or tuition/book fee reimbursements shall identify:

- 1) The nature of the request (leave and/or reimbursement);
- 2) The public educational institution;
- 3) The course to be taken;
- 4) The degree sought;
- 5) The course days, times and duration;
- 6) The times of departure and return to work;
- 7) The total costs for tuition/book fees; and
- 8) A detailed explanation of the benefit to DNR resulting from completion of the course.

If the employee's supervisory chain of command recommends approval of the employee's request, the appointing authority shall detail in writing to the Secretary the

basis for the recommendation, an evaluation of the impact upon the section's operations and the benefit to be derived by the department.

If approved for educational leave or tuition/book fee reimbursements, upon conclusion of the course, the employee shall provide proof of:

- 1) Satisfactory completion of the course with a grade of "B" or better;
- 2) The costs for tuition/books – original receipts required; and
- 3) Proof of payment of the tuition/book fees.

IX. EMPLOYEE REIMBURSEMENT OBLIGATION

Given the limitations by express law upon the expenditure of public funds only in furtherance of public interests, DNR requires that an employee receiving the benefit of educational leave and/or tuition/book fee reimbursements commit, by contractual agreement, to continue working for DNR for a period of two years following course completion. Continued employment for this period ensures that the State derives a benefit from the training/education provided to the employee. In the event the employee fails to satisfy this two-year commitment, he/she is required to reimburse the value of the educational leave and/or tuition and book fee reimbursements provided by the department.

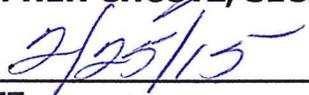
X. EXCEPTIONS

Exceptions to this policy may only be made by the Secretary and then only for reasons beneficial to the business operations of DNR.

XI. QUESTIONS

Questions regarding this policy should be addressed to the Human Resources Division.



STEPHEN CHUSTZ, SECRETARY


DATE

INITIAL ISSUE DATE: 02/25/15

STATE OF LOUISIANA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

REIMBURSEMENT AGREEMENT

Employee (Print)

Date Employed

Job Title

WHEREAS, Employee has requested to take the following course:

COURSE TITLE

EDUCATIONAL FACILITY

COST OF TUITION

COST OF BOOKS

SEMESTER – YEAR

WHEREAS, Employee acknowledges the desire to further his/her training/education and DNR acknowledges that such training/education will materially assist Employee in performing job duties, thus enhancing the department's operations;

WHEREAS, DNR acknowledges its willingness to authorize educational leave and/or reimburse tuition/book fees to facilitate Employee's enrollment in and completion of such training/education;

WHEREAS, Employee acknowledges DNR's intended use of public funds to provide these benefits;

NOW THEREFORE, In consideration of the personal benefit to be received by Employee from the granting of educational leave and/or reimbursement of tuition/book fees, he/she does hereby agree and covenant:

- 1) To remain employed by DNR and satisfactorily perform the duties of his/her position for a period of two years following course completion; or

- 2) Reimburse DNR for the value of the educational leave granted and/or the tuition/book fees paid in the event he/she leaves the employ of DNR, regardless of reason, prior to the two-year continuing employment obligation set forth herein.

CONSIDERING THE FOREGOING, the reimbursement obligation set forth herein shall become due and payable upon receipt by Employee of an itemized statement from DNR of the precise sums due and will be paid:

- 1) Directly by Employee via certified funds within five days of receipt of the itemized statement; or
- 2) Via deduction from Employee's final paycheck, with Employee hereby authorizing Human Resources to deduct from his/her final wages the total sums due as reimbursements; or
- 3) Via deduction from Employee's terminal leave payout, with Employee hereby authorizing Human Resources to deduct from his/her annual/compensatory leave payout the total sums due as reimbursement.

FINALLY, in the event civil litigation becomes necessary because of Employee's failure to honor his/her obligation to satisfy the reimbursement obligation set forth herein, he/she shall be responsible for payment of all costs and the reasonable attorney fees incurred by DNR in enforcing the terms and provisions hereof.

EMPLOYEE SIGNATURE

HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR

DATE

APPOINTING AUTHORITY

AUTHORIZATION

Educational Leave: Approved Denied

Tuition/Book Fees: Approved Denied

STEPHEN CHUSTZ, SECRETARY

DATE