

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

January 8, 2025
10:00 AM

CROWNE PLAZA HOTEL
4728 CONSTITUTION AVENUE
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Garber called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 10:00 A.M. Mr. Steve Horvath 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
Mr. Price Gay, LACD 1st Vice President
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter Alternate Member
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member
Mr. Ron Duhon, Area IV Alternate
Mr. Chris Martin, Area V Alternate

Members Absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Ms. Dana Shuff, LA NRCS State Resource Conservationist
Ms. Stacy Conly, Sabine SWCD
Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director
Ms. Crystal Bowman, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

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

Approval of the January 8, 2025 agenda

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the January 8, 2025 SWCC agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of December 3, 2024 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the December 3, 2024 SWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

The November Farm bill drawdown was \$170,047. Districts are currently entering their Farm Bill Hours for December. These figures will be report along with the January figures at the February SWCC Meeting.

USDA/NRCS-SWCD Memorandum of Understanding and the Unfunded Cooperative Agreement

Commission Members were provided copies of a sample Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) document between a district and USDA-NRCS as well as an Unfunded Cooperative Agreement. These documents were reviewed and approved by NRCS Headquarters and OSWC staff. These documents explain the resources shared with the districts that NRCS isn't compensated for. These documents also answer questions regarding the working relationship between NRCS and conservation districts. Districts should review these documents at their board meetings prior to submission. Mr. Langlinais asked Commission members when these documents were usually signed. Mr. Breaux said these documents are usually signed every 5 years when most agreements between districts and NRCS are expiring. These new agreements will expire on December 31, 2029. Mr. Phillips said with the Commission's approval, OSWC would receive each district's signed MOU and Unfunded Cooperative Agreement and submit those to NRCS. Chairman Garber said if there were no further comments, he would call for a motion to support districts reviewing and signing the MOU document as well as the Unfunded Cooperative Agreement.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motioned passed unanimously.

Out of State travel

Chairman Garber said we have ten out of state travel requests:

- Allen SWCD is asking permission for Ethan Mathews-Smith to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Avoyelles SWCD is asking permission for Mr. Dirk Dupuy, Mr. Kyle Lemoine, Mr. Larry Sayes, Mr. Chad Tassin, and Ms. Maddy Coco to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Calcasieu SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Rose Sharbeno, Ms. Kathleen Soto, and Ms. Carol Bliss to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- D'Arbonne SWCD is asking permission for Mr. Reggie Skains to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- DeSoto SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Christina Ebarb to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Iberia SWCD is asking permission for Mr. Ben Langlinais to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Morehouse SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Erin James to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 7-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Rapides SWCD is asking for permission for Mr. Leo McCann, Associate Board Member, and Mrs. Brenda Archer to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Sabine SWCD is asking for permission for Ms. Patricia Brown to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.

- Upper Delta SWCD is asking for permission for Mr. Price Gay to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.

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

- Allen SWCD is asking permission for Ethan Mathews-Smith to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Avoyelles SWCD is asking permission for Mr. Dirk Dupuy, Mr. Kyle Lemoine, Mr. Larry Sayes, Mr. Chad Tassin, and Ms. Maddy Coco to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Calcasieu SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Rose Sharbeno, Ms. Kathleen Soto, and Ms. Carol Bliss to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- D'Arbonne SWCD is asking permission for Mr. Reggie Skains to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- DeSoto SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Christina Ebarb to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Iberia SWCD is asking permission for Mr. Ben Langlinais to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Morehouse SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Erin James to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 7-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Rapides SWCD is asking for permission for Mr. Leo McCann, Associate Board Member, and Mrs. Brenda Archer to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Sabine SWCD is asking for permission for Ms. Patricia Brown to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- Upper Delta SWCD is asking for permission for Mr. Price Gay to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 8-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Ms. Dana Shuff, LA NRCS State Resource Conservationist
Ms. Shuff reported that Ms. Kelly McClelland will be acting State Conservationist for the next few weeks and then someone from out of state will be appointed to serve for 120 days. There has not been any confirmation of a permanent hire for the LA State Conservationist position. Ms. Shuff also reported that LA NRCS is maintaining a high employee count but 75% of the employees will be eligible for retirement within 5 years.

LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter

Dr. Salassi reported that LSU received approximately \$4 million worth of research equipment this year through State Appropriations. Any State Appropriation funds must be used before the end of the state fiscal year in which they are received. Last year, LSU was able to receive \$11 million through state funding for their research stations. This funding did not have any time limits. Louisiana was approved for \$1.3 billion dollars to enhance broadband use which comes from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and will expand broadband access to 140,000 locations that include homes, hospitals, and law enforcement agencies.

LSU has also been working on registering their feral hog toxicant. Dr. Salassi says their next step is to do a large-scale field drop. They have found a place to the drop but must get the proper approval before they can proceed.

A couple of LSU AgCenter events are coming up:

- January 14, 2025-Economic Outlook Conference- Evacuation Center in Alexandria, LA
- January 23, 2025- Precision Agriculture Summit-Evacuation Center in Alexandria, LA

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux mentioned that he met with Commissioner Strain to discuss increasing the federal funding budget authority. This budget authority would assist in many ways including 2 employee hires to assist in 319 and PL-566 implementation. These positions will start off as 4-year job appointments with hopes to eventually hire them permanently. Mr. Breaux also mentioned an upcoming change to the 319-program administration. OSWC has usually had to wait for DEQ to develop an EPA approvable watershed implementation plan. Mr. Breaux said OSWC now has the pending EPA approvals to develop the watershed implementation plans through private consultants, resulting in more timely manner. He said this would be a costly change, but EPA has tentatively advised OSWC that they could move forward in pursuing consultants using 319 funding from within the agreement.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there is 2 resignations this month:

- Mr. Chris Mattingly, Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position, effective December 17, 2024
- Ms. Mona Murray, Sabine SWCD, elected position, effective December 18, 2024.

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

- Mr. Gary Greene, Dorcheat SWCD, elected position, effective October 24, 2024
- Mr. Ross Neil Record, Feliciana SWCD, appointed position, effective November 19, 2024.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 2 appointments this month:

- Ms. Mitzi Thomas, Dorcheat SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Gary Greene, effective January 8, 2025- June 30, 2025
- Ms. Michele Greco, Plaquemines SWCD, elected position formerly held by Nancy Dupont, effective January 8, 2025- June 30, 2027.

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

- Ms. Mitzi Thomas, Dorcheat SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Gary Greene, effective January 8, 2025-June 30, 2025
- Ms. Michele Greco, Plaquemines SWCD, elected position formerly held by Nancy Dupont, effective January 8, 2025- June 30, 2027.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said the Commission received 9 reappointments:

- Mr. Dirk Dupuy, Avoyelles SWCD, appointed position, effective February 24, 2025- February 24, 2028.
- Mr. Ricky Weeks, DeSoto SWCD, appointed position, effective March 23, 2025-March 23, 2028.
- Mr. Kenneth Richardson, Grant SWCD, appointed position, effective March 29, 2025- March 29, 2028.
- Mr. Mike Crooks, LaSalle SWCD, appointed position, effective March 28, 2025-March 28, 2028.
- Mr. Christopher Carter, Morehouse SWCD, appointed position, effective February 24, 2025- February 24, 2028.

- Mr. Ricky Roussel, New River SWCD, appointed position, effective February 28, 2025-February 28, 2028.
- Mr. Drew Wiggers, Northeast SWCD, appointed position, effective February 24, 2025-February 24, 2028.
 - Mr. Thomas Pierce, Sabine SWCD, appointed position, effective March 23, 2025 to March 23, 2028.
 - Ms. Meagan Percle, West Carroll SWCD, appointed position, effective February 24, 2025-February 24, 2028.

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

- Mr. Dirk Dupuy, Avoyelles SWCD, appointed position, effective February 24, 2025- February 24, 2028.
- Mr. Ricky Weeks, DeSoto SWCD, appointed position, effective March 23, 2025-March 23, 2028.
- Mr. Kenneth Richardson, Grant SWCD, appointed position, effective March 29, 2025- March 29, 2028.
- Mr. Mike Crooks, LaSalle SWCD, appointed position, effective March 28, 2025-March 28, 2028.
- Mr. Christopher Carter, Morehouse SWCD, appointed position, effective February 24, 2025- February 24, 2028.
- Mr. Ricky Roussel, New River SWCD, appointed position, effective February 28, 2025-February 28, 2028.
- Mr. Drew Wiggers, Northeast SWCD, appointed position, effective February 24, 2025-February 24, 2028.
- Mr. Thomas Pierce, Sabine SWCD, appointed position, effective March 23, 2025 to March 23, 2028.
- Ms. Meagan Percle, West Carroll SWCD, appointed position, effective February 24, 2025-February 24, 2028.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Breaux asked the Commission for their approval to send a special recognition letter to Mr. Chris Mattingly and Mr. Gary Greene. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve sending special recognition letters to Mr. Chris Mattingly and Mr. Gary Greene.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

Meritorious Award

Chairman Garber said we received 3 Meritorious award requests:

- Madison SWCD is nominating Denotra Jones to receive a Significant Achievement Award of \$500.
- Madison SWCD is nominating Patches McDaniel to receive a Significant Achievement Award of \$500.
- West Carroll SWCD is nominating Kaitlin Franklin to receive an Exceptional Performance Award of \$500.

The Meritorious award nomination packets 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 Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the nomination packet for:

- Madison SWCD is nominating Denotra Jones to receive a Significant Achievement Award of \$500.
- Madison SWCD is nominating Patches McDaniel to receive a Significant Achievement Award of \$500.
- West Carroll SWCD is nominating Kaitlin Franklin to receive an Exceptional Performance Award of \$500.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber said Commission members should have a copy of the SWCC goals which includes a newly discussed goal: "Commission and District Board Communication Plan". He asked Commission members if they had any comments. Mr. Langlinais discussed the comments that were made regarding LACD creating their goals. He said the Commission goals can tie into the creation of LACD's goals as well. A big suggestion made during a previous meeting aims toward making sure that Commission members attend district board meetings as much as possible. Mr. Breaux said it is imperative that new members hear from their area reps in the beginning so that they become more confident and familiar with their SWCD roles. Something as simple as a phone call or an email can begin communication. This can be entered under the new Communication subheading created during the last meeting. Mr. Spicer suggested that format of the goals list be formatted using a roman numeral format. Chairman Garber suggested Commission members make sure that they are all on the same page with their messages to any new supervisors.

Correspondence/Articles:

- Show Me The Data! Empowering Conservation Champions with Innovative, Real-Time Soil Metrics
- Drovers: Is Regenerative Agriculture Real?
- Sand County Foundation Conservation Brief
- Trump Administration 2.0: What Can We Expect in Chemicals Policy
- Building Soil Health and Resilient Conservation Champions through Collaboration and Data-Sharing

OTHER BUSINESS

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Langlinais for his comments on the upcoming LACD meeting. Mr. Langlinais said LACD's theme is stressing partnerships this year. Many agencies wish they were able to have the same relationship that districts have with NRCS. It is expected that LACD participants will have questions regarding a new Farm Bill. Mr. Langlinais said one of the goals during this year's LACD meeting is to create a Farm Bill Study Group to represent LACD nationally. This group will discuss and present LACD's needs in a new Farm Bill. Mr. Langlinais said NACD always asks LACD representatives how they can help with things going on in Louisiana. He suggested giving producers tax credits instead of normal funding which runs out before all applications are reviewed. He said a goal during LACD is to get some questions answered and make suggestions to prepare for the new Farm Bill.

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 25, 2025 in the LDAF Management and Finance Conference Room- 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. Steve Horvath made a motion to adjourn at 11:57 A.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Brad Spicer and passed unanimously.

/s/ *Earl J. Garber*

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