

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

OFFICE OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION  
STATE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

December 8, 2020  
1:15 PM

5825 FLORIDA BOULEVARD  
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Girouard called the regular monthly Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. Mr. Steve Horvath gave the invocation and Mr. Larry Sayes lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ROLL CALL**

The roll was called by Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander.

**Members and Alternate Members present:**

Dr. Ernest Girouard - Chairman  
Mr. Steve Horvath-Vice Chairman  
Mr. John Alan Williams- LACD President  
Mr. Jason Nolde- LACD 1st Vice President  
Mr. Larry Sayes- Secretary- Treasurer  
Mr. Reggie Skains, Area I Member  
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member  
Dr. Thomas Vitrano, Area V Alternate  
Mr. Brad Spicer, Alternate Member

**Members absent:**

Southern University Agricultural Center  
Representative  
  
Dr. Mike Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Member

A quorum was present.

**Others Present:**

Mr. Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist  
Mr. Blair Hebert, LSU AgCenter  
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC  
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC  
Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC

**Public Comments**

Chairman Girouard asked if there were any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none.

**Approval of the minutes**

Chairman Giroaurd called for a motion to approve the October 27, 2020 SSWCC minutes.

**Motion by:** Mr. Alan Williams

**Second by:** Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### **NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement- Mr. Joey Breaux, Director, SSWCC**

The districts have entered all their information into the interim Farm Bill spreadsheet for October 2020. The current total entered is nearly \$160,000 which is approximately twice as much as one month's total was for that month last year. There were some technical issues with the interim spreadsheet, but we are getting past the glitches and hope to overcome the issues for next month's entries. The spreadsheet is temporary and we are working towards revising the intranet system to have specific tasks instead of the hours that districts used to input.

### **LACD Annual Meeting/NACD Annual Meeting-Mr. Joey Breaux, Director, SSWCC**

Mr. Breaux said after last meeting he and Mr. Alan Williams discussed the LACD Meeting and decided to do a virtual Board of Directors meeting. He said the meeting will take place on Wednesday, January 13, 2021. This will be a one day meeting and will last for approximately 3 hours. He said the draft agenda may be edited to include other items such as the Master Farmer Awards and the Memorial announcements. Mr. Tim Palmer, NACD President, has expressed interest in participating in the meeting as well Mr. Keith Owens NACD SC representative.

Mr. Breaux said the 75th NACD Annual Meeting will be held online from February 1-10, 2021 through NACD's virtual hub. NACD will celebrate their legacy and recognize its origins through the theme "NACD's 75th Anniversary: A Diamond Out of the Dust". There is a \$50 registration fee which will give you access to both the business meetings from February 1-5 as well as the convention programming on February 8-10.

## **New Business**

### **NRCS State Conservationist Report- Mr. Chad Kacir, State Conservationist**

Mr. Kacir said NRCS is working on approximately 40-50 Grassland Conservation Initiative (GCI) applications. He said there have been a few applications that have already been accepted and he hopes they will be completed by January. He said all Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications have been completed for 2020 as of November 6th. Mr. Kacir said there were 1600 conservation program contracts in 2020 for a total of \$28 million dollars. He said payments are slated to be released before the end of 2020 and some producers requested that payment be sent in 2021 for tax purposes. NRCS has been given \$7.8 million in CSP funding which is \$1 million less than last year.

Mr. Kacir said NRCS has been given authority to fill 38 positions. He said these positions will include Soil Conservationists, Soil Conservation Technicians, Engineers, and Biologists. He said these positions will be entry level and that they are looking for assistance from the districts to hire these positions.

Mr. Kacir said Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Undersecretary Bill Northey made a decision to scale back staff in offices due to increased cases of COVID-19. He said the decreased staff will be based off of new cases in the office's parish. For instance, if there are 10 new cases per 10,000 residents (per day), the staff will be decreased. He stated that after the Thanksgiving holiday LA NRCS and FSA had at least 5 COVID positive cases.

### **LSU AgCenter Center Report- Mr. Blair Hebert**

Mr. Hebert appreciated the opportunity to present this report on behalf of Dr. Salassi. He said he first wanted to report on recent Ag Center staff changes.

1. Dr. Ron Levy- Rice Extension Specialist- starting 12/1/2020
2. Donna Gentry- Master Farmers Coordinator- 1/1/2021
3. Matt Foster- Cotton & Corn Coordinator- 1/19/2021
4. Dr. Dustin Harrell- Rice Station Coordinator- 2/11/2021

He said interviews have been virtual and the final interviews have been done in person. He said they will soon fill positions in Jeanerette and Hammond Louisiana also.

Mr. Hebert said 4-H livestock shows have been approved but the shows must practice social distancing to limit the number of people per 60 square feet. He said that LDAF has 2,695 pesticide applicators that need to be recertified. He said they are planning both in person and virtual meetings to get applicators recertified. He said they are also planning a virtual Prescribed Agriculture Burning training class.

#### Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Girouard said there is 1 supervisor resignation: Lafayette SWCD, Mr. Douglas Foreman (appointed) effective December 1, 2020.

Chairman Girouard said there is 1 supervisor reappointment for a three year term: Capital SWCD, Mr. Steve Horvath (appointed) - effective December 8, 2020- November 23, 2023

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the 1 resignation and 1 reappointment.

**Motion by:** Mr. Larry Sayes

**Seconded by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

#### Correspondence- Mr. Joey Breaux, Director, SSWCC

#### Dec. 11 Deadline Approaching for USDA Program for Farmers and Ranchers Impacted by COVID-19

FSA is reminding all farmers and ranchers to apply for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2) by December 11, 2020. This program provides direct relief to producers facing market disruptions and associated costs because of COVID-19. There are over 300 eligible commodities, from livestock and row crops to specialty crops and aquaculture. Producers have several options for applying for the CFAP 2. A list of eligible commodities, payment dates, calculations and options to apply can be found on <http://www.farmers.gov/cfap>.

#### Studies look at how effective conservation practices are at protecting wetlands

Wetlands provide many benefits such as floodwater storage and nutrient and sediment capture. Wetlands also protect downstream waters, as well as provide fish and wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities such as fishing and hunting. After draining so much land, many people are looking to conservation planners to determine what needs to be done. Many planners have reviewed a Special Section of the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation that focuses on Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) Wetlands studies. CEAP is multiagency research collaboration with the objective being to develop better methods for estimating the environmental benefits and effects of conservation practices on agricultural landscapes at various scales, enhancing scientific understanding.

#### NRCS Supports University of Illinois to clean agricultural drainage water

NRCS has awarded \$1.12 million to support the University of Illinois-led research to clean agricultural drainage water through saturated buffers and denitrifying bioreactors. The investment was a part of NRCS's Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) program.

#### NRCS unveils Conservation Concerns Tool

NRCS has unveiled its new Conservation Concerns Tool on farmers.gov. The tool can be used to learn about different types of conservation issues that might impact the productivity or natural resources on your farm, ranch, or forest by exploring different topics in the tool such as soil, water, animals, plants, air, and energy.

#### American Farm Bureau Convention Comes home

The 102<sup>nd</sup> American Farm Bureau Convention is going to be held online. The Bureau said it gives them a unique opportunity to "open the doors" to everyone. The convention will take place on January 9-13, 2021

with free registration. The convention will include events such as the Young Farmer and Rancher competitions, the Ag Innovation Challenge and the much anticipated Farm Dog of the Year. The theme of this year's convention is "Stronger Together".

#### EQIP final rule updates soil health, nutrient management plan requirements

The Department of Agriculture has finalized a rule making soil health, comprehensive nutrient management plan, and advanced payment changes to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. The rule updates the NRCS program, which provides financial and technical help to producers who implement conservation practices that address issues like soil erosion, water quality, and wildlife habitat. Modifications to EQIP also include providing the ability for organic producers to transition ground from the Conservation Reserve Program, and updates national priorities to specifically include soil health, weather, and drought resilience. The rule also increases the payment cap for producers participating in the Organic Initiative to \$140,000 for contracts entered for fiscal years 2019 through 2023.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr. Breaux said that he has been appointed as LDAF alternate to several new Governors' office initiatives such as the Coastal Resilience Task Force and the Climate Initiative Task Force. He has been asked to co-chair the Climate Initiative's Agriculture, Forestry, Conservation and Waste Committee, on which he has been able to work with Mr. David Daigle, Dr. Ernest Girouard, Mr. John Pitre, and Mr. Mike Lindsey. Emissions reduction is the larger focus of the Governor's office, rather than sequestration. Mr. Kacir suggested that if the Governor's office prioritized conversion of gas/diesel engines to electric, NRCS would be able to assist them with EQIP funds.

Dr. Girouard stated that he wanted to remind everyone of the NACD auction that happens as part of the Presidents Association at NACD functions. He said Louisiana's items always seem to be some of the most wanted items. He encourages everyone to contribute to the auction if possible.

#### Next Meeting

Chairman Girouard said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 26, 2021 at 1:15 P.M. which will be virtual. Information will be sent to members prior to the meeting.

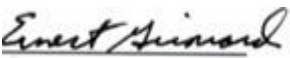
#### Public Comments

Chairman Girouard asked if there were any other comments from the public or Commission members and there were none.

#### Adjournment

Chairman Girouard said if there was no other business or comments from the public or Commission members, he will accept a motion to adjourn.

**Motion:** Mr. Brad Spicer made a motion to adjourn at 2:24 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alan Williams and passed unanimously.

/s/ Dr. Ernest Girouard   
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Dr. Ernest Girouard, Chairman State Soil and Water Conservation Commission