

New leadership at embattled Alberta agriculture agency

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EMMA GRANEY

The Alberta Crown corporation that saw its board sacked and senior leadership suspended has a new board.

The Agriculture Finance Services Corporation (AFSC) landed in hot water last June after an investigation by the province's internal auditor, sparked by an anonymous tip to government.

The investigation found unnecessary travel on the taxpayer's dime, and gifts of booze, theatre tickets and rounds of golf.

The matter was handed over to the RCMP, which is currently investigating criminal wrongdoing in the case.

The corporation has 600 employees spread over 46 offices with a head office in Lacombe.

The Crown corporation's new board was announced Thursday by Agriculture and Forestry Minister Oneil Carlier.

New chairperson Jessica Wood said the first order of business would be hiring a new permanent CEO.

For Carlier, June's report smacked of a culture of entitlement at AFSC.

He said he lost confidence in the board and dismissed them all because they were the ones that approved expenses claimed by the executives.

"It's important for the public to have trust in this valuable organization," he said.

"I did not agree with the standards approved by the former board, and I think it's fair to say Albertans did not agree."

Wood said that, under her leadership, the new board will be committed to acting in the best interests of the Crown, and it will act responsibly, in an open and trans-



Agriculture and Forestry Minister Oneil Carlier, right, announces the new board of the Agriculture Finance Services Corporation, including new chairperson Jessica Wood, pictured, on Thursday. ED KAISER

parent manner.

Her salary will be \$40,000 annually, plus expenses, and the other board members will receive \$30,000 and expenses.

When appointed, the new president and managing director will make markedly less than the corporation's former boss, Brad Klak, who, according to payment disclosures on the AFSC website, took home \$732,104 in salary and other payments in 2015.

Alberta's new chief executive compensation chart, set during the government's recent agencies, boards and commissions review, means the replacement CEO will get between \$223,040 and \$301,760.

Klak was suspended with pay in June as a result of the auditor's investigation, along with chief

operating officer Merle Jacobson and vice-president of innovation and product development, Wayne McDonald.

In 2015, McDonald made \$330,082 and Jacobson \$341,550.

All three men have since left AFSC. Earlier this year, Jacobson and McDonald retired, while Klak's contract expired and wasn't renewed.

Most of the issues identified by the auditor in June revolved around a single broker, who was never named but is no longer working with AFSC.

Along with Wood, the new board members are Jerry Bouma, Gordon Cove, Peter Galloway, Jo-Ann Hall, Harvey Hagman, Anna Harder and Kiren Singh.

egraney@postmedia.com
twitter.com/EmmaLGraney