**OFFICE OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION**

**STATE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

**JANUARY 10, 2018**

**10:00 AM**

**NRCS CONFERENCE ROOM**

**3734 GOVERNMENT STREET**

**ALEXANDRIA, LA 71302**

**PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Skains called the regular monthly Commission Meeting to order at 10:00 A.M. Mr. Randell Fletcher said the invocation and Mr. Ed Yerger lead in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ROLL CALL**

The roll was called by Mr. Joey Breaux.

Members and Alternate Members present: Mr. Reggie Skains, Chairman; Dr. Ernest Girouard, Vice Chairman; Mr. Randell Fletcher: Mr. Donavon Taves, LACD President; Mr. Ed Yerger; and Dr. Rogers Leonard, LSU AgCenter.

A quorum was present.

Others Present: Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF-OSCD/Executive Director SSWCC; Mr. Ray Reich, LDAF-OSWC; Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC; Mr. Kevin Norton, NRCS State Conservationist; and Mrs. Marilyn Rabalais, Rapides SWCD

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Chairman Skains asked if there were any comments from the public or Commissioners and there were none.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

Chairman Skains asked for any comments from the public or Commission members about the December 5, 2017 State Commission minutes and there were none. Chairman Skains called for a motion to approve December 5, 2017 State Commission Meeting minutes.

**Motion:** Mr. Randell Fletcher made a motion to approve the December 5, 2017 State Commission Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded by Mr. Donavon Taves and passed unanimously.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Chairman Skains said they would now take up Unfinished Business and asked Mr. Spicer to review the agenda items with the State Commission

**NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement**

Mr. Spicer reported that districts are working between 5000 – 6000 hours per month on Farm Bill activities. He said the average pay earned is approximately $14.60 + 25% benefits which totals around $19.00 per hour. Mr. Spicer stressed the importance of all districts reporting Farm Bill hours worked in a timely manner and to make sure they report all time spent on implementing farm bill programs.

**LACD and NACD Annual Meetings**

Mr. Spicer said that the LACD Annual PAC Meeting will be held at 11:15 AM, LACD Annual Board Meeting at 1:00 PM, and the LACD Opening Ceremonies at 4:00 PM. He said in the afternoon session, there will be reports from NRCS, FSA and NACD.

An Informative program on Thursday will include presentations on WQ Trading, The Water Institute, and Louisiana Water Code and a panel to discuss the Farm Bill and attendance of the ethics training session on Friday morning is encouraged. He said Ethics training is required for district supervisors and employees and they must participate in annual training to avoid large fines for noncompliance.

The Annual NACD Meeting will be in Nashville, TN on January 27 thru January 31, 2018.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**NRCS State Conservationist Report**

Chairman Skains said they would now take up New Business and asked Mr. Kevin Norton to give the NRCS Report. Mr. Norton said the NRCS is participating in Re-Entry Solutions to develop high tunnels and small plot agriculture opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals returning to the community. He said it is a vocational training program that is part of the re-entry of individuals into the workforce. They are establishing a building and program on the grounds of the old National Guard Armory on the north side of Alexandria. Mr. Norton will leave the Commission meeting earlier than normal to attend the groundbreaking ceremony.

Mr. Norton said that Congress is working on the Continuing Resolution to fund the federal government through February 8, 2018. He said this limits the NRCS ability, as in previous years, to accomplish on discretionary progams, but not on mandatory programs. He said NRCS anticipates wrapping up final program allocation by the end of March 2018, if the final appropriations are completed by Congress.

He said that Secretary Purdue and NRCS continues to stress improvement in customer service including delivering services to customers in a timely and efficient manner. Conservation District employees are critical to our overall success in achieving quality and timely customer service.

He said that NRCS is sponsoring the second annual Women in Ag Conference on February 18, 2018 at the Downtown Holiday Inn in Alexandria, LA.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

Dr. Leonard reported that a Soil Health Conference will be held at the Hampton Inn in Monroe, LA and also at the LSU Ag Center in Alexandria, LA. Topics will include cover crops no till and other conservation measures that improve soil health. The goal is to also have a third meeting in South Louisiana in the rice and cane area.

Mr. Skains asked that attendees review the articles in their packet. He said the article discussing President Trump attending the Farm Bureau Conference in Nashville, TN this week is a significanct event. He said the president’s statement that he believes the strength of this country resides in rural America is very important as to how he may view future conservation legislation.

**SUPERVISORS RESIGNATION/APPOINTMENTS/REAPPOINTMENTS**

Chairman Skains asked Mr. Spicer to report on the resignations and reappointments of supervisors. Mr. Spicer said that Grant SWCD requested Mr. Ben Littlepage be appointed as an associate non-voting member of the Grant Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Fletcher said that he knows that the Commission does not have to approve districts having an associate board member but that it is important for the Commission to show support for associate board members.

Mr. Skains asked for comments from the public or Commission members and there were none; he asked for a motion to support the Grant SWCD to appoint Mr. Ben Littlepage as non-voting associate member of the Grant SWCD Board of Supervisors.

**Motion:**  Mr. Randall Fletcher made a motion to support the Grant SWCD to appoint Mr. Ben Littlepage as a non-voting associate member of the Grant SWCD Board. Dr. Ernest Girouard seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Spicer said that the DeSoto SWCD requested that Mr. Jerry Gamble be appointed fill their board vacancy formally held by Mr. Charles Adams. Ther term will begin January 10, 2018 and will expire on June 30, 2018.

Mr. Skains asked for comments from the public or Commission members and there were none; he asked for a motion to approve Mr. Jerry Gamble to be appointed to the elected position formally held by Mr. Charles Adams. The term will begin January 10, 2018 and will expire on June 30, 2018.

**Motion:** Mr. Ed Yerger made a motion to approve the appointment of Mr. Jerry Gamble to fill the elected position formally held by Mr. Charles Adams on the DeSoto SWCD Board effective January 10, 2018 and expires June 30, 2018. Mr. Randall Fletcher seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

Chairman Reggie Skains asked if there were any more comments from the public or Commission members and there were none.

**NEXT MEETING**

Chairmn Skains reported the next meeting will be Tuesday, February 27, 2018 at 1:15 PM in the Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Boulevard, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70806.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Chairman Skains asked if there were any other comments from the public or Commission members and there were none.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Chairman Skains said if there was no other business or comments from the public or Commission members, he will accept a motion to adjourn.

**Motion**: Mr. Ed Yerger made a motion to adjourn at 11:15 AM. The motion was seconded by Dr. Ernest Girouard and passed unanimously.

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Reggie Skains, Chairman

State Soil and Water Conservation Commission