

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

December 6, 2022
1:15 PM

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

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Garber called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. Mr. Reggie Skains gave the invocation and Chairman Garber lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

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

Members and Alternate Members present:

Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman, Area IV
Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice-Chairman, Area V
Mr. Jason Nolde, LACD President, Member
Mr. Ben Langlinais, LACD 1st VP, Area IV Alternate
Mr. Reggie Skains, Area I Member
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Alternate
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate

Members Absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Candis Voorhies, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs and Initiatives
Mr. George Guillory, Acadia SWCD Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC / Director
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC Ms. Caitlin Joubert, LDAF
Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

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

Approval of the agenda

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the December 6, 2022 SSWCC agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Jason Nolde

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the October 25, 2022 SSWCC minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement-

Mr. Breaux said October's drawdown was \$139,198. It was previously reported some districts suffered a decrease in their FY farm bill allocations. The calculations inadvertently used were the prior year's overall FB allocation which did not include the latest increase. After recalculating the figures using the correct overall FB allocation, districts were sent revised Farm Bill allocation letters with majority of the districts increasing in their FY allocation. With the Commission meeting earlier this month, districts are currently inputting hours for the month of November. The November figures will be reported during the January meeting. Chairman Garber said he was pleased to hear that most districts received increases after the revised letters were sent.

LACD Annual Meeting/NACD Annual Meeting

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Nolde for an LACD update. Mr. Nolde said everything is on schedule for LACD. The LACD Awards judging has begun and is due next week. Districts have also been notified about LACD sponsorships, door prizes, and the hospitality room. Many consultants are participating due to the resurgence of PL-566 with hopes that they can help a district with a watershed plan or a district that maybe interested in a watershed plan in the future. Mr. Nolde said there will be some time changes to the agenda to encourage more participation in the breakout sessions. Mr. Breaux said there has been strong interest in bringing back a supervisor training session at LACD that would take place before or after the Ethics training session.

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Breaux about an NACD update. Mr. Breaux said he and a few others have met with Mr. Gary Blair in New Orleans to look at the tour options for the meeting as well as discussing the agenda with Mr. Jeremy Peters via Zoom. Mr. Breaux said the service project will take place right over the protection levee from a Chalmette subdivision. The meeting will take place on February 11-15, 2022 at the New Orleans Marriot Hotel. Early bird registration will close on December 23, 2022.

New Business

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Ms. Candis Voorhies, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs and Initiatives

Chairman Garber asked for the NRCS State Conservationist report. Ms. Voorhies said the deadline for first round EQIP signups was November 18th so field offices are currently ranking the applications. CSP renewal applications that were deemed eligible earlier this year will be funded. She also said 1st round CSP Classic applications will be due on January 20th. FY 22 CSP payments are still being processed due to applicants having the option of receiving their payment in FY 22 or FY 23. Ms. Voorhies stated that NRCS is aiming to have all of FY 22 CSP processed by March.

Currently, NRCS has 202 full time employees. An announcement just closed yesterday that advertised for 15 Soil Conservation technicians and there will be another announcement in late December for another 20 Soil Conservationists throughout the state. Ms. Voorhies said NRCS has 8-10 student Pathway positions with 6 of the students returning. The application period for Pathway positions months ago.

Approximate Funding for FY 23:

Wetland Reserve Easement program (WRE)-13 million

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)- 23 million

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)- 18 million

In FY 22, NRCS was able to obligate 500 new EQIP contracts, 130 new CSP contracts, 80 CSP renewal contracts, and closed on 30 WRE projects.

Ms. Voorhies said that Mr. Kacir mentioned some info about the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) during the last Commission meeting. NRCS still doesn't know all the details but have been told that it will be an additional 19.5 billion added to the already allocated funding. State Conservationists have a scheduled upcoming meeting with headquarters and are hoping to receive more details about IRA. IRA will focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing carbon sequestration. In September, the partnership with USDA for Climate Smart Commodities was announced. USDA will contribute 3.7 billion to this effort. 70 proposals were selected through the first-round signups with Louisiana being part of 14 of those proposals.

USDA has established 17 urban agriculture hubs which lists New Orleans as one of the locations. The office is expected to be open by February and will be assisting with things such as garden and produce initiatives. Mr. Spicer asked how the urban ag office work with the existing field office and Ms. Voorhies said the office will be a stand-alone office and they haven't given official directives on if the existing field office and the urban ag office will collaborate.

Ms. Voorhies concluded her presentation and Chairman Garber thanked her.

LSU AgCenter Center Report- Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter

Over the past 3 months, a few of LSU's commodities boards have met to discuss FY 23 research funding sources prioritizing soil health, plant breeding and plant health, livestock and wildlife management, invasive species, precision agriculture, nutrition, food safety, and biofuels as their major research funding topics. Dr. William Tate, LSU president, has asked the Deans to come up with ideas to assist with funding efforts. One of the suggestions submitted to President Tate by Interim President, Dr. Matt Lee, is the Ag Innovation and Food System Safety for Security Institute which will be an initiative that will focus on crop production, processing, marketing, and transportation.

Dr. Salassi wanted to remind the Commission members of a few upcoming events:

- January 12, 2023- Master Farmer Award Luncheon- Baton Rouge, LA
- January 18, 2023- Precision Agriculture Conference- Alexandria, LA
- January 31-February 1, 2023- 26th Annual National Conservation Systems conferences- Crowne Plaza hotel- Baton Rouge- www.nctd.net

Dr. Glen Gentry has been working to develop a bait for feral hogs for the past several years. He has already done pin trials but is ready do open trials outside of enclosed pins. He can't move forward with open trials until he gets an experimental use permit from EPA. LDAF is the only state agency that is recognized by EPA which gives the agency a lower fee for an experimental use permit. An agency that isn't recognized by EPA will have higher price tag. A few members of LSU including Dr. Gentry as well as Mr. Breaux of LDAF were able to meet with Commissioner Strain and proposed the idea of LDAF being a collaborator on the feral hog bait. Dr. Strain suggested that Dr. Gentry check with EPA on the next steps on the collaboration efforts. Dr. Gentry contacted EPA and just received notification that all experimental use permits must consider the Endangered Species Act prior to approval as well as review time of 18 months. Dr. Gentry will continue in pen trials and LSU working on the possibility of getting his bait licensed.

Dr. Salassi said that concluded his report.

OSWC Report- LA Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program (smoke management)

Chairman Garber said the next item on the agenda is the OSWC Report and asked Mr. Breaux if he had any comments. Mr. Breaux said he wanted to discuss the Prescribed Burn Manager Program which is one of our busiest programs this time of year. This program began in the early 90s in cooperation with LSU AgCenter who

provided the class curriculum and LDAF conducts the testing and certification. LDAF always played a major role in local delivery along with the county agents all over the state. The OSWC offers two different prescribed burn certifications: agricultural land and marsh land. The agricultural land course is approximately 2.5 hours that has a goal of making sure the participant has a responsible attitude toward environmental and public concerns to minimize offsite impacts the adverse impact during their burns through an ag prescribed burn plan. The marsh land burn course is the longer of the two and covers interpreting fire weather forecast, building the prescribed burn plan, ecological considerations, firing techniques and general smoke management guidelines. There are more than 1,000 landowners who are certified agriculture and marsh land prescribed burners. At least 500 landowners seek their recertification every five years. Anyone who wants to voice a burn complaint may call the OSWC. Most of the complaints received are of ash and soot. To get recertified for agricultural land, producers will either watch a video of the steps for development of a prescribed burn plan or an instructor will discuss the prescribed burn guidelines. To get recertified for marsh land, the producer must retake the entire course every five years. Chairman Garber asked how many times the classes are offered, and Mr. Breaux stated that courses usually happen 3-6 times a year for each course.

Mr. Breaux said another item he wanted to discuss was the National Farmer Veteran Coalition Program. This program was started by NRCS with assistance from Mr. Kirk Garber. Ms. Caitlin Joubert, OSWC outreach designee, was able to attend the annual Farmer Veteran Coalition Stakeholders conference in Oklahoma and will update the Commission on the meeting. Ms. Joubert said the program is a non-profit, non-governmental program with the goal of helping service members transition into careers in agriculture. Louisiana recently established their chapter to the Coalition 2 years ago with the assistance of the Breaux Family from the Florida Parishes. One of the biggest related programs is Homegrown by Hero's, which is a label to show that a product was grown by a veteran just as Louisiana has "Louisiana Certified" on any product made in Louisiana. Ms. Joubert said the conference was a huge networking opportunity for veterans to discuss all the ideas and upcoming plans. NRCS is partnering with the Coalition to advertise for a part-time position that will work on coalition duties as well as NRCS duties.

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there are 4 resignations this month:

- Mr. Anthony Butler, Capital SWCD, elected position, effective November 21, 2022.
- Mr. George Larry Sanderson, East Carroll SWCD, elected position, effective, November 8, 2022.
- Mr. Henry Schumacher, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, appointed position, effective November 10, 2022.
- Mr. Mark Engemann, Upper Delta SWCD, elected position, effective November 8, 2022.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the resignations of:

- Mr. Anthony Butler, Capital SWCD, elected position, effective November 21, 2022.
- Mr. George Larry Sanderson, East Carroll SWCD, elected position, effective, November 8, 2022.
- Mr. Henry Schumacher, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, appointed position, effective November 10, 2022.
- Mr. Mark Engemann, Upper Delta SWCD, elected position, effective November 8, 2022.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said we have 4 appointments this month:

- Ms. Keli Hayden, Capital SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Anthony Butler, effective December 6, 2022- June 30, 2025.
- Mr. Anthony Butler, Capital SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Ms. Jennifer Coats, effective December 6, 2022- November 22, 2024.
- Mr. Rowdy Sanderson, East Carroll SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. George Larry Sanderson, effective December 6, 2022- June 30, 2025.

- Mr. Curtis Engemann, Upper Delta SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Mark Engemann, effective December 6, 2022- June 30, 2023.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the appointments of:

- Ms. Keli Hayden, Capital SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Anthony Butler, effective December 6, 2022- June 30, 2025.
- Mr. Anthony Butler, Capital SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Ms. Jennifer Coats, effective December 6, 2022- November 22, 2024.
- Mr. Rowdy Sanderson, East Carroll SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. George Larry Sanderson, effective December 6, 2022- June 30, 2025.
- Mr. Curtis Engemann, Upper Delta SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Mark Engemann, effective December 6, 2022- June 30, 2023.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence/Articles:

- AgCenter-led team receives grant to help farmers irrigate efficiently
- Biden-Harris Administration signs \$50 Million Agreement with National Wild Turkey Federation for Innovative, Long Term National Master Stewardship Agreement
- Feral Hog Control: 8 years, some progress, \$2.5B damage/year
- Planting green increases soil health
- Resolution by Tensas Parish Police Jury in support of Conservation Funding in Tensas Parish

Commission Goals- Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman of SWCC

Chairman Garber said everyone should have received a copy of the “Louisiana Soil and Water Conservation Commission Goals”. Chairman Garber asked members to give their recommendations to the list. After the recommendations have been made, the list should be approved and as well as reviewed on an annual basis. Chairman Garber opened the floor for comments. The following suggestions were made:

1. Mr. Giering suggested changing #2 under “District Operational Funding” to state: “Develop a list of all Louisiana district conservation self-generated funding projects.” He said the Commission members could develop this list from districts and maybe support NACD in reaching out to its membership to see if a list of self-generated funding opportunities exists. He said the current #2 which states” Find additional funding sources for district operations” could be listed as #4.

Mr. Breaux said OSWC has requested info from districts on their self-generated funds in previous years, but it may be time to reach out to the districts again for an updated list. NACD also reached out to its membership to get this same information in the late 90s and again in the early 200s’s while Chairman Garber was on their leadership team.

2. Mr. Spicer suggested changing the title of the document to “Louisiana Soil and Water Conservation Commission Goals for LA Conservation Districts”
3. Chairman Garber and Mr. Breaux suggested changing the wording of #1 under “Program Development”. It would state “Seek District opportunities to partner on conservation projects”.
4. Chairman Garber suggested that under “Program Development”, the Commission can add #5: Encourage districts to review cooperator agreements and add #6 Encourage districts to digitize conservation records.

Chairman Garber said if they were no more recommendations, he would entertain a motion to accept the list with recommendations given.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Jason Nolde
Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Spicer asked that the cover letter accompanied with the revised goal list ask districts if they have any suggestions and request that they submit them for the Commission consideration.

OTHER BUSINESS

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Nolde if he had any comments. Mr. Nolde wanted to update the Commission members on the Good Neighbor Authority initiative that he had previously mentioned in prior Commission meetings. He had been working to get soil and water conservation districts added to the initiative. After some working with legislators in Louisiana and Arkansas, they were able to get a clarification from Washington to approve adding soil and water conservation districts to the "Good Neighbor Authority" initiative. Mr. Nolde plans to begin a pilot program through the US Forest Service and plans to work with Natchitoches SWCD, Dugdemona SWCD, and Calcasieu SWCD.

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 11, 2023 in the Veterans Memorial Auditorium, 5825 Florida Boulevard, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70806.

Adjournment

Chairman Garber 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 3:30 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Reggie Skains and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman, State Soil and Water Conservation Commission