

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

October 27, 2020  
1:15 PM

LINCOLN PARISH PUBLIC SAFETY COMPLEX  
161 ROAD CAMP ROAD  
RUSTON, LA 71270

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Girouard called the regular monthly Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. Mr. Steve Horvath gave the invocation and Mr. Alan Williams lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Members and Alternate Members present:**

Dr. Ernest Girouard - Chairman  
Mr. John Alan Williams- LACD President  
Mr. Reggie Skains, Area I Member  
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member  
Dr. Thomas Vitrano, Area V Alternate  
Mr. Chris Carter, Area II Alternate  
Mr. Pat Boudreaux, Area I Alternate  
Mr. Brad Spicer, Alternate Member

**Members absent:**

Mr. Larry Sayes- Secretary-Treasurer  
Southern University Agricultural Center  
Representative  
Dr. Mike Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Member  
Mr. Steve Horvath-Vice Chairman

A quorum was present.

**Others Present:**

Mr. Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist  
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC  
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC  
Mr. Michael Schooler, LDAF-OSWC

**Public Comments**

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

**Approval of the minutes**

Chairman Giroaurd called for a motion to approve the September 22, 2020 SSWCC minutes.

**Motion by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

**Second by:** Mr. John Alan Williams

Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Skains said a few districts contacted him regarding not receiving a copy of the State Commission minutes. Mr. Breaux stated districts must remember that we are approving minutes from the month prior and Mr. Skains said he thought about that after receiving the calls. He said that he would be contact the districts to explain this process.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### **NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement- Mr. Joey Breaux, Director, SSWCC**

The new Farm Bill agreement has been signed. The contract is a 4 year agreement with 3 years being funded at \$1,000,000 a year. OSWC is hoping NRCS will amend the agreement in year 4 to add more funds. \$925,000 will be sent out to districts each year to reimburse them for doing specific tasks. Discussions were held in prior years that NRCS would heighten their accountability requirements for any USDA agreement. Since 2002, districts were only required to input the Farm Bill hours they worked into the intranet system. The new contract will require districts to input how many times they did a specific task in each month time with each tasks having a set time frame. The districts' Farm Bill allocation is based off a 3 year average of their contracts per parish and district. The averages hadn't changed in many years causing certain districts with higher workload to question their allocation amounts. OSWC has worked with the current average contract numbers received from NRCS and has decided that there should be a minimum base amount of \$5,500. LDAF IT has created a temporary spreadsheet that each district can use to report their Farm Bill information. The districts would first have to create a Google Mail account and wait for the link to be sent from LDAF IT. On the spreadsheet, each district secretary will have to input each employee personnel number and then the number of times they performed a certain task.

Mr. Kacir said it is hard to keep staff with NRCS. He said NRCS hired 20 new people before the fiscal year ended. They reviewed numbers and noticed it was about 20 people who left NRCS the year prior due to retirements and promotions. He said that it is imperative that each district have conservation plans and NRCS assist districts with conservation practices. He said the task list that OSWC has is the beginning stages and hopes to expand it because there are so many tasks that can be considered that have not been included.

### **State Commission Area I and Area II Election Convention**

The State Commission Area I and Area II Election Convention took place earlier this morning.

The voting results of the Area I and II Election convention are:

**Area I State Commission Member** – Mr. Reggie Skains, D'Arbonne SWCD

**Area I State Commission Alternate Member**- Mr. Pat Boudreaux, Sabine SWCD

**Area II State Commission Member**- Mr. Ed Yerger, Madison SWCD

**Area II State Commission Alternate Member**- Mr. Chris Carter, Morehouse SWCD

Chairman Girouard asked if there were any public or Commission comments regarding the election and there were none. He asked for a motion to approve the election results.

**Motion by:** Reggie Skains

**Seconded by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Resolved, Mr. Reggie Skains, D'Arbonne Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as the Area I Member of the State Commission and Mr. Pat Boudreaux, Sabine Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as Area I Alternate Member of the State Commission with their terms beginning October 27, 2020 and expiring October 27, 2023.

Resolved, Mr. Ed Yerger, Madison Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as the Area II Member of the State Commission and Mr. Chris Carter, Morehouse Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as Area II Alternate Member of the State Commission with their terms beginning October 27, 2020 and expiring October 27, 2023.

### LACD Annual Meeting/NACD Annual Meeting-Mr. Joey Breaux, Director, SSWCC

Mr. Breaux said he and Mr. Alan Williams discussed creating a survey that would get responses from district board members regarding their thoughts on having the LACD meeting. He said LDAF IT was able to create a Google based survey that included the questions created to get responses regarding LACD. The survey was sent out to districts and supervisors with OSWC receiving 82 responses (33-Yes, 22-No, and 27-Undecided). Mr. Breaux said there must be some final decisions being made and we also have to consider the presenters and if they would still be interested in participating as they normally would. The meeting is shaping up to be a hybrid meeting. Mr. Spicer said he had been working on the agreement previously and one of the deadlines has already past but they would work with Mr. Breaux on the next deadline dates. Mr. Breaux said he plans to speak with the representative at the hotel to see what we can do to reshape this year's meeting and discuss future plans for 2022. Chairman Girouard asked Mr. Breaux how much it would cost us to get out the agreement for 2021 and Mr. Spicer stated it wouldn't cost us anything. Chairman Girouard said NRCS is an important part of our event and we want to make sure they are involved. Mr. Kacir said he and Mr. Craig McCain of FSA have to continuously remind NRCS employees about social distancing and making good decisions on going to certain events with large crowds. He said NRCS employees would love to attend this meeting but must take precautions. Mr. Breaux said he would get information out to the Commission and districts as soon as final details are confirmed.

### New Business

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

Mr. Kacir said he only had a few updates to share. NRCS has begun the hiring process for the new 13 restructuring units as previously discussed. He said 13 District Conservationist (DC) positions were announced throughout Louisiana first and 5 candidates were selected. The remaining positions were advertised nationally and the application process has ended. He said NRCS has begun advertising for the Pathway Internships. NRCS has also hired 4 new engineers to work on the Coastal Wetland Planning Protection Restoration Act staff and are in process of hiring 4 new technicians in the Watershed Construction groups.

Mr. Kacir said they are 80% obligated in EQIP funds and 60% obligated in CSP funds. He said once 2020 funds have been obligated, they will begin processing CSP and GCI payments.

#### SWCD Staff Meritorious Achievement Award- Mr. Joey Breaux, Director, SSWCC

Mr. Breaux said that several boards and DCs have recently asked about the possibilities of SWCD boards being allowed to reward their hard working, high performing employees such as the NRCS is able to do with their staff. He said that previously this had been regarded as unearned compensation and therefore unallowable, but after consulting with the LDAF Human Resources it was learned that this would be possible, but only if the State Commission developed a policy establishing guidelines and restrictions for a SWCD employee meritorious award system. Mr. Breaux said that after reviewing the State Rule regarding this action (LSCS Rule 6.16.1) as well as the LA Division of Administrations own Meritorious Award Policy, the minimum requirements for such a policy are:

- Any SWCD Board wishing to nominate an employee for a monetary meritorious award must submit the nomination to the State Commission for Commission approval.
- If monetary, such rewards (or sum of multiple awards) shall not exceed a total of 10% of the employee's base salary within the fiscal year.
- If the award is for an Exceptional Performance Evaluation:
  - o The award shall be limited to no more than 3% of the employee's base pay, not to exceed \$2,500.00.
  - o The employee must have undergone a SWCD board approved job performance review based upon 1) the employee's established job description and 2) job performance plan; both documents must accompany a nomination for a meritorious award for an Exceptional Performance Evaluation.

- Significant achievement awards not to exceed \$500.00 may be made for various special projects or significant achievements.

- o To receive and award for a special achievement or special project, the employee must not have been previously compensated for the project or achievement by any other monetary award or recognition program, nor should they have received an unsatisfactory performance rating in the same fiscal year.

- Employee reward nominations must include: the employee's name, title and personnel number; successful performance rating in the same fiscal year as the significant achievements or exceptional performance; job performance plan; an explanation of the significant achievement and how it benefited the SWCD, the conservation partnership and the district cooperators; the reward amount proposed by the SWCD board.

- The names of all approved reward recipients must be made public by posting in the SWCC meeting minutes.

Mr. Breaux said that in a case where the nominating SWCD does have sufficient funding available for the award in the fiscal year in which the nomination is submitted, the nomination may be submitted to the SWCC in the following fiscal years. Rewards may be either monetary or non-monetary. Mr. Breaux asked Chairman Girouard if this may be approved for addition to the PPMs.

Chairman Girouard asked if there were any comments and there were none. He called for a motion to approve this amendment to PPM #1.

**Motion by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

**Seconded by:** Mr. Alan Williams

Motion passed unanimously.

#### Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Girouard said there is 1 supervisor resignation: Dorcheat SWCD, Mr. Buddy Thomas (elected) effective October 27, 2020.

Chairman Girouard said there are 2 supervisor reappointments for a three year term: East Carroll SWCD, Mr. Donavon Taves (appointed) - effective October 27, 2020-October 19, 2023 and Madison SWCD, Mr. Carter Moberley (appointed) - effective October 27, 2020- September 19, 2023.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the 1 resignation and the two reappointments.

**Motion by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

**Seconded by:** Mr. Alan Williams

Motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence- Mr. Joey Breaux, Director, SSWCC  
American Farm Bureau's 102nd Annual Convention Goes Viral

The 2021 American Farm Bureau Virtual Convention, to be held Jan. 10-13, 2021, will be held online following the cancellation of all events through Jan. 31, 2021, at the San Diego Convention Center. The meeting intended to bring together farmers, ranchers, and industry experts to discuss the top issues facing agriculture, including the impact of COVID-19, sustainability and the future of the supply chain, and would have featured key note speakers who inspire and motivate grassroots action. Registration for the 2021 American Farm Bureau Virtual Convention will open later this year and will be free to all attendees. Details can be found at [FB.org/events](http://FB.org/events).

Executive Order on Modernizing America's Water Resource Management and Water Infrastructure

This Executive Order signed by President Donald Trump will ensure that agencies work together where there are joint overlapping responsibilities to effectively improve our country's water resource management, modernize our water infrastructure, and prioritize the availability of clean, safe, and reliable water supplies.

Details Feed Big Picture for Louisiana Farmer

Sam Ross discusses his career from buying his first 100 acres after high school to having 10,300 acres that are on both sides of the Louisiana-Mississippi state lines. Mr. Ross says his operation would not be as successful without his key players: Mrs. Stacy Ross (his wife) who handles all input paperwork, Mr. Mike Ross (his father) who is his mentor, Ms. Julia Ross (his cousin) who is the office manager, Mr. Marlin Franklin who is lead operator, and Mr. Jacob Ross (his son) who is learning the ropes of the whole operation. The Ross family gives back by assisting with firework displays and tree lighting programs. They also donate to guided hunts for disabled war veterans through the Wounded Warrior Project. Mr. Ross also served as a supervisor on the West Carroll SWCD board for four years.

Gov. Edwards Announces CF Industries to Invest \$41.4 Million at Donaldsonville Nitrogen Complex

Governor Edwards and CF Industries President and CEO Tony Will announced the company will make \$41.4 million capital investment to enhance nitric acid production at the world's largest nitrogen fertilizer complex in Donaldsonville, LA. CF Industries is a global leader in the manufacture and distribution of nitrogen products for fertilizer, emissions abatement and other industrial applications. The Donaldsonville facility is the world's largest and most flexible nitrogen facility, with six world-scale ammonia plants, five urea plants, four nitric acid plants, three urea ammonium nitrate plants and a diesel exhaust fluid plant.

Rough year for rice farmers after hurricanes Laura and Delta

Joel Stelly, a rice and crawfish farmer believes he was lucky during Hurricane Laura and Delta. Fellow farmers in other states lost rice in bins and in their fields and there was also infrastructure damage. LSU County Agent, Jimmy Meaux estimates that 8 to 100 thousand acres were damaged as a result of the hurricanes.

Louisiana Conservation and Commodity Updates-October 2020

The LSU AgCenter discussed many different topics in its October 2020 newsletter which included:

1. The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (RESTORE Council) is awarding CPRA \$15 million, which will be used to extend the System Wide Assessment and Monitoring Program (SWAMP) to the southwest coastal parishes.
2. USDA implementing the second part of the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) for farmers who continue to face market disruptions and additional costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. The EPA is expected to announce their decision on if farmers can use dicamba-based products for the next planting season.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

Next Meeting

Chairman Girouard said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 1, 2020 at 1:15 P.M. in the Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Boulevard, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70806.

Public Comments

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

Adjournment

Chairman Girouard 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 2:37 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alan Williams and passed unanimously.

/s/ Dr. Ernest Girouard



Dr. Ernest Girouard, Chairman State Soil and Water Conservation Commission