

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

December 7, 2021  
1:15 PM  
ZOOM VIRTUAL FORMAT

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY  
VETERANS MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM  
5825 FLORIDA BOULEVARD  
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Girouard called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. Mr. Steve Horvath gave the invocation and Mr. Ed Giering lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ROLL CALL**

The roll was called by Ms. LaClasha Alexander.

**Members and Alternate Members present:**

Dr. Ernest Girouard – Chairman, Area IV  
Mr. Steve Horvath-Vice Chairman, Area V  
Mr. Jason Nolde, LACD 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President  
Mr. Reggie Skains- Area I Member  
Mr. Ed Yerger- Area II Member  
Mr. Ed Giering- Area III Alternate  
Mr. Brad Spicer- LDAF Alternate Member  
Dr. Mike Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate Member  
Mr. Earl Garber, Alternate Member, Area IV

**Members absent:**

Southern University Agricultural Center  
Representative

A quorum was present.

**Others Present:**

Mr. Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist  
Mr. Michael Schooler, LDAF-OSWC  
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC  
Ms. Caitlin Joubert, LDAF-OSWC  
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC  
Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC  
Ms. Crystal Bowman, LDAF-OSWC  
Ms. LaClasha “Clay” Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

**Public Comments**

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

**Approval of the Agenda**

Chairman Girouard called for a motion to approve the December 7, 2021 SSWCC agenda. Mr. Breaux said the Commission received a meritorious award nomination and suggests the Commission add it under New Business. Chairman Girouard called for a motion to approve the December 7, 2021 agenda with the suggested revision.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer  
**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains  
Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the minutes

Chairman Girouard called for a motion to approve the October 26, 2021 SSWCC minutes.

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

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement- Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC  
Mr. Breaux said the Farm Bill reporting system is currently open for districts to input their November hours. October's Farm Bill total was \$154,957 which is a great start to the new Farm Bill reporting year.

Area 3 and 4 State Convention- Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC  
Mr. Breaux said the Area 3 and 4 State Convention was held prior to this meeting via Zoom. The newly elected Area III and IV members are:

**Area III Member:** Mr. Ruben Dautat, Avoyelles SWCD  
**Area III Alternate member:** Mr. Ed Giering, Natchitoches SWCD

**Area IV Member:** Mr. Earl Garber, Acadia SWCD  
**Area IV Alternate Member:** Mr. Ben Langlinais, Iberia SWCD

Chairman Girouard asked for a motion to accept the results of the Area III State Convention.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer  
**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains  
Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Girouard asked for a motion to accept the results of the Area IV State Convention.

**Motion by:** Mr. Steve Horvath  
**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains  
Motion passed unanimously.

Resolved, Mr. Ruben Dautat, Avoyelles Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as the Area III Member of the State Commission and Mr. Ed Giering, Natchitoches Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as Area III Alternate Member of the State Commission with their terms beginning December 7, 2021 and expiring December 7, 2024.

Resolved, Mr. Earl Garber, Acadia Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as the Area IV Member of the State Commission and Mr. Ben Langlinais, Iberia Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as Area IV Alternate Member of the State Commission with their terms beginning December 7, 2021 and expiring December 7, 2024.

Chairman Girouard asked if there were any public or Commission comments regarding the election. Mr. Garber said he thanks Chairman Girouard for his service to the Commission and is looking forward to working with the Commission members. Chairman Girouard thanked Mr. Garber for his comments.

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

Mr. Breaux said he discussed LACD options with Chairman Girouard, Mr. Garber, Mr. Williams, Mr. Kacir, and many others. Due to NRCS's tighten COVID travel restrictions, NRCS employees would not be able to attend a January meeting. With this in mind, discussions were had to change the date of Annual LACD meeting back. Suggested dates were between April and June with the decision of April being the best option to have the meeting. Mr. Breaux was able to schedule April 19-21, 2022 as the new dates for the Annual LACD meeting at the Crowne Plaza hotel in Baton Rouge. Mr. Breaux said he spoke with NACD President Michael Crowder who unfortunately won't be able to attend the April meeting. He said Mr. Keith Owen, NACD South Central Region Rep, was promoted to a Director of Education position and Mr. Wesley Gibson has moved into the NACD rep position.

### New Business

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

Mr. Kacir said November 22, 2021 was the deadline for NRCS employees to have taken their Covid-19 vaccinations or to have submitted medical or religious accommodation requests. NRCS received approximately 1,000 medical accommodation requests and nearly 4,000 religious accommodation requests. Medical requests reviews are underway and religious exemption requests won't be reviewed until medical exemption requests are completed. Mr. Kacir said State Conservationists will not have any part of the reviewing or approving process of the accommodation requests. Regional Conservationists will be the reviewers and the approvals of each accommodation. Mr. Kacir said employees who haven't disclosed their vaccination status or who did not submit accommodation requests can expect to be advised accordingly at the beginning of the year. Mr. Nolde asked Mr. Kacir if FPAC has decided on how these accommodations will affect district employees. Mr. Kacir said there hasn't been any decision regarding district employees or any of the other partners that work in the NRCS offices. He said district employees and partners located in NRCS offices should still be following the "visitor" protocols that were given previously. These protocols require that "visitors" fill out NRCS's attestation form as well as have a negative Covid-19 test 3 days prior to entering NRCS offices. Mr. Kacir said NRCS is working on a "Return to Work" process for the offices. He expects that State Offices will fully staffed by mid-January with the field offices following their lead. Currently field offices are at 75% which doesn't allow all of the staff to be in the offices and visitors have to make appointments before arriving to the office. Secretary Vilsack announced a new telework policy which includes a possibility of a 4-day telework schedule for certain positions while other positions could telework full-time. He said NRCS and FPAC plan to incorporate a variation of Secretary Vilsack's policy.

Mr. Kacir reported that NRCS currently has 206 employees and expects an additional two employees to start before the end of January. There are some expected retirements taking place that include: Mr. John Pitre (State Resource Conservationist), Mr. Mike Lindsey (State Soil Scientist), Mr. John Jurgenson (State Conservation Engineer), Mr. Chris Ebel (State Rangeland Management Specialist), Ms. Nancy Vicknair (Administrative Support Specialist), and Ms. Terry Barron (Secretary).

NRCS is currently working on CSP renewals as well processing CSP payments. EQIP signups are in process currently and will the deadline is approaching. The newest addition to the EQIP process is Conservation Incentive Contract (CIC) which was a part of the 2018 contract. The CIC was introduced as a pilot in 4 states last year and this is the first year that it will go nationwide. Mr. Kacir said NRCS plans to use CIC in 4 targeted LARUs to concentrate on soil health conservation practices, improving soil organic matter, and decreasing soil erosion. He said CICs can be valid for up to 10 years and allows NRCS to mix EQIP conservation practices and CSP enhancements with one contract. He said he hopes to convert producers from a complete conventional tillage process to using the cover crop process more. Chairman Girouard asked if there were any questions or comments for Mr. Kacir. Mr. Breaux said a lot of those announced retirees have been key partners and leaders in Louisiana conservation for many years and they will truly be missed.

### LSU AgCenter Center Report- Dr. Michael Salassi

Dr. Salassi said there have been a few staffing changes:

1. Dr. Andre Reis- Stationed at the Dean Lee Research Center but will be doing sugarcane research at the Iberia Station.
2. Dr. Felipe Dalla Lanna- New Pathologist stationed at the H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station.
3. Dr. Kirk Guidry- Director at the H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station.
4. Dr. Al Orgeron- Director at the Iberia Research Station

Dr. Salassi said the LSU AgCenter with assistance from President Tate are working towards Precision Agriculture initiatives. One of the first steps being discussed is converting the Kalagari Center located on the Ben Hur Farm in Baton Rouge to a Precision Agriculture center. The center would provide various aspects of Precision Agriculture training to producers, consultants and many others. The Agcenter hopes to be able to receive funds to increase interest in the Precision Agriculture initiatives.

Another one of President Tate's priorities is to add more extension centers to the state. There have already been meetings with other current extension agents in the state to identify what areas would new extension agents be focusing on over the next 5 to 10 years. The AgCenter is also considering forming an Urban region. Currently, LSU has the state divided into five regions and are currently evaluating all possibilities. Chairman Girouard asked if there were any public or Commission comments. Mr. Garber asked Dr. Salassi about the vision for the Precision Ag program and if LSU be offering a Precision Agriculture degree or some form of training. Dr. Salassi said quite a few of the staff members are specialized in areas that could support the formation of a Precision Ag degree program. Dr. Salassi said he doesn't see anything being formed in the next 12 months but there are conversations being held to form a possible Undergraduate degree or at least a training program.

### Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Girouard said there is one appointment this month: DeSoto SWCD, Mr. Ricky Weeks, elected position formerly Mr. William Bagley, effective December 7, 2021- June 30, 2024.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the appointment of DeSoto SWCD, Mr. Ricky Weeks, elected position formerly Mr. William Bagley, effective December 7, 2021- June 30, 2024.

**Motion by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

**Seconded by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

### Correspondence/Articles:

Chairman Girouard said the first correspondence is an out of state request from Crescent SWCD requesting authorization for Ms. Rebecca Livaudais, Mr. Irvin Dares III, Mr. Blaise Pezold, Mr. Henry G. Schlorff, and Ms. Nina Ockman to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 12-16, 2022 in Orlando, FL.

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

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

## Articles

- Carbon Farming Opportunities Beckon Farmers
- National Association of Conservation Districts- "One Water"- Coastal Resource Policy Group Work Plan for National Coastal Conservation Assistance to Districts
- Grant-funded project focuses on conservation
- What's that low-flying plane with bomb-shaped device doing? Checking Louisiana ground water
- NRCS to Host Public Webinars on Funding Opportunities through Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

## Meritorious Award:

Mr. Breaux said a Meritorious Award nomination had been received from Madison SWCD nominating Ms. Patches McDaniel to receive an award of \$500 based on her excellent performance evaluation and commitment shown to her district. The 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 Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the nomination packet to give Ms. Patches McDaniel a one-time \$500 meritorious award.

**Motion by:** Mr. Jason Nolde

**Seconded by:** Mr. Ed Yerger

Passed unanimously.

## OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Breaux said although the in person Annual LACD meeting was rescheduled to April, there will be a virtual LACD Business Meeting on Wednesday, January 12, 2022. Mr. Breaux said that current LACD President, Mr. Alan Williams, has the Business Meeting as a top priority to smoothly transition out of the President position as well as filling other vacant LACD positions. The OSWC staff will send out Zoom information as well as an agenda soon.

Mr. Breaux said that some of the OSWC staff will be taking some of the Legislative budget analysts and auditors on a field tour this week. Tours aren't requested regularly but they are interested in seeing some of the field work that takes place through SWCDs. Previous tours included cover crops and office tours. Mr. Breaux said he'd hoped to include feral swine work in the planned tour, but it was decided this may be too overwhelming for some of the legislative staff. It was decided that the tour would include visiting the Bayou Folsé Watershed in Lafourche parish where prescribed grazing work is happening and also visit St. Bernard parish to look at some district work being done in the Central Wetlands area.

Mr. Breaux said he also wanted to mention the NACD Next Leadership program. He asked Mr. Garber for comments on this. Mr. Garber said the leadership program is very much needed. Mr. Garber said there was a Leadership program but it later lost its funding. While working with NACD, he and others did feel that there needed to be a leadership program for the future members and conservation districts. A previous board member was able to purchase life insurance policy for \$100,000 which the family later took and dedicated it to a leadership program within NACD. These funds have become the seed money to begin another leadership program. NACD is always looking for sponsors to help grow the leadership program. Mr. Breaux said he does get inquiries from district supervisors on NACD's involvement with districts. The NACD leadership program is a

great entrance to NACD and possibly becoming one of their officers. Mr. Breaux said he hopes that Mr. Garber and others are able to keep districts aware of any updates with the NACD Leadership program.

Mr. Breaux said currently OSWC is advertising for vacant water resources based position. This will be a temporary 2 year appointment with hopes of getting funded to retain the position. It is currently advertised as an Agricultural Environmental Specialist position on the State Civil Service website.

Mr. Breaux said he also wanted announce that the Coastal Vegetative Planting Program budget has been increased by \$100,000 per year. Currently the program is funded at \$400,000 annually and OWSC has requested an increase many times. These additional funds will be able to fund increased pay for district technicians as well as better equipment.

Mr. Breaux said Mr. Sidney Evans of Natchitoches SWCD has started an effort to reform the Feral Swine task Force. The task force did sunset a year ago accomplishing what the Legislature asked of it. Districts currently involved with Feral Swine Initiative have determined that the task force should be reestablished and that Conservation districts be allowed a voting membership on it. The draft legislation that is currently being presented will include an appointment made by recommendation to the Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry by the Soil and Water Conservation Commission for a conservation district representative on the reestablished task force.

#### Next Meeting

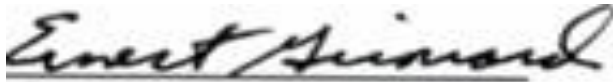
Chairman Girouard said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 25, 2022 at 1:15PM virtually.

#### 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. Brad Spicer made a motion to adjourn at 2:16 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Horvath and passed unanimously.

/s/ Dr. Ernest Girouard



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