

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

December 5, 2023
1:15 PM

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

MEETING 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 Chairman Garber led 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. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Area I
Mr. Ben Langlinais, LACD President, Member
Mr. Price Gay, LACD 1st Vice President, Alternate
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate

Members Absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Ms. Candis Voorhies, Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives
Mr. Doug Daigle, LA Hypoxia Working Group
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC / Director Ms. Caitlin Joubert, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF/OSWC Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF/OSWC
Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

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

Approval of the December 5, 2023 agenda

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the December 5, 2023 SSWCC meeting agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the October 24, 2023 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the October 24, 2023 SSWCC meeting minutes.

Mr. Giering asked that the minutes be revised to remove Chairman Garber from pages 1 and 4 due to his absence at the October meeting.

Chairman Garber said if there were no more comments, he would call for a motion to approve the minutes as amended.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

Mr. Breaux said October's Farm Bill drawdown was \$161,127 with a remaining balance of \$1,013,854. This is the district's first drawdown into the new fiscal year, and it's expected that districts will drawdown larger amounts during the first few months. Ms. Voorhies stated that she and Mr. Davis have already started discussions on the new farm bill agreement that will start in September 2024. Mr. Breaux wanted to remind everyone that initially Mr. Kacir said that districts were going to have an additional \$1,000,000 amendment but NRCS was able to provide an additional two amendments which ended up being more than expected. There have been discussions on how things will look when districts start to see IRA funds, and will they have the same type of tasks and deliverables. Ms. Voorhies said tasks will mostly stay the same with the possibility of a few additional tasks.

LACD Annual Meeting/NACD Annual Meeting

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Langlinais did he have any comments on the LACD meeting. Mr. Langlinais said the meeting is scheduled for January 8-10, 2024 at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Baton Rouge. He said the agenda is shaping up pretty good and is jammed packed with great speakers. The attendees will also get introduced to our new LACD Executive Director, Ms. Courtney Gerace who started officially as November 16, 2023.

Chairman Garber said the NACD Annual Meeting is scheduled on February 10-14, 2024 at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel and Marina in San Diego, CA. The early bird registration deadline is December 22, 2023 and the last day to reserve rooms is January 19, 2024.

Out of State Travel

Chairman Garber said we received one out of state travel request:

- Crescent SWCD is requesting approval for Ms. Rebecca Livaudais, Ms. Erica Johnson, Ms. Nina Ockman, Mr. Blaise Pezold, and Mr. Alvin "Brusier" Melancon to attend the Annual NACD Meeting in San Diego, CA on February 10-14, 2024 in San Diego, CA.

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

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

LA Hypoxia Working Group- Mr. Doug Daigle

Mr. Daigle introduced himself as the coordinator of the LA Hypoxia Working Group which was formed in 2003 to focus on the Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan. The Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan includes 12 states (including Louisiana) along with some key federal agencies including USDA, EPA, and the C.O.R.E. The first version of the action plan was signed in 2000 and continues to focus on voluntary actions with the goal of reducing excess nitrogen and phosphorus loads into waterways of the Mississippi/Atchafalaya River Basin. Several different agencies represented Louisiana on this task force with the Governor's Office of Coastal Activity being the most recent

representative. Unfortunately, the Governor's Office of Coastal Activity along with previous agencies didn't realize that the work that is being done to address part of the problem has to do with the farm bill and conservation work. Mr. Daigle said it is about time for the team to re-evaluate the current plan to see if there is room for improvement. He wants to propose that the Governor's Office of Coastal Activity remain the member with the addition of adding LDAF Office of Soil and Water Conservation as a co-member. There is not an official process to add OSWC as a co-member, but the idea must be brought to the Governor's attention before it can be approved. Mr. Daigle said maybe the Commission can create a resolution to support the process. Mr. Spicer agreed and said the Commission should also request that Commissioner Strain meet with the Governor to discuss the suggestion. Mr. Breaux suggested that the LACD Coastal Resources Committee be part of the resolution as well. Mr. Giering asked has the task force made any noticeable difference in the reduction of the size of the zone. Mr. Daigle said the task force has worked to maintain current size of the zone. Mr. Breaux asked does any of the other states have co-members. Mr. Daigle replied that Tennessee would be the closest because they combine our versions of DEQ and DNR together. Mr. Breaux asked Mr. Daigle would he assist in writing a resolution and he agreed.

Chairman Garber said if there were no more comments, he would call for a motion to ask that the Assistant Commissioner of the Office of Soil and Water meet with the Commissioner to discuss having OSWC become a co-member with the Governor's Office of Coastal Activity on the LA Hypoxia Working Group.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer
Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering
Motion passed unanimously.

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Ms. Candis Voorhies, Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives

Ms. Voorhies said Mr. Davis continues to serve as the acting LA State Conservationist. The first signups for EQIP and CSP ended on November 17th and field offices are currently doing visits, assessments, and rankings. The participant eligibility deadline is January 5, 2024 and the WRE signup ended November 13, 2023.

She said Mrs. Trichel discussed the "Act Now" process that NRCS plans to enact. This process allows NRCS to immediately preapprove applications based on a threshold ranking score. NRCS will do rank and access each application and if the application meets the state threshold, it will be moved into preapproval status. The deadline to get the application into the "Act Now" process is 2 weeks. The deadline to move the application from preapproval to obligation will be 60 days or less. The 1st round deadline for "Act Now" is April 26, 2024. Applications are submitted for the "Act Now" process will also be placed in the applicable EQIP ranking. The application categories for the "Act Now" process include: Longleaf pine initiative, working lands for wildlife, National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI), Urban and small scale, high tunnel, Conservation Planning Activity (CPA) Design Implementation Activity (DIA), and Conservation Evaluation Monitoring Activity.

FY 23 Recap:

222 new CSP contracts
100 CSP renewal contracts on 248,000 acres
Total CSP: \$28.6 million

26 new RCPP contracts
4 projects, approximately 6,000 acres
Total RCPP: \$ 1.3 million

561 new EQIP contracts
96,700 acres

Total EQIP: \$24.8 million

34 new WRE enrollments

27 closed enrollments on over 8,000 acres

Currently working on a new Agricultural land easement (ALE) which keeps agriculture and pastureland and in production.

FY 24 allocation:

FY 24 WRE: \$19 million

FY 24 Farm Bill CSP- \$18.8 million

FY 24 Farm Bill EQIP- \$16.6 million

FY 24 EQIP IRA- \$22.9 million

FY 24 CSP IRA- \$ 12.2 million

Ms. Voorhies said they recently received some more guidance from Washington regarding the Climate Smart Commodities Initiative. Each project has now been assigned a National Program Officer. One of the duties of the officer will be to work with partners and applicants to make sure that they are not “double dipping” in practices.

LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Salassi

Dr. Salassi said Dr. Guidry along with extension agents and some commodity specialists were working to get estimates of the drought. The report showing the findings were released last week.

Acres impacted:

Soybeans- 769,000 acres, \$322 million

Rice- 356,000 acres, \$152 million

Corn- 269,000 acres

Sugarcane- 269,000 acres, \$273 million

Crawfish- 269,000 acres, \$139 million

Losses:

Crawfish- \$139 million

Beef- \$217 million

Hay- \$151 million

Dr. Salassi also wanted to mention that Dr. Glen Gentry along with a professor in the chemistry department has been working on a feral hog toxicant. The main ingredient in the toxicant is sodium nitrate which is a food preservative used to cure meats. They have done some pin trials and are working to get an experimental use permit from EPA to do open trials. Due to sodium nitrate not being registered as a pesticide with EPA, tests would have to be conducted across the country and in different seasons to see how stable it is. There is another feral hog bait that is federally registered but isn't registered in any state because the bait has not only for feral hog and could be used on other animals.

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux wanted to mention the high volume of prescribed burns happening around this time of year. OSWC receives these calls from upset folks regarding their health and damaged property. OSWC is working with the AgCenter to schedule some prescribed burning classes. During the prescribed burn classes, producers are asked to come up with a prescribed burn plan which asks them what they plan to accomplish with the burn and if there are alternative options. Ms. Caitlin Joubert is working with St. Landry Parish and Evangeline Parish to host a prescribed burn class which will take place directly after the annual LACD meeting. There is also a combination agriculture land and marshland prescribed burn class taking place in Abbeville in a few days. Discussions for a prescribed burn class in Calcasieu, Beauregard, and Cameron parishes are also in the works.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there are 2 SWCD resignations this month:

- Mr. Johnny Taylor, Red River SWCD, appointed position, effective November 16, 2023.
- Mr. Jolley Nash, Red River SWCD, elected position, effective November 16, 2023.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the SWCD supervisor resignations for:

- Mr. Johnny Taylor, Red River SWCD, appointed position, effective November 16, 2023.
- Mr. Jolley Nash, Red River SWCD, elected position, effective November 16, 2023.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are two appointments this month:

- Mr. Jolley Nash, Red River SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Johnny Taylor, effective December 5, 2023- August 30, 2026.
- Mr. Loyd Dodson, Red River SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Jolley Nash, effective December 5, 2023-June 30, 2025.

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

- Mr. Jolley Nash, Red River SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Johnny Taylor, effective December 5, 2023- August 30, 2026.
- Mr. Loyd Dodson, Red River SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Jolley Nash, effective December 5, 2023-June 30, 2025.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Open Meeting Law Changes

Mr. Breaux has not gotten any further comments about this matter from the LDAF legal team.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber said the next item on the agenda is the SWCC goals. The commission discussed districts having a personnel policy management plan. It is highly encouraged that all districts especially districts that have staff with varying and sometimes complex job requirements have a plan in place. The template is a one pager that asks each individual district important items such as job descriptions and performance evaluation criteria amongst other things. The document should be something that could be passed down and would be something the district can manage. Mr. Breaux said if no one objected, he could send the document out to the Commission members for further comments. Chairman Garber asked the members for their comments. Mr. Spicer suggested that districts be asked for their suggestions to the template. The district personnel policy management plan should also include a personnel training policy. Once the commission members review and approve the template, it can be sent to districts. Chairman Garber asked about the progress of Louisiana Outdoors Forever. Mr. Breaux said there has been a few projects funded with most of the initial funds. There have been many conversations regarding a working farm in Vermillion Parish. This working farm had applied for funds through RCPP and other venues received tentative approval for a working land conservation easement.

Correspondence/Articles:

- Governor-elect Landry believes carbon neutrality efforts hurt the economy
- Farmers get billions in government aid. Some of that money could also fight climate change

- “The Mississippi River, she’s a-goin’ dry”: The Southeast is under historic drought conditions, but the worst is yet to come.
- Cattle Producers Praise Farm Bill Extension
- AFBF Appreciates Farm Bill Extension, Urges New Bill
- Delta Farm Press: Friday, November 17, 2023
- November/December 2023: Journal of Soil and Water Conservation
- Congress Honors Rice Stewardship Partnership
- Essentials of Regenerative Grazing-Noble Research Institute Announces Second New Course

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Monday, January 8, 2024 at the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806.

Public Comment

Adjournment

Chairman Garner 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 3:10 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Horvath and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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