

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

October 26, 2021

1:15 PM

ZOOM VIRTUAL FORMAT

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY
VETERANS MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM
5825 FLORIDA BOULEVARD
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Girouard called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. Mr. Steve Horvath gave the invocation and Mr. Alan Williams lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Ms. LaClasha Alexander.

Members and Alternate Members present:

Dr. Ernest Girouard – Chairman, Area IV
Mr. Steve Horvath-Vice Chairman, Area V
Mr. John Alan Williams- LACD President
Mr. Jason Nolde, LACD 1st Vice President
Mr. Reggie Skains- Area I Member
Mr. Ed Yerger- Area II Member
Mr. Ed Giering- Area III Alternate
Mr. Brad Spicer- LDAF Alternate Member
Dr. Mike Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate Member

Members absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center
Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist	Mr. Michael Schooler, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC	Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Caitlin Joubert, LDAF-OSWC	Ms. Crystal Bowman, LDAF-OWC
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC	Ms. LaClasha “Clay” Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

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

Approval of the Agenda

Chairman Girouard called for a motion to approve the October 26, 2021 SSWCC agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Alan Williams

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the minutes

Chairman Girouard called for a motion to approve the September 28, 2021 SSWCC minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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

The Farm Bill reporting system closed on October 10th with September's Farm Bill total earnings being \$52,557. Last month, OSWC divided the unused farm bill funds into the 32 over earning districts giving them an additional \$955 each. Most districts were able to utilize most of the funds with a remaining balance of \$2,163 which will be carried over to following program year. Districts received their new FY Farm Bill allocation letters on October 13th. The districts' allocations were based NRCS active contracts and other key indicators of district Farm Bill assistance activity. The OSWC again incorporated a base allocation to support the under earning districts in conducting Farm Bill outreach. The farm bill program will reopen on November 1st to enter October's figures.

Area 3 and 4 State Convention- Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC

Mr. Breaux said the Area 3 and 4 State Convention will be held on December 7, 2021 virtually via Zoom. OSWC has tested the breakout rooms in Zoom and feel confident that we can get everyone to their assigned Area virtual breakouts. Delegates and alternates from each district are due by November 10th.

New Business

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

Mr. Kacir said NRCS received their FY 22 allocation. Easements programs and EQIP figures did come in a bit lower than expected. He said NRCS can request additional funds from Headquarters if needed. CSP Renewal funds were capped at \$7 million and CSP Classic/New Application funds were capped under \$9 million. Mr. Kacir said NRCS has only been able to fund approximately 20% of its selected applications due to the funding caps and expects that he will have request more funds. NRCS is currently working on FY 21 CSP payments as well as preparing for CSP renewals because of their expiring agreement. NRCS will also have a bigger role in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) administered by FSA. NRCS will be assisting with implementation and monitoring of the projects.

Mr. Kacir asked if the LACD Annual meeting in January be in person. Mr. Breaux said the meeting will be in person if conditions permit. The hotel is currently hosting in person meetings for others and has not given any different indication for LACD. The reality is that there will likely be virtual options for parts of the meeting. Mr. Kacir said he isn't sure what the recommendations will be for NRCS employees. Mr. Breaux said we will keep NRCS in the loop because they are a primary part of the meeting. Mr. Spicer said the state doesn't have the same COVID mandates as federal employees and the hotel will expect the LACD meeting to move forward and expect attendees to spend a certain amount above room costs. If the normal amount isn't spent, then LACD will be liable to cover the remaining balance.

NRCS is approaching the vaccine mandate deadline. All federal employees are expected to have taken their second COVID shot by November 8th. NRCS is planning to have another statewide conference call on Tuesday, November 2nd. This meeting will be to discuss the upcoming mandates for federal employees. Mr. Kacir said he isn't expecting to have new information for conservation partners and Soil and Water districts until late November. Districts are still considered "visitors" under the current mandate which requires a negative COVID test within 3 days of entering NRCS offices. He is concerned with the amount of NRCS employees who will choose to resign due to the mandate. The federal employees will have a "Reasonable Accommodation" process they can choose to use if they choose not to take the vaccine. He said he knows Mr. Breaux has been working on a similar "Reasonable Accommodation" process for district employees but he suggests not sending any information until NRCS gets definite details regarding the mandate. Mr. Kacir said he

wanted to invite Mr. Breaux and Chairman Girouard on to the conference call to give their thoughts on the mandate and suggestions for conservation partners.

COVID Field Office Requirements & Options- Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC

Mr. Breaux said in the Commission packet are the examples of the draft Soil and Water Conservation District Employee Request For A Medical Exception to the Covid-19 Vaccination requirement as well as a copy of the SWCD Employee Request For a Religious Exception to the Covid-19 Vaccination Requirement. Mr. Breaux said he appreciated the Mr. Kacir and Mr. Giering for giving constructive comments. These draft exception forms for districts were modeled after the NRCS templates. Commission members are welcome to send comments and the templates will be released as needed.

LSU AgCenter Center Report- Dr. Michael Salassi

Dr. Salassi said LSU is currently advertising for the following positions:

1. Agronomist- H. Rouse Caffey Rice Station- Crowley, LA
2. Food Marketing position- Agriculture Economics and Agribusiness Department- Baton Rouge, LA
3. Field Crops Entomologist - Dean Lee Research Station- Alexandria, LA
4. Rice & Wheat Scientist- H. Rouse Caffey Rice Station- Crowley, LA
5. Rice Pathologist- H. Rouse Caffey Rice Station- Crowley, LA
6. International Trade position- Agriculture Economics and Agribusiness Department- Baton Rouge, LA

Dr. Salassi said LSU will begin to meet with a few Commodity boards in hopes of getting assistance with funding. The three commodity boards are:

1. The Rice Research Board- November 10, 2021
2. The Soybean and Grain Research and Promotion board- November 18-19, 2021
3. Cotton Incorporated State Support Committee –November 30, 2021

Dr. Salassi said LSU is also working on a couple of initiatives at the request of President Tate. President Tate plans to assist LSU in getting some one-time funds on special projects. He plans to first work with Precision Ag get the funds for the needed tools they are requesting. The other area that President Tate is working on is expanding the AgCenter's Extension presence. LSU is preparing a proposal to present to the Legislature that would explain how LSU could use additional extension agent positions. It would detail their job description, what clientele they aim to reach and, what would be the economic impact of those efforts.

Mr. Kacir asked Dr. Salassi if LSU plans to incorporate urban extension agents. Dr. Salassi said there has been some discussion to possibly include Urban Agriculture Agents in the 5 regions of the state. The Urban Agriculture Agents will primarily focus on Horticulture. There won't be any definite decisions until LSU chooses a Vice President of Agriculture. Mr. Kacir said this would greatly assist NRCS efforts in emphasizing Urban Agriculture. Dr. Salassi said LSU is also working to hire a Communications Agent in each region. The Communication Agent will work to promote agriculture around their assigned region. Dr. Salassi said this concluded his report

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Girouard said there is one resignation this month: Dugdemona SWCD, Mr. Ronald Kenneth Jeane, elected position, effective October 14, 2021.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the resignation of Dugdemona SWCD, Mr. Ronald Kenneth Jeane, elected position, effective October 14, 2021.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously

Chairman Girouard said there is one appointment this month: Saline SWCD, Mr. Tim Collins, appointed position formerly Mr. William David Nolte, effective October 26, 2021- August 30, 2023.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the appointment of Saline SWCD, Mr. Tim Collins, appointed position formerly Mr. William David Nolte, effective October 26, 2021- August 30, 2023.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Alan Williams

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Girouard said there are three reappointments this month:

- Caddo SWCD, Mr. Leroy Kirby III, appointed position effective November 17, 2021- November 17, 2024,
- Capital SWCD, Mr. Jennifer Coats, appointed position effective November 22, 2021-November 22, 2024
- D'Arbonne SWCD, Mr. David Manuel, appointed position effective November 18, 2021- November 18, 2024.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve these reappointments:

- Caddo SWCD, Mr. Leroy Kirby III, appointed position effective November 17, 2021- November 17, 2024,
- Capital SWCD, Mr. Jennifer Coats, appointed position effective November 22, 2021-November 22, 2024
- D'Arbonne SWCD, Mr. David Manuel, appointed position effective November 18, 2021- November 18, 2024.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Alan Williams

Motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence/Articles:

Chairman Girouard said the first correspondence item is an engagement letter from Avoyelles SWCD requesting approval from the Commission to enter into agreement with J Aaron Cooper, CPA LLC to conduct the district's FYE June 30, 2021 audits at the cost of \$575.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Avoyelles SWCD requesting approval from the Commission to enter into agreement with J Aaron Cooper, CPA LLC to conduct the district's FYE June 30, 2021 audits at the cost of \$575.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Girouard said the next correspondence is an out of state request from Calcasieu SWCD requesting authorization for Ms. Rose Sharbeno, Ms. Kathleen Soto, Mr. David Daigle, Mr. Preston Broxson, Mr. Wesley Coffman, Mr. Jason Nolde, and Mr. Jacob Marceaux to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 12-16, 2022 in Orlando, FL.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the out of state travel request.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains
Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath
Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Girouard said the next correspondence is a letter to Mr. Tracy Johnston, Mr. Max Johnston's son, expressing the Commission member's sincere condolences on the passing of his father. Mr. Spicer asked Mr. Williams to consider making a contribution to the LACD scholarship fund in recognition of Mr. Johnston's work with the Louisiana's Soil and Water Conservation programs. Mr. Spicer said if Mr. Williams needed any assistance that he would be willing to help.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to have the Commission assist Mr. Williams in making a contribution to the LACD scholarship in recognition of Mr. Max Johnston's work with Louisiana's Soil and Water Conservation programs.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer
Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains
Motion passed unanimously.

Articles

- U.S. Army Central Review of Legislative & Regulatory Actions
- LA Farm Bureau: Back From the Brink, Farm Couple Rebuilds After Hurricane Devastation
- Corps of Engineers considers nature-based flood control instead of concrete and steel
- Leadership in the Age of Connection
- In term-opener, Justices will hear Mississippi's complaint that Tennessee is stealing its groundwater
- Department of the Army, Corps of Engineers: Notification of Regional Roundtable Discussions Regarding "Waters of the United States"

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting


Chairman Girouard said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 7, 2021 at 1:15PM virtually.

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. Steve made a motion to adjourn at 2:22 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Brad Spicer and passed unanimously.

/s/ Dr. Ernest Girouard



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