

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

October 22, 2019
1:15 PM

VETERAN'S AUDITORIUM
5825 FLORIDA BLVD.
BATON ROUGE, LA 70806

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Skains called the regular monthly Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M and gave the invocation and Mr. David Daigle lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

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

Members and Alternate Members present:

Mr. Reggie Skains- Chairman
Dr. Ernest Girouard-Vice Chairman
Mr. Ed Yerger
Mr. Larry Sayes
Dr. Tommy Vitrano
Mr. David Daigle- LACD President
Dr. Rogers Leonard, LSU AgCenter

Members absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center
Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Randolph Joseph, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist of Field Operations
Dr. Brian Leblanc, LSU AgCenter
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF-OSWC/Executive Director SSWCC
Mr. Hezzie Crain, Bogue-Chitto-Pearl River SWCD Supervisor
Mr. Steve Horvath, Capital SWCD Supervisor
Ms. Gina Campo, Deputy Executive Director-Office of Community Development
Mr. Ben Wicker, Resilience Analyst-Office of Community Development
Mr. Bradley Spiegel, Resilience Analyst- Office of Community Development
Ms. Helen Waller, Resilience Analyst- Office of Community Development
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

Louisiana Governor's Office of Community Development- Louisiana Watershed Initiative

Chairman Skains introduced Ms. Gina Campo, Deputy Executive Director, and her team from the Office of Community Development. He said they will be discussing the Louisiana Watershed Initiative program. He said he had attended a few Watershed Initiative meetings and thought it was important to have them make a presentation to the Commission. Ms. Campo thanked the Commission for the opportunity to discuss the Watershed Initiative with them. She said the Watershed Initiative council consists of five state agencies including the Louisiana Office of Community Development, the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries, and Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD). Mr. Wicker said DOTD has identified 59 watersheds across Louisiana. He said they have recently completed the Amite River Basin hydraulic model and they have been reaching out to the University of Louisiana Lafayette, University of Louisiana Monroe, and also the University of Iowa. Ms. Campo said they will use hydraulic models to help identify projects at local and regional levels. She said these models will show the potential flooding impact of proposed projects. Ms. Campo said the Watershed Initiative Council has established eight regions in August. Mr. Wicker said these eight provisional regions can be modified during this first year. Ms. Campo said the regions have setup temporary steering committees for a one year period to manage project coordination and for prioritization of potential projects.

Ms. Campo said the Regional Capacity Building Grant of \$3.2 million dollars has just been announced. She said each of the eight regions can be allocated a maximum of \$400,000. She said these funds can be used for outreach and education, feasibility work to identify projects, and day to day operating expenses for the Steering Committees. She said the Steering Committees will be the "decision makers" in regards to selecting water management projects. Ms. Campo said the Steering Committees have already selected their regional fiscal agent. She said the fiscal agent will be the entity that will accept and manage the region's approved funding.

Ms. Campo said they have been approved to receive \$1.2 Billion in Mitigation Funds. She said Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has requested that participating states receiving mitigation funds submit an action plan. She said action plans are requested anytime new funding becomes available. She said it took HUD a while to determine the goals that should be included in a states' action plan. Ms. Campo said Louisiana's Action Plan along with the budget breakdown can be reviewed on the state's website: watershed.la.gov. Ms. Campo said that concluded their presentation. Chairman Skains thanked the group for meeting with the Commission

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Chairman Skains asked for comments from the public or Commission members about the September 19, 2019 State Soil and Water Conservation Commission minutes and there were none. Chairman Skains called for a motion to approve the September 19, 2019 State Commission Meeting minutes.

Motion: Dr. Ernest Girouard made a motion to approve September 19, 2019 State Soil and Water Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded by Mr. David Daigle 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 the districts have earned most of the FY 18-19 Farm Bill funds they were allocated. He said the districts have done an excellent job managing their Farm Bill work and funds. He said the \$750,000 that we have received for FY 19-20 is being entered into the system and the districts will receive their allocation letters before November 1, 2019.

State Commission Area V Election Convention

Chairman Skains said the next item is the State Commission Election Convention for Area V. He said the State Commission conducted the Area V State Soil and Water Conservation Commission Election Convention earlier this morning.

Chairman Skains said the voting results of the Area V Election Convention are as follows:

Area V-State Commission Member

Mr. Steve Horvath

Capital SWCD

Area V- State Commission Alternate Member

Dr. Thomas Vitrano

Crescent SWCD

NEW BUSINESS

NRCS State Conservationist Report

Chairman Skains said they would now take up New Business and asked Mr. Randolph Joseph, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist of Field Operations, to give the NRCS report. Mr. Joseph said he wanted to send apologies on behalf of Mr. Landreneau for not being able to make it to the Commission meeting today. He said 2019 has been a very successful year for Louisiana submitting record numbers of enrollment across several Conservation Programs. He said over \$71.4 million dollars in financial assistance was obligated on over 348,000 acres for conservation on working lands, Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE), and Floodplain Easements. He said under the Conservation Technical Assistance, conservation plans were developed on over 436,000 acres, and over 236,000 acres of conservation practices were applied to improve environmental quality.

Mr. Joseph said as NRCS begins the FY 2020 program implementation, new rules and regulations are being finalized and released under the 2018 Farm Bill provisions and announcements for special project proposals. He said the 2019 RCPP proposal was announced on September 3rd and will be open for 90 days with a December 3rd submittal due date. He said NRCS is also very excited to release new tools in 2020 that will integrate conservation planning and program delivery, improving efficiency and streamlining processes for field office staff, as well as delivering improved services and products.

Mr. Joseph said EQIP/RCPP has obligated \$28.8 million for 706 contracts on 156,000 acres. He said CSP, CSP-GCI, CSP-RCPP has obligated \$20.9 million for 560 contracts on 187,000 acres. He said he would like to commend Vermillion SWCD for having 125 contracts out of the above 560 contracts mentioned. Mr. Joseph also said that St. Landry SWCD has 5 contracts as well. He said ACEP-WRE has obligated \$16.9 million for 31 new easements on 5,000 acres. He said EWP-FPE has obligated \$4.8 million for 39 new easements.

Mr. Joseph said the Grant Parish Irrigation Watershed Plan is making progress. He said water level data collection has been completed, sponsors are acquiring landowner permissions for surveys, and the hydrologic model is setup for review. He said the Upper Terrebonne Basin Flood Prevention plan has an engineering consultant firm hosting a public scoping meeting on October 23rd at 6pm in New Roads. He said also the Town of Plain Dealing has executed an agreement to develop a rehab plan for the 3 flood control structures in the Upper West Fork Cypress Bayou and have solicited for an A&E firm to develop plans.

Mr. Joseph said this month's *Conservation Update* contains an article on Mr. Eric Unkel farming operation. He said Mr. Unkel said significant resource management contributions to the Unkel farm are being made through Ducks Unlimited (DU), USA Rice, SWCDs, and NRCS in the Regional Conservation Stewardship Program (RCPP).

He said they are some important dates he wanted us to remember:

1. National Milk Producers Annual Meeting- November 4-6, 2019 in New Orleans, LA.
2. November 15-16, 2019- On Farm Composting School in Bogalusa, LA.

Mr. Joseph concluded his report and Chairman Skains thanked him.

Correspondence

Chairman Skains said the first correspondence item is an out of state travel request from Avoyelles SWCD for Mr. Dirk Dupuy, Mr. Kyle Lemoine, Mr. James Deshotel, Mr. Larry Sayes, Mr. Ruben Dautzat, and Ms. Maddy Coco to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2020 in Las Vegas, NV. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the out of state travel request from Avoyelles SWCD.

Motion: Mr. David Daigle made a motion to approve the out of state travel request from Avoyelles SWCD for Mr. Dirk Dupuy, Mr. Kyle Lemoine, Mr. James Deshotel, Mr. Larry Sayes, Mr. Ruben Dautzat, and Ms. Maddy Coco to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2020 in Las Vegas, NV. The motion was seconded by Dr. Tommy Vitrano and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the next correspondence item is an audit engagement letter for D'Arbonne SWCD. He said D'Arbonne SWCD is requesting approval to enter into agreement with J. Aaron Cooper, LLC. to conduct the districts FYE June 30, 2019 audit at a cost of \$575. He asked for any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none. He called for a motion to approve the engagement letter.

Motion: Mr. Larry Sayes made a motion to approve D'Arbonne SWCD to enter into agreement with J. Aaron Cooper, LLC. to conduct their districts FYE June 30, 2019 audit at a cost of \$575. The motion was seconded by Mr. David Daigle and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the next correspondence item is an audit engagement letter for Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD. He said Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is requesting approval to enter into agreement with Minda B. Raybourn, LLC to conduct the districts FYE June 30, 2019 audit at a cost not exceed \$1,300. He asked for any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none. He called for a motion to approve the engagement letter.

Motion: Mr. David Daigle made a motion to approve Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD to enter into agreement with Minda B. Raybourn, LLC. to conduct their districts FYE June 30, 2019 audit at a cost not exceed \$1,300. The motion was seconded by Mr. Larry Sayes and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the next correspondence item is an audit engagement letter for Morehouse SWCD. He said Morehouse SWCD is requesting approval to enter into agreement with J. Aaron Cooper, LLC. to conduct the districts FYE June 30, 2019 audit at a cost of \$750. He asked for any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none. He called for a motion to approve the engagement letter.

Motion: Mr. Larry Sayes made a motion to approve Morehouse SWCD to enter into agreement with J. Aaron Cooper, LLC. to conduct their districts FYE June 30, 2019 audit at a cost of \$750. The motion was seconded by Mr. David Daigle and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the next article covers the Hardwick family and their unique farming operation. He asked Mr. Spicer if he had any comments on this article. Mr. Spicer said the article describes the mission of the Hardwick farm which is to "achieve a viable, profitable farm enterprise that strives for the ethical stewardship of all habitats and production resources with minimum impact upon the overall farm ecosystem." He said the family utilizes less aggressive best management practices, including minimal tillage, crop rotations, cover crops and residue maintenance. He said Dr. Hardwick is a long-time member of the Tensas-Concordia SWCD.

Chairman Skains said the next article is "Analysis IDs Ag Practices to Fight Flood and Drought." He asked Mr. Spicer did he have any comments on this article. Mr. Spicer said the article is based on 89 different studies across six continents that helps clarify which agricultural practices increases precipitation infiltration rates and soil water holding capacity. He said the scientists involved decided to analyze the effects of five emerging ag-related practices: no-till farming, cover crops, crop rotations, perennial plantings and cropland grazing. He said the analysis found that planting perennials such as grasses or trees near cropland increases the rate of water absorption by an average of 59%. He said cover crops planted primarily to combat erosion and restore soil nutrients boosted water absorption by an average of 35%.

Chairman Skains said the next correspondence is the 2020 LACD Annual Awards packet. He asked Mr. Daigle did he have any comments on the awards packet. Mr. Daigle said the packet was sent out to the districts on October 1st. He said districts will have to submit nominees to their Area Vice Presidents by November 4, 2019. He said Area VPs are to submit their choices (one per award category) to him at the OSWC by November 18, 2019. He said the award selection committee will select the 2020 Awardees in early December.

Chairman Skains said the next correspondence is the 2020 Sponsorship request. He asked Mr. Daigle if he had any comments regarding the sponsorship request. Mr. Daigle said we have set a goal of \$400 to \$500 per district. He said we would like to have commitments from sponsors no later than December 27, 2019.

Chairman Skains said the last correspondence item is the NACD First Timer Scholarship reminder. He asked Mr. Daigle did he have any comments on the NACD Scholarship. Mr. Daigle said this is a great opportunity for one person from Louisiana to attend the NACD Annual Meeting. He said the scholarship includes complimentary meeting registration and a ticket to the Appreciation Banquet. He said we are requesting nominee names be submitted to Ms. Rose Sharbeno at the Calcasieu SWCD by November 29, 2019.

Supervisor Resignations/Reappointments/Appointments

Chairman Skains said they would now take up supervisor resignations, reappointments, and appointments.

Chairman Skains said there is one resignation request this month from Mr. Richard Noles, Saline SWCD, elected position, effective September 12, 2019. He asked for comments from the public and the Commission members and there were none. Chairman Skains called for a motion to accept the resignation Saline SWCD, Mr. Richard Noles, elected position, effective September 12, 2019.

Motion: Mr. David Daigle made a motion to accept the resignation of Mr. Richard Noles, Saline SWCD, elected position, effective September 12, 2019. The motion was seconded by Dr. Tommy Vitrano and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said there were two reappointments this month and the first one is his reappointment to the D'Arbonne SWCD. He asked the Commission Vice Chairman, Dr. Girouard, to handle the reappointment. Vice Chairman Girouard said the D'Arbonne SWCD is requesting Mr. Reggie Skains be reappointed to fill his appointed position on the D'Arbonne SWCD. Term will began November 18, 2019 and expire November 18, 2022. Dr. Girouard asked for any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none. He said if there were no comments, he would call for motion to approve this reappointment.

Motion: Mr. Ed Yerger made a motion to approve the reappointment of Mr. Reggie Skains, D'Arbonne SWCD, to fill his appointed position on the board. Term will began November 18, 2019 and expire November 18, 2022. The motion was seconded by Mr. David Daigle and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the second reappointment request is from Iberia SWCD requesting Mr. Robert Judice to be reappointed his vacant appointed term. Term will began November 27, 2019 and expire November 27, 2022. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve this reappointment.

Motion: Dr. Ernest Girouard made a motion to approve the reappointment of Mr. Robert Judice, Iberia SWCD, to fill his appointed position on the board. Term will began November 27, 2019 and expire November 27, 2022. The motion was seconded by Mr. Larry Sayes and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said there are two appointments this month:

Chairman Skains said the first appointment request is from Saline SWCD requesting Mr. John W. Hayes to fill the vacant elected position formerly held by Mr. Richard Noles. Term will begin November 1, 2019 and expire June 30, 2022. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve this appointment.

Motion: Mr. Larry Sayes made a motion to approve the appointment of Mr. John W. Hays to fill the vacant elected position formerly held by Mr. Richard Noles. Term will begin November 1, 2019 and expire June 30, 2022. The motion was seconded by Mr. David Daigle and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the second appointment request is from Upper Delta SWCD requesting Mr. Mark Engemann to fill the vacant elected position formerly held by Ms. Lindsey Gaspard. Term will begin November 12, 2019 and expire June 30, 2020. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve this appointment.

Motion: Dr. Tommy Vitrano made a motion to approve the appointment of Mr. Mark Engemann to fill the vacant elected position formerly held by Ms. Lindsey Gaspard. Term will begin November 12, 2019 and expire June 30, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. David Daigle and passed unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

Chairman Skains said they would now take up Other Business. He asked Dr. Rogers Leonard if he had any comments. Dr. Leonard said he wanted to update us on a few things. He said the Louisiana Farm to School program is currently taking place in Baton Rouge at the Pennington Biomedical Center. He said this is an event sponsored by the Department of Education to try to get more fresh fruits and vegetables into the school systems across the state. He said a number of principals and cafeteria supervisors are attending the meeting. He said LSU College of Agriculture career week has also been going on this week with a lot of state officials looking for new employees. Dr. Leonard said Dr. Richardson announced the College of Agriculture had 430 new freshmen this year. He said LSU seems to be the only school that keeps increasing its enrollment.

He said there is a meeting coming up that he wanted to make mention of:

1. Industrial Hemp Meeting- November 13th- Evacuation Center at the Dean Lee Research Station- Alexandria, LA

Dr. Leonard said that concluded his updated and Chairman Skains thanked him.

NEXT MEETING

Chairman Skains said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 4, 2019 at 1:15 P.M. 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: Dr. Tommy Vitrano made a motion to adjourn at 2:58 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Yerger and passed unanimously.

/s/ Reggie Skains 
Reggie Skains, Chairman State Soil and Water Conservation Commission