

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

May 28, 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. LaClasha "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
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate Member

Members Absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Doug Daigle, LA Hypoxia Workgroup
Ms. Candis Voorhies, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC / Director
Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

Chairman Garber asked for public comment and Mr. Doug Daigle said he had a few comments. He said that he spoke to the Commission last year regarding the LA Hypoxia taskforce. He said the Governor's Office of Coastal Activities has been the leader of the taskforce for several years. With looming state agency reorganization discussions, they have scheduled a stakeholder meeting on June 18th to discuss the hypoxia task force leadership future. Mr. Daigle also discussed HCR 49 by Rep. Thompson and Sen. Cathey that commends the LDAF OSWC for its important work in benefitting natural resources, soil, and water quality in Louisiana and supports its full partnership with Louisiana state agencies in their efforts to carry out the Gulf Hypoxia action plan. He asked the Commission to consider writing a letter of support after the resolution passed. He mentioned that all states involved with the hypoxia task force have developed a state nutrient strategy with different time frames. The Louisiana nutrient reduction and management strategy has a 5-year time frame that was created by DEQ and CPRA which is on the way to expiration. He asked the Commission to consider submitting a public comment when it is released.

Approval of the May 28, 2024 agenda

Chairman Garber called a motion to approve the May 28, 2024 SWCC agenda. Ms. Alexander asked that the agenda be amended to include SWCD requests for meeting absence waivers to the Supervisor Resignations, Appointments, and Reappointments section under New Business on the agenda. Chairman Garber said if there were no other comments, he would call for a motion to approve the agenda as amended.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the April 23, 2024 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the April 23, 2024 SWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ben Langlinais

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

- April's Farm Bill drawdown- \$ 59,565
- 17 Districts have fully expended their allocated Farm Bill funds, totaling \$153,657 worked beyond their allocations.
- NRCS Farm Bill agreement balance- \$247,097

Legislative Session/State Funding

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Langlinais for a legislative update. Mr. Langlinais said districts have been reaching out to legislators by letter and phone regarding their request for additional State funding. He said that Senate amendment 122 was sent back to the House today requesting an additional \$300,000 which was a decrease from the \$400,000 originally requested. He said we must make sure that this amendment isn't decreased further or eliminated completely. Mr. Langlinais suggested that districts especially in Rep. Jack McFarland's area reach out to him to keep the amendment with additional district funding fresh in his thoughts. As previously stated, Rep. McFarland wants to hear from his constituents. Ms. Langlinais said that he and Ms. Gerace would reach out to the districts and ask that they contact Rep. McFarland.

Out of State travel

Chairman Garber said we received two out state travel requests:

- Sabine SWCD is asking permission for Mr. John Pat Boudreaux, Mr. Thomas C. Pierce, Mr. James Pratt, Ms. Patricia Brown, and Ms. Mona L. Murray 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 Mr. Teddy Schneider to attend the NACD Summer meeting on August 9-14, 2024 in Boston, Massachusetts.

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

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

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

Ms. Voorhies said NRCS has allocated approximately 43.8% of their programs including IRA. There are currently 412 obligated EQIP applications and 148 obligated CSP applications. She stated that there have been some issues with the Conservation Desktop program and that NRCS headquarters is working on correcting them.

Currently, Louisiana NRCS has 206 full-time employees but with every hire, there's nearly 2 employees that are leaving. Ms. Erica Baxley is the Acting LARU 1 DC, filling the position formerly held by Mr. Glenn Austin, and Mr. Gary Wilkerson is the Acting LARU 2 DC.

A Notice of funding opportunity was slated to be announced at the end of April and has been delayed since December. The national office has now decided that any notice of funding opportunities involving IRA funding would have to go through an additional level of review. NRCS's deadline to have all their agreements submitted to the Grants and Agreements division for FY 24 is July 16th. With the notice of funding opportunity being delayed, NRCS plans to run the opportunity when it completes review and will most likely for FY 25 funding. Draft unfunded cooperative agreements have been submitted to the Grants and Agreements division. OSWC plans to assist with distributing those to the SWCDs. The RCPP Notice of Funding will expire on July 2, 2024, with \$1.5 billion in funding. There is approximately \$1.2 billion in IRA funding with an option of Classic or Alternate Funding Arrangement (AFA). With the AFA process, the partner will plan and implement their project and must have enough staff to assist in the process. Mr. Breaux asked Ms. Voorhies if a district were to be awarded AFA funding, would the person signing off on plans and contracts have TSP credentials? Ms. Voorhies said they do not have to have those credentials. Applicants can go outside NRCS's standards for an AFA, but they must get NRCS approval which could take years. Ms. Voorhies also wanted to remind Commission members about an upcoming RCPP webinar scheduled for May 30, 2024 from 2PM-4PM.

LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Salassi

Dr. Salassi said that LSU has been filling some vacancies at a few of their research stations: Agronomist at the Red River Station and Forestry Agronomist at the Macon Ridge Station among other positions. He mentioned that they also hired a geneticist at the Sugarcane station which will assist breeders with predicting which lines will most likely succeed and be released.

Dr. Salassi said each year the Board of Regents funds universities and this year the AgCenter had 8 proposals funded for approximately \$940,000. The funding will be used to purchase equipment that will enhance their research competitiveness.

More funding that was received by LSU includes:

- Commodity Rice Board: \$1.3 million
- Soybean Board: \$1.4 Million
- Sugarcane League: \$1.3 million
- Last Fall, the LSU AgCenter submitted a \$5 million proposal through Congressman Letlow's office to work on Precision Ag research. In April, the LSU AgCenter received news that they would receive \$1 million. The funding will go through NRCS.

The LSU AgCenter has also entered a partnership with Horizon Ag and the Crowley Rice Station. Horizon Ag will hire a rice breeder and support staff who will be housed at the Research Station. Horizon Ag will have access to the AgCenter's rice breeding lines which will give Horizon the opportunity to test its experimental lines in wider environments.

Dr. Salassi also wanted to mention some of the upcoming field days:

May 29, 2024- Sugarcane variety field day- Morganza, LA

June 11, 2024- Climate Smart Practices Rice Field Day- Kaplan, LA

June 21, 2024- Agricultural Water Management Field Day-Red River Station Field Day-Bossier, LA

June 25, 2024- Rice Station Field Day-Rayne, LA

OSWC Update

- Mr. Breaux said the OSWC staff has been working on organizing a 319 BMP Field Day in the Bayou DuPortage watershed in partnership with the LSU AgCenter. A producer plans to bring his sugarcane combine to show the harvester modification.
- The Commissioner signed an extension with Ducks Unlimited (DU) for district involvement with rice stewardship in overlapping areas was signed today and returned to DU.
- Ms. Caitlin Joubert is planning a Project Wet Facilitator training workshop which will take place at the former Hodges Garden State Park in Florien, LA.
- There are plans to do a demo planting Neptune Past in Plaquemine Parish this week. Mr. Breaux extended an invitation to the Commission members.
- Mr. Breaux discussed an annual erosion prevention project led by Capital SWCD that took place on May 6, 2024. Approximately 1,600 plugs were installed along the western coast of Lake Maurepas, from Blind River up to the Tickfaw River all along the coast.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said we received two waiver requests:

- Mr. Louis Clay Brignac, Evangeline SWCD
- Mr. Stuart Shaw, Red River SWCD

Neither supervisor met board meeting attendance requirements in the past year. Mr. Brignac and Mr. Shaw submitted letters to their district Board of Supervisors and their boards submitted supporting letters suggesting the absences were justified and they are requesting the attendance requirements be waived.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to waive the attendance requirement for Mr. Louis C. Brignac, Evangeline SWCD and Mr. Stuart Shaw, Red River SWCD, making them eligible for re-election.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 3 SWCD resignations this month:

- Mr. Michael Thompson, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, elected position, effective May 9, 2024.
- Mr. Doug Miller, Gulf Coast SWCD, elected position, effective June 30, 2024.
- Mr. Brad Judice, Iberia SWCD, elected position, effective May 1, 2024.

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

Mr. Michael Thompson, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, elected position, effective May 9, 2024.

Mr. Doug Miller, Gulf Coast SWCD, elected position, effective June 30, 2024.

Mr. Brad Judice, Iberia SWCD, elected position, effective May 1, 2024.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 3 appointments this month:

- Mr. James Knight, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, unexpired elected position formerly held by Mr. Michael Thompson, effective May 28, 2024- June 30, 2026.
- Mr. Michael Thompson, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, unexpired appointed position formerly held by Mr. James Rogers, effective May 28, 2024- May 24, 2027.
- Mr. Kendall Lamar, DeSoto SWCD, unexpired elected position formerly held by Mr. Allen Gooden, effective May 28, 2024- June 30, 2026.

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

- Mr. James Knight, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, unexpired elected position formerly held by Mr. Michael Thompson, effective May 28, 2024- June 30, 2026.
- Mr. Michael Thompson, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, unexpired appointed position formerly held by Mr. James Rogers, effective May 28, 2024- May 24, 2027.
- Mr. Kendall Lamar, DeSoto SWCD, unexpired elected position formerly held by Mr. Allen Gooden, effective May 28, 2024- June 30, 2026.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 2 reappointments this month:

- Mr. Robert Dale Thibodaux, Acadia SWCD, appointed position, effective June 10, 2024- June 10, 2027.
- Mr. Timothy Allen, Lafourche Terrebonne SWCD, appointed position, effective June 11, 2024- June 10, 2027.

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

- Mr. Robert Dale Thibodaux, Acadia SWCD, appointed position, effective June 10, 2024- June 10, 2027.
- Mr. Timothy Allen, Lafourche Terrebonne SWCD, appointed position, effective June 11, 2024- June 10, 2027.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

District Supervisor Election- June 8, 2024

Chairman Garber reported that OSWC has received 38 completed petitions from SWCDs. He reported that Bodcau SWCD will have an election on June 8, 2024 between Mr. Rick Admas (current supervisor) and Mr. David Hooper (opponent). Mr. Allen Evans of Caddo SWCD and Mr. James Decker of Rapides SWCD were disqualified from the election due to their incomplete petitions. 3 districts currently or will have vacancies at the end of June which include DeSoto SWCD, St. Martin SWCD, and Plaquemines SWCD.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber discussed the revised Commission Goals list that now includes the following items:

1. District Meetings- be supportive of active board members striving to address resource concerns/greater accomplishments.
2. Partner with organizations to reach a younger audience and inform them about SWCDs.
3. Supervisor Handbook; Regular review and updates.

Chairman Garber asked Commission members if they had any comments. Mr. Breaux advised Commission members that they are free to reach out to OSWC about these goals anytime. Commission members discussed

the difficulties of keeping the tract information for SWCD producers in the Conservation Desktop system. Ms. Voorhies said she would have to speak to IT to verify that district employees are able to access the information. She said that NRCS did lose access to the resource inventory data in Conservation Desktop, but she hopes that they regain access. Commission members wondered could the information be separated from the information that NRCS needs. A job position could be created through an RCPP proposal that would assist in entering the information in Conservation Desktop.

Correspondence/Articles:

- Local officials, volunteers head to Lake Maurepas to participate in anti-erosion project
- Soil Health Institute: Soil Hydraulic Properties for Measuring Soil Health
- Lexology: The FDA's New Pre-Harvest Agricultural Water Rule: Impacts on PFAS-Contaminated Groundwater?
- Little BIG Otter Creek: Community led conservation
- The Guardian: Megadrought forces end to sugarcane farming in parched Texas borderland
- Biosecurity Approaches to Mitigate Wildlife Disease
- Understanding the Push for and Impact of Implementing Regenerative Principles
- Drivers: Establishing Native Grasses

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 25, 2024 at the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806.

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 3:18 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Horvath and passed unanimously.

/s/

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