

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

July 25, 2023
1:15 PM

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

MEETING 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 led 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. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Area I Member
Mr. Ben Langlinais, LACD President, Member
Mr. Price Gay, LACD 1st Vice President, Alternate
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member

Members Absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist
Mr. Michael Schooler, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC / Director
Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

Chairman Garber asked if there were any comments from the public and there were none. He welcomed Mr. Gay to the meeting.

Approval of the July 25, 2023 agenda

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the July 25, 2023 SSWCC agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the June 30, 2023 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the June 30, 2023 SSWCC minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

June's Farm Bill drawdown was \$51,629 leaving a balance of \$197,561. Eighteen districts have maxed out their farm bill funds with Boeuf River and Bogue-Chitto Pearl River being the latest districts to be added. Chairman Garber said he appreciated districts continuing to input hours so that reports can show all the figures and work that districts handled that they weren't able to get reimbursed for. These reports could also be a part of a presentation that could earn districts more funding in the future. Mr. Breaux said he hopes to discuss these topics during our LACD Mid-Year meeting scheduled on September 13th.

NACD South Central Region Meeting

Chairman Garber said NACD's South Central meeting is currently scheduled on August 13-15, 2023. Mr. Breaux said that he had the opportunity to attend the NACD Summer Meeting in North Dakota last week. He said this was a great meeting and that he enjoyed the open and candid conversations. The conversations regarding North Dakota conservation issues are nearly the same conversations being held in Louisiana. Chairman Garber said NACD made the decision a while ago to give North Dakota and other northern states an opportunity to host meetings while not having to deal with their heavy winter seasons.

Out of state travel

Chairman Garber said we received 4 out of state travel requests:

1. Crescent SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Rebecca Livaudais, Mr. Blaise Pezold, Mr. Alvin Melancon, and Ms. Erica Johnson to attend the NACD South Central Regional Meeting on August 13-15, 2023.
2. D'Arbonne SWCD is asking permission for Mr. Reggie Skains to attend the NACD South Central Regional Meeting on August 13-15, 2023.
3. Natchitoches SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Olivia Cohea to attend the NACD South Central Regional Meeting on August 13-15, 2023.
4. Red River SWCD is asking for Ms. Sarah Elias and Ms. Wendy Hinds to attend the NACD South Central Regional Meeting on August 13-15, 2023.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve these out of state travel requests.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

CPA-SWCD Agreements

Chairman Garber said the Commission received a SWCD CPA Agreement:

- Lafayette SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist. The cost is between \$1,500-\$1,650.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve these engagement requests:

- Lafayette SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist. The cost is between \$1,500-\$1,650.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

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

NRCS Staffing

- 215 Full-time employees with hopes of getting to 250 employees.
- All leadership team positions are filled.
- Mr. Jose Mendoza, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in the Northern region began work last Monday.
- Mr. Andrew Kears, LARU DC, began working with NRCS. He is the 13th LARU DC which fills all the LARU DC vacancies.
- Made an offer to an applicant to fill the Soil Conservationist position.
- Job announcement for the Natural Resource Conservationist position will be advertised soon.
- Mr. Giering asked Mr. Kacir how the FSA will be funded by the new funding, and how will NRCS be able to add more employees to already filled offices. Mr. Kacir said the FSA receives funds differently than NRCS. Many of the NRCS partners have been lobbying to get the FSA to increase budgets and staff. Mr. Kacir said LACD should consider lobbying congressional members to get more staff into the FSA because they will eventually be impacted by NRCS workload. Mr. Giering suggested that NRCS consider maybe buying some small trailers and placing them on district office properties. Mr. Kacir agreed and said he may present the idea to headquarters.

Programs

- 60 Days away from the end of the federal fiscal year
- The agreement for LACD's Executive Director position has been sent to Grants and Agreements for approval. The agreement should be ready for signature within the next two months.

OSWC Staff- Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC / Director

Mr. Breaux said everything has been flowing well through OSWC. The revegetation planting season is ahead of schedule despite being down one boat. There have been a lot of inquiries regarding the 319 Poultry Litter distribution project but have not received many signups. Applicants must be aware that there will be no reimbursements for out-of-state litter transport or for liquid waste. Chairman Garber asked how OSWC is making sure that the litter is moving from an area of concentration. Mr. Breaux stated that landowners will have to give their origin and application coordinates. The letter will state that the landowners will have to travel outside of the HUC 8 that it's leaving. Chairman Garber suggested that OSWC set specific HUCs for future signups. Mr. Breaux also wanted to mention that the funding that Senator Bill Cassidy applied to get Louisiana some Hypoxia funds that have now been approved. Tensas-Concordia SWCD will receive funding for 2 HUC 12s: Cypress Bayou and Lake St. Joseph. Mr. Breaux said that Mr. Jerry Davenport as well as Mr. Kirk Garber have been working with on PL-566 projects for districts. He advised Mr. Kacir that there have been discussions with hopes of hiring another person to work on PL-566 in the northern region of the state. These projects have been getting a lot of districts more active than normal.

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there are 1 SWCD supervisor resignations this month:

- Mr. Christopher Freeman, Catahoula SWCD, elected position, effective July 12, 2023.

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

- Mr. Christopher Freeman, Catahoula SWCD, elected position, effective July 12, 2023.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said we have 1 SWCD supervisor appointment this month:

- Ms. Rhonda Murphy, Catahoula SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Christopher Freeman, effective July 25, 2023-June 30, 2024.

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

- Ms. Rhonda Murphy, Catahoula SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Christopher Freeman, effective July 25, 2023-June 30, 2024.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said we have 1 SWCD supervisor re-appointment this month:

- Mr. Preston Broxson, appointed position, effective July 27, 2023-July 27, 2026.

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

- Mr. Preston Broxson, appointed position, effective July 27, 2023-July 27, 2026.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence/Articles:

- Hurricane Impacted Forestry Landowner Meeting: Tuesday, August 29th at the Golden Nugget Hotel in Lake Charles, LA
- Conservation Districts & the Good Neighbor Authority: Empowering Local Communities for Sustainable Forest Management
- Sugar cane bagasse fuel facility promises energy revolution.
- How Much Carbon Is Stored in Farm Fields?
- How Summer Prescribed Burns Can Be a Safe And Efficient Way To Regenerate Grazing Lands

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber said the first goal is to optimize SWCD employee management which begins with effective job descriptions. He asked Mr. Breaux for his comments. Mr. Breaux reminded everyone that SWCD employee job description template already exist. There are also job descriptions available for various SWCD staff positions that a district may have or need. It is important that districts know that they can tailor these job descriptions to their own use. Chairman Garber said the Commission should ask districts to report on their job descriptions and the adequacy of them from their perspective. Mr. Breaux agreed with the suggestion and Mr. Spicer suggested that districts have required items in their job descriptions. Mr. Breaux said the SWCC has never required

districts to have employee job descriptions, and Chairman Garber said we should discuss setting the standard for districts to have job descriptions. Mr. Kacir suggested that the minimum requirement should involve districts discussing the MOU between NRCS and conservation districts, as well as discussing the farm bill work that is associated with these positions. Mr. Skains said that D'Arbonne SWCD has job descriptions as well as interview questions prepared. Mr. Breaux feels that the job descriptions should be mirrored by comprehensive performance evaluation criteria for employees. Great evaluations provide opportunities such as the meritorious award which was approved by the Commission a few years ago. Chairman Garber said we will work to get the standard job descriptions for secretary and technician started and work towards others. Mr. Breaux wants the Commission to know that when OSWC receives payroll, employees will be labeled as either a secretary or technician. Mr. Breaux said he or Ms. Alexander would send the Commission our current standard job descriptions for a district secretary and district technician.

OTHER BUSINESS

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Langlinais if he had any comments. Mr. Langlinais stated that he is working on updating the cooperative agreements. Cooperative agreements used to be stored in a binder when they were first introduced. Mr. Langlinais said things have changed and we are in a digital world. The cooperative agreement should be used to get more conservation planning on the ground. Chairman Garber suggested that getting a substantial number of cooperators to sign agreements could be added to reports given to our legislators which could promote districts for more funding. Mr. Breaux said a district recently used their cooperator list to ask for donations to the districts and it was a success.

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 22, 2023 in the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Boulevard, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70806.

Public Comment

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 3:19 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Reggie Skains and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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