

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

August 23, 2022
1:15 PM

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

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Garber called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. Mr. Reggie Skains gave the invocation and Mr. Brad Spicer lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

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

Members and Alternate Members present:

Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman, Area IV
Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice-Chairman, Area V
Mr. Jason Nolde, LACD President, Member
Mr. Reggie Skains, Area I Member
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate

Members Absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative
Mr. Ruben Dautat, Secretary-Treasurer, Area III

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC / Director
Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

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

Approval of the agenda

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the August 23, 2022 SSWCC agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the July 26, 2022 SSWCC minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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

Mr. Breaux said July's Farm Bill drawdown was \$41,126. The total FY 21-22 remaining balance is \$66,903 with 2 months remaining. A total of 29 districts have expended their allocated Farm Bill funds for the current year. These maxed-out districts have continued to submit Farm Bill hours worked for a total of \$392,363 beyond their allocations. Districts with remaining balances have received notification requesting confirmation of their ability to utilize their remaining Farm Bill allocation balances. OSWC has requested their emailed responses no later than September 19, 2022. If districts don't utilize their funds, OSWC will sweep the remaining balances and distribute them to the over earned districts.

SWCD Proposed Budget- Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director, SSWCC

Mr. Breaux cautioned that although the FY 2023 allocations are essentially unchanged for FY 22, the increased insurance costs as well as the new OSUP fee have burdened the overall district budget. There are indications that these increases will continue. LDAF's Office of Management and Finance was able to add a modest amount to the FY 2023 budget so that districts were able to maintain similar budgets as last fiscal year, but any additional increases in insurance or OSUP costs will negatively affect district allocations. Vice-Chairman Horvath said outreach is important because this informs people about soil and water conservation districts which opens doors for possible overall support and funding opportunities. Mr. Breaux mentioned that, along this line, the OSWC received word that the Upper Delta SWCD received conditional funding from the Louisiana Watershed Initiative for their Upper Terrebonne Basin Watershed Project.

NACD South Central Meeting- Baton Rouge, LA- Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director, SSWCC

Mr. Breaux said the meeting is shaping up favorably for good attendance from across the region, especially Oklahoma. As of yesterday, there were approximately 100 registrants for the meeting. The tours to the Idlewild Research Station and the LSU Center For River Studies are peaking the interests of the registrants. Initial responses suggested the River Studies tour would be the preference for everyone but more responses were submitted for Idlewild so another tour bus will be added.

LACD Mid-Year Meeting-September 27, 2022

Mr. Nolde said an announcement went out earlier this month about the upcoming LACD Mid-Year Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, September 27, 2022 in Alexandria, LA. This meeting will be a planning session for the annual LACD meeting scheduled for January 11-13, 2022 in Baton Rouge, LA. The committees will have separate breakout sessions to discuss possible conservation topics, draft prospective resolutions, and aid in drafting a tentative agenda. Mr. Breaux said another topic of discussion would be the locations for the upcoming annual LACD meetings. A lot of the cities that the meeting has taken place in prior years don't have the best venues to hold the annual meeting. Baton Rouge had been favored because there are greater opportunities for legislators to participate.

Area 5 SWCC Election Convention

Chairman Garber said Area 5 districts received an email earlier this month regarding the upcoming SWCC Area 5 Election Convention. The convention is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, October 25, 2022 in the Veterans Memorial Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806 at 11 A.M. Districts were instructed to submit a delegate and alternate for the convention by October 10, 2022. One of the members from each district must show up to vote for the SWCC Area 5 member. Currently, Mr. Steve Horvath is the SWCC Area 5 member and Dr. Thomas Vitrano is his alternate.

New Business

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

Mr. Kacir advised that NRCS has returned to 100% field office staffing and hopes that they will no longer have to deal with reduced staffing tiers due to Covid-19 restrictions. NRCS currently has 201 full time employees with plenty of advancement and retirements happening. They have advertised for district conservationists, conservation planners, engineers, and technicians. Mr. Kacir said they are winding down their fiscal year.

Recently, NRCS approved a \$7.5 million Regional Conservation Partnership Program project with Ducks Unlimited for conjunctive water use which is used to shift from ground water into surface water use. This is a five-year multi-state partnership program. Press releases have also gone out regarding the Inflation Reduction Act and the possible funds that maybe coming to NRCS. Mr. Kacir believes these funds will go towards implementing previously submitted nutrient management plans and their proper application. The process for receiving these funds is expected to be intricate.

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

Dr. Salassi said the LSU AgCenter is hiring a statewide extension specialist to assist pecan producers. President Tate initially asked the Legislature for funding sufficient to add an additional 40 county agents and was only given funding for 8 agents. One of these newly funded agents will work with poultry producers in the northern part of the state. The AgCenter is also in the process of filling some animal science faculty positions at the Dean Lee research station and the Hill Farm research station. Dr. Salassi said there was a Sweet Potato field day held last Thursday, and it was a great turn out for a rainy day. He was unable to attend the field day due to a Farm Bureau meeting scheduled in Baton Rouge.

A vacant room at the Iberia Research Station in Jeanerette, LA has been converted into a seafood processing demonstration lab. This lab will be used to teach seafood processors new management practices and other techniques. The food incubator located on the main campus which helps small startup food companies start their process received a \$1.5 million grant from the US Department of Commerce as well as a \$2.5 million grant given by the state to help expand the facility. A faculty member also received a \$1 million grant from the Board of Regents to research developing beneficial use of by-products such as fiber from agricultural products. Recently, Shell donated approximately \$25 million to LSU and there will be a meeting on September 8th to discuss allocation of some of these funds to research efforts.

The AgCenter was able to upload the newest copy of LSU's survey showing the economic impact of Feral Hog damage. The AgCenter used the same formulas and calculations as the 2013 feal hog survey. Looking at 10 major commodities including timber, the AgCenter estimated crop losses at approximately \$66 million and non-production losses were an additional \$25 million.

Dr. Salassi said that concluded his report.

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there is 1 resignation this month:

- Mr. Walter Tortorich, Evangeline SWCD, appointed position, effective April 28, 2022

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve this resignation:

- Mr. Walter Tortorich, Evangeline SWCD, appointed position, effective April 28, 2022

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 3 re-appointments this month:

- Mr. Robert Judice Jr., Iberia SWCD, appointed position, effective November 27, 2022- November 27, 2025.
- Mr. Edward Yerger, Madison SWCD, appointed position, effective October 25, 2022- October 25, 2025.
- Dr. Ernest Girouard, Vermillion SWCD, appointed position, effective November 27, 2022- November 27, 2025.

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

- Mr. Robert Judice Jr., Iberia SWCD, appointed position, effective November 27, 2022- November 27, 2025.

- Mr. Edward Yerger, Madison SWCD, appointed position, effective October 25, 2022- October 25, 2025.
- Dr. Ernest Girouard, Vermillion SWCD, appointed position, effective November 27, 2022- November 27, 2025.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Jason Nolde

Motion passed unanimously.

Meritorious Award:

Chairman Garber said we received one Meritorious Award Request:

- Vermillion SWCD nominating Ms. Mitzi Dohrman, District Secretary, to receive an exceptional performance award of 3% of her annual base salary (\$1,310.00)

The Meritorious award nomination packet was reviewed and met all the requirements outlined in PPM #1.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Vermillion SWCD's nomination packet for Ms. Mitzi Dohrman, District Secretary, to receive an exceptional performance award of 3% of her annual base salary (\$1,310.00)

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence/Articles:

- Southeast Conservation Blueprint
- Across the globe, farmers put grazing livestock to work to help the environment
- Big Louisiana coastal restoration projects continue
- Certified Angus Beef & Ducks Unlimited Partner to Preserve Working Grasslands
- How Minnesota's little, polluted Crow River clouds the Mississippi
- How will the coastal restoration plan be funded once oil spill money runs dry?
- USDA Announces New Opportunities to Improve Nutrient Management
- Senate overwhelmingly passes WRDA
- U.S. Army: Central Review of Environmental Legislative and Regulatory Actions

Commission Goals- Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman of SWCC

Chairman Garber said the members should have received a copy of the "Louisiana Soil and Water Conservation Commission Goals" sheet. The sheet lists 3 main topics (Supervisor and Personnel Management, District Operational Funding, and Program Development) that he would like for the Commission members to review and discuss. He said Commission members can suggest changes as they discuss all the subcategories of each topic.

Under the Supervisor and Personnel Management, he listed improving policy and procedures for an employee management plan. The first part of this phase would be to make sure districts have adequate job descriptions. Mr. Spicer said there were job descriptions given to districts years ago and Mr. Breaux said those have evolved and have been used to create many other job descriptions. Mr. Breaux said if districts are composing personnel management plans, then they should also add training plans as well. The plans should be tailored to the specific field office needs. Chairman Garber asked Mr. Breaux for guidance with management plans. Mr. Breaux said that OSWC has a draft personnel management policy, a training plan template, and job descriptions. Chairman Garber said we could use these templates and have the Commission review them and make suggestions. Mr. Spicer said the Commission must ensure that districts will follow the plans as directed. Chairman Garber said the next phase is developing online training for district supervisors. Mr. Breaux said that Mr. Jeremy Rodriguez began to create online training for supervisors a while ago through the Google platform but now LDAF has converted to Microsoft Office. Mr. Breaux said OSWC could ask to have the training created

through LDAF IT or through LEO. Vice-Chairman Horvath shared that he reached out to Area 5 districts regarding the supervisor training and surveyed how they would like to have it conducted. He said all the district's answers leaned toward having an OSWC staff member conduct the training on a meeting day or have the area districts meet and get trained together at a discussed location by an OSWC staff member. Mr. Breaux said OSWC now has enough staff to be able to accommodate a district board that chooses either option. Chairman Garber said online training will be discussed further. The last phase of the supervisor and personnel management is supervisor recruitment guidelines. Chairman Garber suggested that each board have a procedure on how they recruit a board member on file where it could be reviewed as needed. Mr. Breaux said we should also regard recommendations for associate members. If districts have associate members participating in their meetings, the associate members should be regarded as candidates to fill district supervisor vacancies. Chairman Garber said the Commission can discuss the other topics at our upcoming Commission meetings.

Mr. Skains suggested to Chairman Garber that OSWC give presentations on the programs that they are working on. The reports can be like the ones given by LSU and NRCS during Commission meetings. Mr. Breaux said reports can be given by the staff but suggested that it be one program at a time.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 27, 2022 at 1:15 PM in the USDA Building B Training Room, 3727 Government Street, Alexandria, Louisiana 71302.

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 3:19 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Yerger and passed unanimously.



/s/

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