

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

February 27, 2024
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. Steve Horvath 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. Ben Langlinais, LACD President, Member
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate

Members Absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative
Mr. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Area I
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Ms. Mellowdee Tibbs, Acting NRCS LA State Conservationist
Ms. Candis Voorhies, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives
Dr. Anne Case Hanks, PhD, Director, ULM School of Science
Ms. Emily Newby, Mesonet Manager, ULM School of Science
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC / Director Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Caitlin Joubert, LDAF-OSWC Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF/OSWC
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 February 27, 2024 agenda

Chairman Garber asked the Commission to revise the agenda to move Dr. Hank's presentation up prior to Unfinished Business as well adding a discussion about the Area III SWCC alternate to prior correspondence. He said if there were no public comments, he would call for a motion to approve the suggested changes.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the January 8, 2024 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the January 8, 2024 SSWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer
Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath
Motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Anne Case Hanks, PHD, Director, University of Louisiana Monroe (ULM) School of Science, Assoc. Prof., Atmospheric Science

Chairman Garber asked for Dr. Hanks introduction. Mr. Breaux serves with Dr. Hanks on the Environmental Education Commission, where this introduction to the SWCC was suggested. Dr. Hanks said ULM received a \$2 million grant that would be used to create a weather mesonet by establishing at least 50 different mesonet sites in as many parishes across the state. Dr. Hanks introduced Ms. Emily Newby, ULM's Mesonet Manager, to discuss further details of the plans. Ms. Newby said mesonets are interconnected networks of environmental monitoring stations used to measure temperature, relative humidity, pressure, solar radiation, wind speed and direction, precipitation, and soil temperature and moisture content. The plan for each site is for it be 30ft.x 30ft., be accessible by truck for installation and maintenance, be accessible for installation of a 30ft. tower, and be acceptable to install a security/perimeter fence. The selected areas are expected to be undisturbed open land. The data received from these mesonet sites will show soil temperature and moisture which will allow for mitigation measures to reduce crop damage and allow for more efficient planning. Cooperators who agree to host a mesonet site will receive that site data at no cost and it will save state business and taxpayers millions of dollars annually. Ms. Newby stated that it would take 3-4 days to complete site installation, and upkeep of the mesonet location will be done by ULM. Dr. Hanks said the landowner and ULM would sign an MOU that would be in effect for several years, and can share a list of site selection best practices to begin the process.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

December's Farm Bill drawdown- \$141,165

January's Farm Bill drawdown- \$ 172,327

Remaining balance- \$544,922

Mr. Breaux said there have been substantial drawdowns recently. Ms. Voorhies stated that the "Act Now" process that she discussed in previous commission meetings has started and is making the funding process quicker for a producer to get funded.

NACD Spring Fly-In- March 20, 2024

Chairman Garber discussed the upcoming NACD Spring Fly-In that will take place in Washington D.C. on March 20, 2024. NACD also plans to have two virtual fly-in advocacy training sessions on March 12 and 14th. During these virtual meetings, NACD plans to review their priorities, share tips, and answer any questions regarding the in-person fly-In.

NEW BUSINESS

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Ms. Candis Voorhies, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives

Ms. Mellowdee Tibbs, Acting State Conservationist, introduced herself to the Commission and thanked the Commission for inviting her to the meeting. She stated that she is getting used to her role and that Ms. Voorhies would be giving the report today.

- Ms. Voorhies said the deadline for assessment ranking and cost estimates is this Friday and selections will begin next week.
- CSP renewal applications deadline is May 3, 2024. FY 23 CSP payments are near completion with a few hiccups to correct.
- EQIP Act Now signup deadline is April 26, 2024
- FY 24 Funding- \$16 million- Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE)

\$ 23 million- CSP Classic
\$ 21 million- EQIP Classic
\$ 22 million- Infrastructure Reduction Act (IRA) EQIP
\$ 12.2 million- IRA CSP

Hiring:

- LARU 1 District Conservationist vacancy
- 7 Resource Conservationists vacancies
- 4 Soil Conservationists vacancies
- 5 Technician vacancies
- 4 Grazing Land specialist vacancies
- 2 Area Administrative Support vacancies

Mr. Langlinois asked about the status of advertising for the State Conservationist vacancy. Ms. Voorhies reported that NRCS has already advertised, and the position post has closed. Ms. Tibbs said they are hoping to interview and select a candidate soon.

LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Salassi

Dr. Salassi reported that LSU has spent significant time filling vacant positions.

- Offers have been sent to candidates who applied for the recent entomologist position as well as a corn, cotton, and soybean specialist.

Recently filled positions:

- Soil Physics position on LSU campus
- Rice Agronomist position at the Rice Station in Rayne, LA
- Animal Scientist at the Hill Farm Research Station in Homer, LA
- Sugarcane Egronomist position at the Dean Lee Station in Alexandria, LA
- Precision Agriculture Egronomist position
- Extension specialist position

Vacancies:

- 3 research positions

Notes

- Dr. Rodrigo Diaz was recently rewarded \$1.6 million from the Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to go towards his continued efforts dealing with Roseau cane.
- As previously reported, LSU received approximately \$11 million from the LA legislature to update some of the research stations' equipment and most of those funds have now been allocated.
- The Aquaculture center in Baton Rouge had a fire previously. LSU has been able to receive funding from the LA Legislature to rebuild the facility as well as cleaning out some ponds.
- LSU received the largest National Science Foundation (NSF) grant ever awarded. With assistance from public and private partners, they were able to get a \$160 million grant to be disbursed over a 10-year period.

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux introduced Mr. Davenport who will be reporting on recent district PL-566 activities. Mr. Davenport reported that NRCS will soon be accepting PIFRs. Blue Wing Contracting will be the company handling the process in rounds of 3. The first set will be Avoyelles Parish, East Carroll SWCD, and Lafourche-Terrebonne SWCD. Mr. Davenport also mentioned that there was a meeting to get Acadia SWCD, Gulf Coast SWCD, and Jefferson Davis SWCD projects funded for environmental assessment. Mr. Davenport stated that the Commission had a copy of the mutual agreement of the Mermentau Basin Soil and Water Conservation

districts in their packets. It states that all 3 districts are coming together to support the watershed planning and implementation efforts of each other's districts.

Mr. Breaux also advised the Commission that OSWC will begin interviews for the 4-year job appointment position. This position will have water resources duties like Mr. Davenport but will be located in Northeast Louisiana.

District Funding Sources

Chairman Garber discussed the District Funding Sources memo in the Commission's packet. The memo that will be sent to Dr. Strain asks him to consider proposing an amendment to HB1 for a dedicated increase of \$400,000 beginning FY 2024-2025 through the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry budget. This would enable districts to receive an increase in their passthrough budget. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve sending this memo to Commissioner Strain for review.

Motion by: Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Ben Langlinais

Motion passed unanimously.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there are 4 SWCD resignations this month:

- Mr. Gregory Monceaux, Allen SWCD, elected position, effective February 29, 2024.
- Mr. Larry Fontenot, Evangeline SWCD, elected position, effective February 21, 2024.
- Mr. Louis Clay Brignac, Evangeline SWCD, appointed position, effective February 21, 2024
- Mr. Thomas Christian Pierce, Sabine SWCD, elected position, effective January 17, 2024.

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

- Mr. Gregory Monceaux, Allen SWCD, elected position, effective February 29, 2024.
- Mr. Larry Fontenot, Evangeline SWCD, elected position, effective February 21, 2024.
- Mr. Louis Clay Brignac, Evangeline SWCD, appointed position, effective February 21, 2024
- Mr. Thomas Christian Pierce, Sabine SWCD, elected position, effective January 17, 2024.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ben Langlinais

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber also mentioned that Sabine SWCD submitted a letter on behalf of Mr. John Alan Williams who passed away on January 6, 2024, while still serving on their board.

Mr. Spicer suggested that the Commission send a special letter to his family recognizing his contributions to Louisiana conservation. Chairman Garber agreed and said if there were no public comments, he would call for a motion to approve a special letter of recognition being sent to Mr. Williams' family.

Motion by: Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 6 appointments this month:

- Mr. Eric Savant, Allen SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Gregory Monceaux, effective February 29, 2024- June 30, 2024.

- Mr. Daniel Milojevic, Crescent SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Irvin Dares, effective February 27, 2024-June 30, 2024.
- Mr. Larry Fontenot, Evangeline SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Louis Clay Brignac, effective February 27, 2024-March 24, 2026.
- Mr. Louis Clay Brignac, Evangeline SWCD, elected position formerly held by Larry Fontenot, effective February 27, 2024- June 30, 2024
- Mrs. Conan Soileau, Grant SWCD, elected position formerly held by Dennis Courtright, effective February 27, 2024-June 30, 2026.
- Mr. Thomas Christian Pierce, Sabine SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. John Alan Williams, effective February 27, 2024- March 23, 2025.

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

- Mr. Eric Savant, Allen SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Gregory Monceaux, effective February 29, 2024- June 30, 2024.
- Mr. Daniel Milojevic, Crescent SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Irvin Dares, effective February 27, 2024-June 30, 2024.
- Mr. Larry Fontenot, Evangeline SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Louis Clay Brignac, effective February 27, 2024-March 24, 2026.
- Mr. Louis Clay Brignac, Evangeline SWCD, elected position formerly held by Larry Fontenot, effective February 27, 2024- June 30, 2024
- Mrs. Conan Soileau, Grant SWCD, elected position formerly held by Dennis Courtright, effective February 27, 2024-June 30, 2026.
- Mr. Thomas Christian Pierce, Sabine SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. John Alan Williams, effective February 27, 2024- March 23, 2025.

Motion by: Mr. Ben Langlinais

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 5 reappointments this month:

- Mr. Larry Sayes, Avoyelles SWCD, appointed position, effective February 27, 2024- February 27, 2027.
- Ms. Carolyn Fannin, Catahoula SWCD, appointed position, effective March 28, 2024- March 28, 2027.
- Mr. Billy Gaines, Dugdemona SWCD, appointed position, effective March 25, 2024-March 24, 2027
- Mr. Steve Andrews, LaSalle SWCD, appointed position, effective February 27, 2024-February 27, 2027.
- Mr. Keith Latiolais, St. Landry SWCD, effective March 26, 2024-March 26, 2027.

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

- Mr. Larry Sayes, Avoyelles SWCD, appointed position, effective February 27, 2024- February 27, 2027.
- Ms. Carolyn Fannin, Catahoula SWCD, appointed position, effective March 28, 2024- March 28, 2027.
- Mr. Billy Gaines, Dugdemona SWCD, appointed position, effective March 25, 2024-March 24, 2027
- Mr. Steve Andrews, LaSalle SWCD, appointed position, effective February 27, 2024-February 27, 2027.
- Mr. Keith Latiolais, St. Landry SWCD, effective March 26, 2024-March 26, 2027.

Motion by: Mr. Ben Langlinais

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

District Supervisor Election- June 8, 2024

Chairman Garber said the draft Annual District Supervisor's Election packet has been prepared for the Commission's review. The list with instructions and a blank petition is included in the packet. If a district board has more than 1 candidate interested in the vacant elected position, the board must hold an election on Saturday, June 8, 2024. The nominating period will begin April 1st and end on April 30th. All supervisors who had no opposition will be duly elected at the June SWCC meeting. Chairman Garber asked that the Commission approve the packet to be emailed out so that they can discuss the election during their March board meetings.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the District Supervisor Election packet.

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Mr. Ben Langlinais

Motion passed unanimously.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber said he had the opportunity to discuss ideas for online supervisor training with OSWC this afternoon prior to the start of the Commission meeting. He walked in to see a sample online training session which was the "Know the Difference" module that has been recently presented to supervisors with an addition of a voiceover done by Ms. Caitlin Joubert. The voiceover went into greater detail than the notes that were shown on PowerPoint. He was excited that the idea of online training was in the creative stages and will hopefully be available in the near future. Mr. Breaux said the idea of online training for supervisors has been floating around for a while now, but we want to make sure it's accessible and supervisors learn and retain what they need to be successful in their roles. Chairman Garber said there was discussions regarding possibly placing the training video on YouTube and getting a separate program to have supervisors get a quiz to see what information was retained from the video. He said the goal is to get the information to supervisors in a cost-efficient way. He said he also felt that new supervisors should still attend in person training first and have the option to do virtual training for their next training opportunity.

Area III SWCC Alternate Member

Chairman Garber said he was concerned about the Area III alternate member. Mr. Ed Giering currently serves as the Area III SWCC member and does not have an alternate member currently. He suggested that the Commission send a letter out to Area III to get their thoughts flowing on who could fill the position. Mr. Breaux said we could get the letter sent soon so that they can have the discussion at their area meeting scheduled for April 1, 2024. Mr. Breaux said this year we are having the Area III and IV SWCC election convention so this person could temporarily fill the vacancy until the election takes place later this year. Chairman Garber said if there were no further comments, he would call for a motion to have a letter sent to Area III to prepare them to discuss the Area III SWCC alternate position at their area meeting on April 1, 2024.

Motion by: Mr. Benson Langlinais

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence/Articles:

- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation-Jan/Feb. 2024- Farmers' participation in incentivized conservation programs: Exploring barriers and opportunities for innovative designs
- Recover from drought with a regenerative future in mind
- The Atlantic: Nature Doesn't Care Where A Species Is From
- USDA: World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates
- National Invasive Species Awareness week (NISAW)- Feb. 26th -March 3rd

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 26, 2024 at the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 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 3:07 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Horvath and passed unanimously.

Earl J. Garber

/s/

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