

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

July 22, 2025
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.

ROLL CALL

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

Members and Alternates present:

Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman, Area IV Member	Mr. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Area I Member
Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice Chairman, Area V Member	Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member
Mr. Price Gay, LACD President, Member	Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member	Dr. Michael Deliberto, LSU AgCenter Alternate Member
Dr. Crystal Vance-Rogers, Southern University Ag Center	

Members Absent:

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Ms. Sarah Trichel, Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist	Ms. Candis Voorhies, Acting Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives
Mr. Doug Daigle, LA Hypoxia Task Force Coordinator	Ms. Amy McInnis, LDAF General Counsel
Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director	Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Clay Alexander, LDAF-OSWC	

Public Comments

Chairman Garber asked if there were any public comments. Mr. Doug Daigle, LA Hypoxia Task Force Coordinator, discussed HCR 27 from the 2025 Regular Legislative Session by Rep. Jerome Zeringue, a resolution that urges and requests enhancement of the state's participation in the Gulf of America Hypoxia Action Plan and Task Force. The resolution passed with no opposition and was framed as a series of recommendations to Governor Landry. The first item in the resolution is to appoint the Louisiana Governor's Office of Coastal Activities (GOCA) as Louisiana's representative on the Gulf Hypoxia task Force. Mr. Gordy Dove, Executive Assistant to the Governor for Coastal Activities, has already appointed Mr. Bryan Wallace to represent GOCA. Another provision included in the resolution includes OSWC acting as co-chair of the state's Interagency Nutrient Team. Mr. Daigle asked the Commission to continue to support the resolution should they receive any communication from the Governor's Office of Coastal Activities.

Approval of June 24, 2025 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the June 24, 2025 SWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Giering recommended that Chairman Garber amend the agenda to move "A. Southern University SWCC Designee Introduction" after "Approval of June 24, 2025 Meeting Minutes" and add "Appointment of Area III SWCC alternate" under New Business as letter "I".

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to amend the agenda to move "A. Southern University SWCC Designee Introduction" after "Approval of June 24, 2025 Meeting Minutes"

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to amend the agenda to add "Appointment of Area III SWCC alternate" under New Business as letter "I".

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay

Motion passed unanimously.

Southern University SWCC Designee Introduction

Chairman Garber introduced Dr. Crystal Vance-Rogers to the Commission. Dr. Vance-Rogers stated that she received her Bachelor of Science from Alcorn State University as well as a master's degree in science and agronomy. Dr. Vance-Rogers also received a PH.D in Plant Environmental Management and Soil Sciences from LSU. She currently teaches plant and soil sciences courses at Southern University. Commission members introduced themselves to Dr. Vance-Rogers and welcomed her to the Commission. Ms. Amy McInnis, LDAF General Counsel, administered the oath to Dr. Vance-Rogers certifying her as an appointed Commission member.

OLD BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

Mr. Breaux reported that the June 2025 Farm Bill Agreement Total Drawdown was \$41,100 with a remaining balance of \$244,303.

17 districts have maxed out their Farm Bill agreement earnings: Bodcau, Boeuf River, Calcasieu, Crescent, DeSoto, Dorcheat, Lafourche-Terrebonne, Lower Delta,

Morehouse, Natchitoches, New River, Red River, St. Martin SWCD, Tangi-St. Helena, and Tensas-Concordia SWCD. These districts were able to report a total of \$247,287 earned over their allocated farm bill budgets.

LACD Mid-year Meeting-September 4, 2025

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Gay if he had any comments on the upcoming LACD mid-year meeting. Mr. Gay said the meeting is scheduled to begin at 9:30 AM at the NRCS State office in Alexandria, LA. Members should come prepared to discuss breakout topics and brainstorm resolutions ideas. Lunch will be served after the Mid-Year Meeting. Immediately following the Mid-Year Meeting, the LACD Board of Directors will have their 3rd Quarter meeting. Mr. Breaux said the Coastal Resources Committee usually meets outside of the Mid-Year meeting and plans to meet later this Fall.

CPA-SWCD Agreements

Chairman Garber said the Commission received 3 SWCD-CPA Agreements:

- Calcasieu SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Windham & Reed, LLC. The fee is not to exceed \$3,500.
- LaSalle SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from The Vercher Group. The fee is between \$500-\$1,000.
- Upper Delta SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Major, Morrison, & David. The fee will not exceed \$26,000.

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 is not to exceed \$3,500.
- LaSalle SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from The Vercher Group. The fee is between \$500-\$1,000.
- Upper Delta SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Major, Morrison, & David. The fee will not exceed \$26,000.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay

Motion passed unanimously.

FY 26 State Operating Budget

Mr. Breaux said OSWC has not received the operating budget but will make sure to alert the Commission members when more details are received.

Out of State Travel

Chairman Garber said the Commission received 6 out of state travel requests:

- Calcasieu SWCD is asking permission for David Daigle, Carol Bliss, Jason Nolde, Michael Lavergne, Rose Sharbeno, and Kathleen Soto to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- East Carroll SWCD is asking permission for Bert Lensing, Willis Nelson, Rowdy Sanderson, Rebecca Thom, Teddy Schneider, and district secretary, Deborah Morris to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- LaSalle SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Tonda Masters to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Morehouse SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Erin James to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Northeast SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Stephanie Ainsworth and Ms. Katie Taylor to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Tensas-Concordia SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Zacki Cummings to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.

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

- Calcasieu SWCD is asking permission for David Daigle, Carol Bliss, Jason Nolde, Michael Lavergne, Rose Sharbeno, and Kathleen Soto to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
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- Tensas-Concordia SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Zacki Cummings to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

NRCS State Conservationist Report-Ms. Sarah Trichel, Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist and Ms. Candice Voorhies, Acting Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives

- EQIP, CSP and RCPP received 3,270 applications and had a budget of \$54.3 million across all 3 programs. 67% of the funding has already been allocated and LA NRCS plans to be fully obligated by the end of the FY.
- NRCS LA along with Missouri, Texas, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi are celebrating 1,000,000 acres of Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) in place. Ms. Trichel said Louisiana's part of the WRE acres is about 360,000 acres.
- Louisiana was able to obligate \$5 million of the previously approved IRA funding in FY 25. However, LA producers with IRA funding in their contracts are still paused so that LA NRCS can figure out management procedures.
- IRA funding will be added to LA NRCS conservation program baseline. Figures won't be available until the Farm Bill is approved.
- PSS draft agreement has been submitted to DOGE but there has been another quality assurance step added. Anytime NRCS has an agreement that is getting a no-cost extension or receiving added funding, the agreement will now have to be reviewed by an Undersecretary or a Deputy Undersecretary. This revised process has not been finalized and is still under review. With this process not being finalized, there is a risk of a funding lapse.
- NRCS is going through a critical agency-wide staff shortage. This process involves critical positions that became vacant due to these employees accepting the Deferred resignation program (DRP). NRCS LA identified 15 critical vacancies, and these vacancies will be filled internally. This opportunity is being called a "voluntary reassignment" program. NRCS is hoping some regional employees as well as some of the headquarter employees will take the "voluntary reassignment" opportunity.

LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Deliberto, LSU AgCenter

Dr. Deliberto discussed the new strategic plan for the LSU AgCenter. He said there were changes but is primarily a restatement of their current mission statement. The goals included are:

1. increasing agricultural production and enhance the preservation of Louisiana's natural resources by developing talent, technologies, products, and practices.
2. Provide programming and solutions to strengthen rural communities and ensure economic prosperity, a healthy population, and flourishing institutional structures.
3. Identify incentives and programs to place much needed professional services in rural communities supporting local and state decision makers and enhancing community resilience.
4. Collecting analyzed data to identify opportunities and strategies for commodity market growth ultimately strengthening food and fiber production capacity.
5. Expand the rural talent pipeline through youth development, agricultural leadership, and college academic and workforce development programming that returns talent to rural communities in Louisiana.
6. Support small business startups and workforce development through "Foodie", the seafood safety lab industry-based credential program, and our intellectual property commercialization programs and other mechanisms.

He also wanted to share that LSU saw no change in recurring state funding. The LSU AgCenter did receive a one-time allotment of \$4.5 million to support research and extension agenda, programming, and platforming. On June 6th, the Secretary of Commerce rescinded Connect LA's previously approved plan to obligate \$1.35 billion in broadband funds. The LSU AgCenter intended to use \$20 million of the rescinded funded to support and pilot the AgCenter's Precision Agriculture project development area. The Louisiana Board of Regents Support Fund is offering competitive grants for FY 25 and 26 which includes opportunities for LSU's Biological Sciences area. Dr. Deliberto said there is a constitutional amendment up for vote in 2026 that could stop this funding.

A few upcoming field days:

- September 11, 2025- Dean Lee Research and Extension Center's Beef and Forage Field Day- Alexandria, LA.
- September 30, 2025- Poultry Field Day- Hill Farm Research Station, Homer, LA

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux mentioned that Ms. Marinna Curtis, OSWC staffer housed in the Bossier area, recently resigned to take a teaching position. OSWC is awaiting LDAF permission to advertise the vacancy. LDAF granted a waiver request to Region 6 EPA that would allow OSWC to use a portion of the assigned Section 319 project funds to assist in watershed implementation plan development. This waiver will advance watershed implementation plan development and will increase conservation prospects for districts in the non-point source conservation priority areas. More conversations have emerged concerning surface water sales off the Toledo Bend reservoir. There has been a lot of misinformation about the statutory process of an out-of-state water sale. The law as it stands states that any proposal to sell surface water from Toledo Bend out of state must be approved by: The Board of the Sabine River Authority of Louisiana (SRA-LA), Two-thirds of the parish governing authorities within the SRA-LA's jurisdiction, The Senate Committee on Natural Resources and the House Committee on Natural Resources and Environment, and Governor of Louisiana, The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission if the volume exceeds over one million gallons per day.

NACD Summer Meeting/South Central Meeting

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Gay if he had any comments on these upcoming NACD meetings. Mr. Gay referred to the meeting info in the Commission members' packet. The NACD Summer Meeting is scheduled to take place on July 25-29, 2025 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The regions will get a chance to meet as well as participate in some of the great tours that are scheduled. The NACD South Central Region meeting is scheduled on September 22-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, Arkansas. This meeting will have great breakout sessions, general updates, and some many speakers. Registration for the South-Central meeting is \$275 and is due by September 15, 2025.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there are 1 resignation this month:

- Mr. Rebecca Livaudais, Crescent SWCD, appointed position, effective June 24, 2025.

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

- Mr. Rebecca Livaudais, Crescent SWCD, appointed position, effective June 24, 2025.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

Commission members discussed sending a special recognition letter to Ms. Livaudais for her service to the Crescent SWCD. Chairman Garber said if there were no further comments, he would call for a motion to approve sending Ms. Livaudais a special recognition letter on behalf of the Commission.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 1 appointment this month:

- Mr. Frank Sotile III, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Stacy Allee, effective July 22, 2025- June 30, 2028.

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

- Mr. Frank Sotile III, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Stacy Allee, effective July 22, 2025- June 30, 2028.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Chris Martin

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there is 1 re-appointment this month:

- Mr. Stephen "Burt" Lensing, East Carroll SWCD, appointed position, effective October 23, 2025- October 23, 2028.

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

- Mr. Stephen "Burt" Lensing, East Carroll SWCD, appointed position, effective October 23, 2025- October 23, 2028.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Chris Martin

Motion passed unanimously.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber asked Commission members if they had any comments. Mr. Gay asked about the status of the online supervisor training. Mr. Breaux said that it is still a priority but currently unaffordable. Mr. Breaux said Commission members should consider creating a higher regard among districts concerning the annual supervisor election and responsibilities of supervisors during this time. If districts receive multiple petitions, they only have 30 days to prepare for an election which isn't a lot of time. It is imperative that board

supervisors realize that their assistance will be needed for this process. Chairman Garber suggested adding "Supervisor Election Guidelines" as letter "E" under "I. Supervisor and Personnel Management". The Commission's goal is to make sure every district is prepared for their election by giving the proper guidance. Crescent SWCD recently went through an election, and that district is unique due to the fact of them having 5 parishes. Chairman Garber said if there were no comment, he would call for a motion to revise the Louisiana Soil and Water Conservation Commission Goals list to add "Supervisor Election Guidelines" as letter "E" under "I. Supervisor and Personnel Management".

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains
Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay
Motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence

- Farm Progress: Debunking phosphorus myths: Expert explains soil fixation, availability
- Louisiana Conservation & Commodity Updates- June 2025, Issue 6
- Louisiana Grazing Land Conservation Initiative: 2025 Events Calendar
- Sabine River Authority plans to generate out-of-state water sales to Texas from Toledo Bend
- Why pond dredging is essential for healthy waterways
- What does Trump's 'big bill' have to do with LA coastal protection? It could mean more money
- Breaking Down Methane in the Beef Industry
- Congress Passes Reconciliation Bill with Long-awaited Farm Safety Net Improvements for Rice Farmers

Other Business

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 26, 2025 in the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806.

Chairman Garber and Commission members discussed September's SWCC meeting which is usually held in conjunction with the LACD Mid-year Meeting. This year the LACD Mid-Year meeting is scheduled the week after the tentative August meeting. The members reviewed their calendars and collectively agreed that the September meeting could be rescheduled to September 30, 2025. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve rescheduling September's Commission meeting to September 30, 2025.

Motion by: Mr. Price Gay
Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer
Motion passed unanimously.

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: At 3:19 P.M. Mr. Brad Spicer made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Giering and passed unanimously.

/s/



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