

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

January 8, 2024
10:00 AM

CROWNE PLAZA HOTEL
4428 CONSTITUTION AVENUE
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70808

MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Garber called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 10:00 A.M. Mr. Reggie Skains gave the invocation and Chairman Garber led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Ms. Crystal Bowman.

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
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member
Mr. Pat Boudreaux, Area I Alternate
Mr. Chris Carter, Area II Alternate
Mr. Ron Duhon, Area IV Alternate
Mr. Ben Langlinais, LACD President, Member
Mr. Price Gay, LACD President-Elect, 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. Kris Davis, Acting NRCS LA State Conservationist
Ms. Candis Voorhies, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives
Ms. Courtney Gerace, LACD Executive Director
Mr. Steve Bates, LACD Secretary-Treasurer
Mr. Ike Boudreaux, St. Landry SWCD
Ms. Jo Sadowsky, Capital SWCD
Ms. Maddy Coco, Avoyelles SWCD
Mr. Joey Breau, LDAF-OSWC / Director
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Caitlin Joubert, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF/OSWC
Ms. Crystal Bowman, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

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

Approval of the January 8, 2024 agenda

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

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the December 5, 2023 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the December 5, 2023 SSWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ben Langlinais

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Langlinais to introduce Ms. Gerace to the Commission. Mr. Langlinais introduced Mrs. Courtney Gerace, LACD Executive Director and welcomed her. Mrs. Gerace was hired through an NRCS agreement that Mr. Kacir discussed last year's LACD meeting prior to his retirement. She started in mid-November and is the first paid LACD employee. Mrs. Gerace said she is excited about her new position as LACD Executive Director. Currently Ms. Gerace and her husband farm sugarcane, soybeans, and beef cattle in St. Landry parish. She believes her new position gives her the opportunity to work on both sides of conservation as well as travel across the state to meet producers, district staff, and board members.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

Mr. Breaux reported November's Farm Bill drawdown was \$155,440 with a remaining balance of \$858,414.16. Districts are currently inputting their December farm bill hours and will have until January 10th to complete those entries.

District Allocation Reduction

Mr. Breaux reported to the Commission that the district insurance through Turrentine Agency increased by approximately \$5,147. Each district will receive a small reduction to their allocation to cover the cost of the insurance increase. Districts are always encouraged to strive toward getting self-generated funds from available sources.

LACD Annual Meeting/NACD Annual Meeting

Chairman Garber said today is the first day of the 2024 LACD State Convention and everyone is looking forward to a great program. He asked Mr. Langlinais if he had any comments. Mr. Langlinais said the program has shaped up to be a great lineup and that he is personally looking forward to all the great updates that will be given. District and NRCS staff will also have a chance to interact with our new LACD Executive Director, Ms. Courtney Gerace. Mr. Breaux stated that a lot of the requested legislators that were contacted for the Legislative session taking place on Wednesday did not commit due to the schedule changes with inauguration and legislative committee chairman appointments taking places on the days following.

Chairman Garber said the NACD Annual Meeting is scheduled on February 10-14, 2024 at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel and Marina in San Diego, CA. The last day to reserve rooms is January 19, 2024.

Mr. Breaux said he also wanted to remind everyone about the NACD Spring Fly In which has been scheduled for March 20th.

Out of State Travel

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

- Calcasieu SWCD is requesting approval for Ms. Rose Sharbeno, Ms. Kathleen Soto, and all available supervisors to attend the Annual NACD Meeting in San Diego, CA on February 10-14, 2024.

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

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

- DeSoto SWCD is requesting approval for Ms. Christina Ebarb to attend the Annual NACD Meeting in San Diego, CA on February 10-14, 2024.
- Avoyelles SWCD is requesting approval for Ms. Maddy Coco and Mr. Dirk Dupuy to attend the Annual NACD Meeting in San Diego, CA on February 10-14, 2024.

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

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

NEW BUSINESS

Election of Officers

Chairman Garber asked for nominations for Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Secretary-Treasurer of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. **Mr. Price Gay nominated all current SWCC officers remain the same as previously voted last January and Mr. Ed Giering seconded the nomination.** Chairman Garber asked were there any other nominations and there were none. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, the Commission would accept the nomination for all current SWCC officers to continue to hold their positions.

The Commission unanimously elected:

Mr. Earl Garber as Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission
Mr. Steve Horvath as Vice-Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission
Mr. Reggie Skains as Secretary-Treasurer of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Mr. Kris Davis, Acting Louisiana State Conservationist

Mr. Davis introduced himself and thanked Ms. Voorhies for stepping in to attend a lot of his scheduled meetings on his behalf. He said NRCS is currently operating under a continuing resolution that will expire on January 19th. There is hope that a budget approval will happen soon and will allow NRCS to function normally. He said Ms. Voorhies previously presented NRCS FY 23 budget figures. FY 24 budget will include the traditional farm bill figures as well as the beginning Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds. IRA funded projects are expected to be completed within a certain time unlike the traditional farm bill funds. NRCS completed the renewal process for their Conservation Stewardship program (CSP) which will obligate approximately \$2 million.

NRCS is also working to implement the “Act Now” process to assist with quick obligation of funding. Participants will be able to be ranked immediately and if they meet a certain threshold then they will get funding. The idea is to get participants obligated within 60 days. Chairman Garber asked how a participant would reach the threshold. Mr. Davis said different technical committees have come up with the criteria that will be input into Conservation Desktop. From this point, the participant will be entered and ranked in Conservation Desktop and if they meet the criteria, they will get funding. NRCS staff will run obligation batching periods every two weeks which will expediate the funding process. Mr. Davis said the first batch of payments should be completed by the end of the month. Chairman Garber asked what type of participant can apply for the “Act Now” process. Mr. Davis said Louisiana NRCS leadership has already identified select ranking pools that “Act Now” would be applicable to and will be released soon.

Mr. Davis said Ms. Voorhies has been working on NRCS’s Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is slated to begin in March. The application process will take 60 days to complete and from there they will be up for review. NRCS has also been reviewing agreements with the soil and water conservation districts. He plans to fully commit to renewing those agreements and appreciates the value that the districts bring. NRCS would like to

have renewal agreements prepared and ready for review by mid-Summer. Mr. Davis also wanted to mention that NRCS recently made offers to 13 Resource Conservationists and 5 candidates are from out of state. With more hiring, they plan to make the LARU structure more efficient for everyone.

LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Salassi

Dr. Salassi said LSU had a conference call in November with USDA to discuss sodium nitrate being a major ingredient in their new feral hog toxicant. Sodium nitrate has been used as a food preservative and has also been used to treat people dealing with cyanide poisoning. USDA advised that since sodium nitrate has not been registered as a pesticide, EPA may recommend initiating different trials around the U.S. to try the toxicant in different climates and seasons which could take years. LSU hopes to partner with USDA to receive a grant to cover the estimated \$1 million cost for the trials. Dr. Salassi said LSU is also considering requesting additional funding through legislation. Mr. Breaux said getting support from the South-Central Region states would also be ideal. Louisiana hosted Mississippi last year and they are still talking about all the great things they saw during their tours and would support LSU's effort.

Mr. Giering said he wanted to commend Dr. Salassi and the LSU team led by Dr. Kirk Guidry on the excellent job they did on the preliminary estimates on the impact of the droughts in Louisiana this past year. He said it showed approximately \$1.7 billion worth of damage and that he was surprised at how much damage there was.

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux advised that years ago when Ms. Caitlin Joubert began working with OSWC she was on a 4-year temporary, WAE job appointment that was partially paid for through a federal agreement. Ms. Joubert came back to OSWC through a permanent position leaving the WAE appointment vacant. OSWC, with assistance from a federal agreement will fill the vacant WAE position with a candidate who will work with districts on PL-566 watershed funding efforts in north Louisiana. Mr. Jerry Davenport has been covering PL-566 watershed admirably and it would be great to have another candidate just as great in north Louisiana. He also wanted to congratulate Mr. Davenport on his appointment as LDAF delegate to the State GIS council.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there are 2 SWCD resignations this month:

- Mr. Ronnie Sonier, Allen SWCD, elected position, effective December 31, 2023.
- Mr. Thomas Mayes, Allen SWCD, appointed position, effective December 14, 2023.

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

- Mr. Ronnie Sonier, Allen SWCD, elected position, effective December 31, 2023.
- Mr. Thomas Mayes, Allen SWCD, appointed position, effective December 14, 2023.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are two appointments this month:

- Mr. Ethan Smith, Allen SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Ronnie Sonier, effective January 8, 2024- June 30, 2025.
- Mr. Marlin Lemoine, Allen SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Thomas Mayes, effective January 8, 2024-July 26, 2024.

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

- Mr. Ethan Smith, Allen SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Ronnie Sonnier, effective January 8, 2024- June 30, 2025.
- Mr. Marlin Lemoine, Allen SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Thomas Mayes, effective January 8, 2024-July 26, 2024.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Meritorious Award

Chairman Garber said we received one Meritorious award request:

- Morehouse SWCD is nominating Ms. Erin James, District secretary, to receive an exceptional performance award of 3% of her base salary (\$1497.60).

The Meritorious award nomination packet was reviewed and included the following as requested in PPM#1:

1. Employee's Name
2. Title of Employee
3. Personnel number
4. A successful performance evaluation in the same fiscal year, a job performance plan showing an explanation of the significant achievement and how it benefited the SWCD, the conservation partnership and the district cooperators.
5. The reward amount proposed by the SWCD.

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

- Morehouse SWCD is nominating Ms. Erin James, District secretary, to receive an exceptional performance award of 3% of her base salary (\$1497.60).

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence/Articles:

- S.T. Biologicals: Effective Crop Residue Management with Biologicals
- S.T. Biologicals: How Do Biological Products Break Down Stubble
- Southeastern wildrye: A native cool-season option
- Successful Farming: Corn and soy growers take a step back from cover crops, says Purdue survey
- Contribution of Tallow to Beekeeping and Honey Industries, and the Broader Economy
- The Energy Law Blog: Fifth Circuit Applies U.S. Supreme Court's Sackett Decision to End Long-Standing WOTUS Dispute.

Louisiana Supervisors Tour- Tentative Agenda- Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF-OSWC

Mr. Davenport discussed the Louisiana Supervisor's tour tentatively scheduled for April 30-May 3, 2024 in Mississippi. There are plans to tour places such as the Freedom Ranch Wildlife Center, Longleaf Plantation, Blueberry Farm, and Bluff Creek Cattle Co. to name a few. Mr. Davenport says he hopes to get approximately 50 participants to come on this tour.

- **Mr. Reggie Skains made a motion to move forward with sending the information out to districts to see if the supervisors are interested in attending. Mr. Ben Langlinais seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber said he had no comments and that the Commission we would have further discussion at the next Commission meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Breaux said during the last Commission meeting, Mr. Doug Daigle visited the Commission to discuss forming a resolution that would request the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry become a member on the multi-state hypoxia task force. The commission requested that Mr. Breaux speak with to Commissioner Strain regarding the membership. Commissioner Strain advised the commission to maintain focus on its main goal of receiving additional funding for districts.

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 27, 2024 at the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806.

Public Comment

Mr. Ike Boudreaux wanted to commend LACD for hiring Ms. Courtney Gerace. He said that she will be a great addition to the team.

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 11:52 A.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Giering and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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