

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

July 29, 2024
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. "Clay" Alexander.

Members and Alternate Members present:

Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman, Area IV Member
Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice Chairman, Area V Member
Mr. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Area I Member
Mr. Ben Langlinais, LACD President, Member
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate Member

Members Absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Jose Mendoza, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations
Ms. Courtney Gerace, LACD Executive Director
Mr. Joey Breau, SWCC Exec. Director 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 July 29, 2024 agenda

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the July 29, 2024 SWCC agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the June 25, 2024 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the June 25, 2024 SWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

- June's Farm Bill drawdown- \$45,942
- 24 Districts have fully expended their allocated Farm Bill funds, totaling \$349,788 worked beyond their allocations.
- NRCS Farm Bill agreement balance- \$146,259

NACD Summer Meeting- Boston, MA

Chairman Garber said the NACD Summer Meeting will be held on August 9-14, 2024 at the Renaissance Boston Waterfront Hotel in Boston, MA.

LACD Mid-Year Meeting- August 29, 2024

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Langlinais about the upcoming Mid-Year meeting and to introduce Ms. Gerace. Mr. Langlinais introduced Ms. Courtney Gerace, LACD Executive Director, to the Commission. Ms. Gerace said the Mid-Year meeting structure will remain primarily the same. The agenda is being revised and will be emailed out to everyone soon. Mr. Langlinais said LACD is researching different funding opportunities to possibly hire a videographer. Mr. Breaux said it would be great to have a videographer to assist with different projects such as the success stories shown at the LACD annual meeting. Mr. Horvath asked Mr. Langlinais if it was too early to start asking for an increase for next FY state funds for the districts. Ms. Gerace stated districts should be reaching out to their local legislators while they are not in session and inviting them to board meetings. Districts should form relationships now so when they start the next session, they will know about conservation districts and their needs. LACD has also been working to get RCPP funding that would be used in efforts to convert bagasse to biochar for agricultural use.

Out of State travel

Chairman Garber said we received six out of state travel requests:

- Allen SWCD is asking permission for Mrs. Loretta Saltzman to attend the East Texas Plant Materials Center tour on Monday, August 12, 2024 in Nacogdoches, Texas.
- Calcasieu SWCD is asking permission for Mrs. Rose Sharbeno, Ms. Kathleen Soto, and Ms. Carol Bliss to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 22-24, 2024 in Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- D'Arbonne SWCD is asking permission for Mr. Reggie Skains to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 22-24, 2024 in Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- East Carroll SWCD is asking permission for Mr. Bert Lensing, Mr. Willis Nelson, Mr. Rowdy Sanderson, Ms. Rebecca Thom, and Ms. Teddy Schneider to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 22-24, 2024 in Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- Rapides SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Brenda Archer to attend the NACD Summer Meeting on August 9-14, 2024 in Boston, MA.
- Sabine SWCD is asking permission for Mrs. Nancy Windham to attend the East Texas Plant Materials Center tour on Monday, August 12, 2024 in Nacogdoches, Texas.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Allen SWCD and Sabine SWCD's out of state travel request to attend the East Texas Plant Materials Center tour on Monday, August 12, 2024 in Nacogdoches, Texas.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Calcasieu SWCD, D'Arbonne SWCD, and East Carroll SWCD's out of state travel requests to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 22-24, 2024 in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Rapides SWCD out of state travel request to attend the NACD Summer Meeting on August 9-14, 2024 in Boston, MA.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

CPA-SWCD Agreements

Chairman Garber said the Commission received 5 SWCD-CPA Agreements:

- Calcasieu SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Windham & Reed, LLC. The fee won't exceed \$3,500.
- Dugdemona SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Shanna Jones, CPA. The fee won't exceed \$7,000.
- Iberia SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist, CPA. The fee won't exceed \$1,800.
- Lafayette SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist, CPA. The fee won't exceed \$1,800.
- St. Martin SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist, CPA. The fee won't exceed \$1,650.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the following SWCD-CPA Agreements:

- Calcasieu SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Windham & Reed, LLC. The fee won't exceed \$3,500.
- Dugdemona SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Shanna Jones, CPA. The fee won't exceed \$7,000.
- Iberia SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist, CPA. The fee won't exceed \$1,800.
- Lafayette SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist, CPA. The fee won't exceed \$1,800.
- St. Martin SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist, CPA. The fee won't exceed \$1,650.

Motion by: Mr. Ben Langlinais

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Distribution of FY 25 Budget Increase

Chairman Garber said that at the June meeting the Commission discussed possible options to disperse the \$300,000 that was approved to be added to district funding. Mr. Giering said after that meeting, he created an Excel spreadsheet with different scenarios. He discussed each option and ultimately said we should review the costs for additional offices first and divide the remaining amounts into the rest of the districts. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve funding the districts with additional

offices first at the normal rate for additional offices and then dividing remaining balance into the single district offices.

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Mr. Jose Mendoza, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

Mr. Mendoza said NRCS has obligated 81% of their \$72.4 million of EQIP and CSP funds. Through EQIP 625 contracts have been completed on over 108,000 acres for a total of approximately \$31 million. CSP has completed 196 contracts on approximately 49,000 acres with a total cost of nearly \$24 million. NRCS has also obligated \$6 million in ACT NOW EQIP funds.

The RCPP agreement signup period closed on July 2nd. NRCS is currently reviewing proposals and announcements will hopefully be made in FY 25. The RCPP program has \$1.58 billion of funding available due to the additional IRA funding.

The LDAF/NRCS working agreements are being processed and are expected to be executed prior to the end of the current fiscal year.

Mr. Mendoza said LA NRCS currently has 214 full-time employees. Mr. Mitch Mouton is currently the Acting State Conservationist since Ms. Mellowdee Tibbs retired at the end of June. Mr. Mouton is expected to be Acting State Conservationist until mid-August. There has not been any update on hiring a permanent State Conservationist.

LSU AgCenter Report-Dr. Michael Salassi

Dr. Salassi said LSU has hired two new Precision Ag faculty members with one focusing on entomology and the other focusing on cropping and climate modeling. LSU also hired Mr. Brayden Blanchard who will serve as a quantitative geneticist at the sugar cane research station in St. Gabriel.

Dr. Salassi said LSU submitted a Precision Agriculture proposal to Congressman Letlow's office last Summer. They were able to receive \$1 million in funding in a partnership with NRCS. The funding will be used to set up a system to increase productivity of some of their weather and soil readings at their research stations. The new setup is intended to support their Precision Agriculture applications.

Dr. Salassi wanted to remind to Commission of a few upcoming field days:

- August 29, 2024- Sweet Potato Field Day- Sweet Potato Research Station in Chase, LA
- September 12, 2024- Beef & Forage Field Day- Dean Lee Research Station in Alexandria, LA
- September 19, 2024- Beef & Forage Field Day- Goldmine Plantation in Edgard, LA

OSWC Update

Mr. Breau discussed the Bilateral Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding that was made created by Congressman Cassidy. The bill's purpose is for states surrounding the Mississippi River to produce practices that would reduce gulf hypoxia. The Lake St. Joseph project recently got funded with hopes of nutrient impairment reduction. Currently the project has 6 landowners under contract with a little over 5,000 acres of cover crops. The match practices include additional cover crops, nutrient management, pest management, and residue management to name a few. LDAF has also signed an agreement with LSU AgCenter to do some field side monitoring in association with the project. The project has \$1.6 million of funding available and has been totally obligated. There are hopes to see more funds become available in the upcoming year.

319 funding has recently been re-allocated to do some conservation outreach. Ms. Caitlin Joubert who serves as OSWC's outreach coordinator is coordinating with LDAF Public Affairs staff, LSU Ag Center, and others to produce commodity-based conservation PSAs. Mr. Breaux said the first PSA will be shot on Mr. Glenn Simon's farm on Wednesday. Mr. Jeff Durand from St. Martin SWCD will also be a part of the PSA. Dr. Strain will also be interviewed.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there are 2 SWCD resignations this month:

- Mr. Alvin Melancon, Crescent SWCD, elected position, effective April 9, 2024
- Mr. Darryl Ellerbee, Madison SWCD, elected position, effective June 30, 2024.

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

- Mr. Alvin Melancon, Crescent SWCD, elected position, effective April 9, 2024
- Mr. Darryl Ellerbee, Madison SWCD, elected position, effective June 30, 2024.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 2 appointments this month:

- Mr. William Waller, Boeuf River SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Shane Hart, effective July 29, 2024- June 30, 2026.
- Mr. Josh Copes, Madison SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Darryl Ellerbee, effective July 29, 2024-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. William Waller, Boeuf River SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Shane Hart, effective July 29, 2024- June 30, 2026.
- Mr. Josh Copes, Madison SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Darryl Ellerbee, effective July 29, 2024-June 30, 2025

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said the Commission received one reappointment:

- Mr. Benson Langlinais, Iberia SWCD, appointed position, effective November 26, 2024- November 26, 2027.

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

- Mr. Benson Langlinais, Iberia SWCD, appointed position, effective November 26, 2024- November 26, 2027.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber asked the Commission to share any ideas on how to get additional funding to districts. While he served under NACD on the Operations Committee, they compiled nationwide SWCD funding. Mr. Spicer suggested each area select a representative during the LACD Mid-Year meeting to form a committee to begin researching available funding opportunities in their area. Mr. Breaux said districts were also recently surveyed about their funding sources. Mr. Breaux believes that some districts are not regarding some of their alternative funding sources as self-generated and don't realize the significance of these opportunities. Ms. Gerace said she discussed grants at the LACDE meeting last week. She said she may discuss making the topic of grant writing into a breakout session at the Annual LACD meeting during the Mid-Year Meeting. Mr. Breaux said multi-day grant writing workshops have taken place years ago. It maybe time to reintroduce this opportunity to districts so that they can take advantage of more funding options. One major point that was made during previous grant writing workshops was that when reviewing the grant funding announcements, an applicant should recognize some part of their own job description in it, and in responding to the announcement, the applicant must be able to submit something quantifiable. Districts are free to reach out to OSWC for assistance in writing their grants. Chairman Garber suggested that the SWCC Goals list be revised under "District Operational Funding". Number 2 should state: Identify current and future funding sources for district operations. Chairman Garber said discussions on grant writing can began at the Mid-Year meeting and Ms. Gerace assumes that the idea could further be discussed during the Information Education Committee breakout session. Mr. Skains said he believes we need to start working with the House and Senate members on maintaining the \$1.9 million budget now as well as keeping Commissioner Strain involved in these efforts. Chairman Garber said the Legislative Committee can discuss plans to maintain the budget during the LACD Midyear meeting.

Correspondence/Articles:

- Ville Platte Rice, Soybean And Crawfish Farmer Richard Fontenot Elected President of Louisiana Farm Bureau
- Gulf states could benefit from bills to provide offshore green energy revenues
- Impact Fusion International Inc.: Louisiana State Legislature Unanimously Passes LA HCR-42 Focusing on Bagasse Utilization
- Randall Rush, Senior Policy Adviser- Louisiana Farm Bureau Convention

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 29, 2024 at the NRCS State Office Building B Training Room, 3727 Government Street, Alexandria, LA 71302.

Public Comment

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 3:27 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Reggie Skains and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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