

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

June 24, 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

**Members Absent**

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative

Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member

Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter Alternate Member

A quorum was present.

**Others Present:**

Ms. Kelli McClelland, Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist

Ms. Tabitha Irvin, LDAF Executive Counsel

Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director

Ms. Wendy Gibson- LDAF-OSWC

Ms. "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Ms. Candis Voorhies, Acting Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives

Ms. Amy McInnis, LDAF General Counsel

Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC

Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF-OSWC

**Public Comments**

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

### **Approval of May 27, 2025 minutes**

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the May 27, 2025 SWCC meeting minutes.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Price Gay

Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Giering recommended that Chairman Garber amend the agenda to move "D. Crescent SWCD Election Results- June 14, 2025" under New Business to letter "A". Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to amend the agenda to move "D" under New Business to "A".

**Motion by:** Mr. Ed Giering

**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

#### **NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement**

Mr. Breaux reports that the May 2025 Farm Bill Agreement Total Drawdown: \$52,947

Remaining Balance: \$285,403

16 districts have maxed out: Bodcau, Boeuf River, Calcasieu, Crescent, DeSoto, Dorcheat, Lower Delta, Madison, Morehouse, Natchitoches, New River, Red River, St. Martin SWCD, Tangi-St. Helena, and Tensas-Concordia SWCD. These districts were able to report \$191,984 earned over their allocated farm bill budget.

#### **Legislative Session Updates**

Mr. Breaux reported that HB 1 presented by Senator McFarland which included the passthrough budget for SWCDs passed. A few months ago, Commissioner Strain submitted LDAF's budget which had a \$2 million budget for conservation districts. Unfortunately, \$209,107 was deducted during the beginning budget negotiations. \$209,000 was added back just in time and the FY 26 budget passed \$107 short of the \$2 million request.

Other notable updates include:

- SB 32 presented by Sen. Robert Allain- Provides limited liability to agricultural producers, landowners, and suppliers using flue-gas gypsum in LA; to provide relative to gypsum analysis; and to provide for related matters.
- HB 638 presented by Sen. Kimberly Coates- Establishes agricultural conversion fees for large-scales solar development. (returned to calendar - failed)
- HCR 27 presented by Rep. Jerome Zeringue- Urges and requests enhancement of the state's participation in the Gulf of America Hypoxia Action Plan and Task Force.
- SB 244 presented by Senator Bob Hensgens- Provides for the Department of Energy and Natural Resources

Chairman Garber asked the members if they had any further comments on the legislative session and there were none.

#### **NACD Summer Meeting- Milwaukee, WI**

Chairman Garber said the NACD Summer Meeting will be held on July 25-29, 2025 at the Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee, WI. Mr. Gay said the NACD Natural Resources Committee met previously and NACD 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, Mr. Mark Masters, proposed a list of different objectives for each state representative to act on in their states. Ms. Gerace and Mr. Gay decided to work on the objective that involves publishing 4 different conservation stories within the next 2 years. Ms. Candice Abinanti, NACD staff co-lead will assist Louisiana with

this objective. Chairman Garber mentioned that the early bird registration deadline for this meeting is July 7, 2025

#### CPA-SWCD Agreements

Chairman Garber said the Commission received 2 SWCD-CPA Agreements:

- Iberia SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist. The fee will be between \$1,750-\$2,000.
- Lafayette SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist. The fee will be between \$1,750-\$2,000.

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

- Iberia SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist. The fee will be between \$1,750-\$2,000.
- Lafayette SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist. The fee will be between \$1,750-\$2,000.

**Motion by:** Mr. Ed Giering

**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

#### NEW BUSINESS

##### Crescent SWCD Election Results- June 14, 2025

Chairman Garber discussed the notification received from Crescent SWCD regarding the election that took place on June 14, 2025. The Crescent Board of Supervisors met after the election polls closed to review the unofficial tally. There was a total of 2,005 counted votes and 53 “spoiled” votes. The “spoiled” votes were those in excess of the number of signatures on the election day legers.

**A motion was made by Mr. Daniel Milojevic and seconded by Ms. Rebecca Livaudais to declare Ms. Erica Johnson the winner of the election. The Crescent Board of Supervisors recommended Ms. Johnson’s term be renewed effective July 1, 2025 and expiring June 30, 2028.**

OSWC and Commission members received concerns regarding polling locations running out of ballots. Chairman Garber said Crescent SWCD decided on the ballot copy count based upon previous SWCD elections held in other areas of the state. The Commission discussed a draft notification distributed to Commission members for review that will go to Crescent SWCD Board of Supervisors. The notification states that due to the ballot shortages at polling places, the Commission recommends that Crescent SWCD consider conducting a revote. The notification will also state that the Commission’s role is limited to promulgating the election results and the decision to hold a re-vote ultimately rests with the Crescent SWCD Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Breaux stated that he was present during the Crescent SWCD board meeting where they began election planning discussions with ballot copy count being a major topic. He said the Crescent SWCD made the decision to print 2,400 ballots to be distributed at their polling places based on prior SWCD election day turnout ratios as well as on an opinion they had received from a local Clerk of Court. Mr. Breaux said due to their geographic scale, diversity of natural resources and massive population, the election response for Crescent SWCD was unlike any other SWCD election previously held in the memory of anyone present. Chairman Garber said he and Mr. Breaux met with Commissioner Strain and his staff yesterday regarding future SWCD election rule changes. Chairman Garber and Mr. Breaux also discussed adding more SWCD supervisor election content to the SWCD supervisor training modules.

Mr. Giering stated that everyone should be given the opportunity to vote and that he hopes that Crescent SWCD will consider conducting a re-vote.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would approve the draft notification from the Commission to be sent to Crescent SWCD.

**Motion by:** Mr. Ed Giering

**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

**Motion passed unanimously.**

#### NRCS State Conservationist Report-Ms. Kelli McClelland and Ms. Candice Voorhies

Ms. McClelland said LA NRCS has obligated 407 Farm Bill contracts on 165,000 acres for a total of \$27.4 million. The IRA funding has resumed and LA NRCS has already used some the CSP IRA funding that was originally allocated. LA NRCS also received EQIP IRA funds through the Act Now process. EQIP IRA funding has a balance of approximately \$11 million and CSP IRA funding has a balance of approximately \$15 million.

Ms. Voorhies said due to the funding pause earlier this year, LA NRCS has decided not to announce a notice of funding opportunity this fiscal year. Before the notice of funding opportunity is posted, NRCS submits the announcement to Grants and Agreements to give them the opportunity to review the announcement to make sure it follows proper procedures. After its approved, it's posted, and applicants then get a 60-day sign up period. When the period closes, NRCS reviews and ranks the applications.

FY 24 RCPP proposals that did not have a financial obligation form by mid-January during the funding pause were reviewed again. Of the 92 selections that were announced, 5 applications had financial obligation completed prior to the funding pause. 23 applications were re-ranked and will proceed to the next process along with the 5 applications that had financial obligation. Selections were made for FY 24 RCPP funding and only 4 applications were selected. The top application was from Arkansas and its primary conservation focus is terrestrial habitat concerns, fire management, and water quality. This agreement will combine NRCS's usually programmatic partnership agreement and the supplemental agreement to create the intern 1 process.

LA NRCS has received approval to move forward with approving amendments for the FY 26 Farm Bill, PSS, LARU Tech, and Watershed Planner agreements. All agreements will now have to be vetted through a DOGE review. The deadline for agreement submission is set for July 15, 2025.

Ms. McClelland announced that Ms. Sarah Trichel will become the new Acting State Conservationist in July, 2025.

#### OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux mentioned the Farm Bureau State meeting happening this weekend. There are some great presentations on the agenda and a lot of LA conservation program members and partners plan to attend. Ag Nonpoint Source Management workplans are currently being revised to adapt to the recent changes to the EPA CWA section 319 program guidelines. Approval for the submitted revisions are expected to happen soon and work will continue in priority non-point source watersheds. Recently, a waiver request was submitted by Commissioner Strain to Region 6 EPA that would allow OSWC to use a portion of the allocated Section 319 project funds to assist in watershed implementation plan development and was granted. This waiver will expedite watershed implementation plan development and will broaden conservation opportunities for districts in the non-point source conservation priority areas.

#### 2025 Annual Supervisor Election

Chairman Garber said the following supervisors submitted completed nominating petitions and had no opposition. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the below list of supervisors:

## **ELECTED SUPERVISORS WITH TERMS EXPIRING JUNE 30, 2025**

\* **Bold means new vacancy/supervisor**

<b>District</b>	<b>Mr./Ms.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Term Exp</b>
Acadia	Mr.	Glenn Simon	06/30/2025
Allen	Mr.	<b>Vacant</b>	06/30/2025
Avoyelles	Mr.	John Thomas Laborde	06/30/2025
Bodcau	Mr.	William Bart Dobson	06/30/2025
Boeuf River	Mr.	Christopher Brian Johnson	06/30/2025
Bogue Chitto-PR	Mr.	Mark Magee	06/30/2025
Caddo	Mr.	Paul Dickson Jr.	06/30/2025
Calcasieu	Ms.	Beverly Carol Bliss	06/30/2025
Capital	Ms.	Denise Richard	06/30/2025
Catahoula	Mr.	Jeremy Wood	06/30/2025
<b>Crescent (election)</b>		<b>Erica Johnson vs. Lloyd L. Landry III</b>	<b>06/30/2025</b>
D'Arbonne		<b>Vacant</b>	06/30/2025
DeSoto	Mr.	Thomas Huel Jones	06/30/2025
Dorcheat		<b>Vacant</b>	06/30/2025
Dugdemonia	Mr.	J. Paul Johns Jr.	06/30/2025
East Carroll	Mr.	Rowdy Sanderson	06/30/2025
Evangeline	Mr.	Brad Fontenot	06/30/2025
Feliciania	Ms.	<del>Jeffrey Gardner</del> <b>Yolande Lee</b>	06/30/2025
Grant	Mr.	Richard Bonner	06/30/2025
Gulf Coast	Mr.	Louie Barbe III	06/30/2025
Iberia	Mr.	Guy Viator	06/30/2025
Jefferson Davis	Mr.	Eric Brown	06/30/2025
Lafayette	Mr.	Ronous Duhon	06/30/2025
Lafourche-Terrebonne	Mr.	Randy Toups	06/30/2025
LaSalle	Mr.	Twyman Appleby	06/30/2025
Lower Delta	Mr.	Stacy Allee	06/30/2025
Madison	Mr.	Josh Copes	06/30/2025
Morehouse	Mr.	Antwain Downs	06/30/2025
Natchitoches	Mr.	James Wagley	06/30/2025
New River	Mr.	Leroy J. Laiche Jr.	06/30/2025
Northeast	Mr.	Edward Peters	06/30/2025
Plaquemines		<b>Vacant</b>	06/30/2025
Rapides		<b>Vacant</b>	06/30/2025
Red River	Mr.	Loyd W. Dodson	06/30/2025
Sabine	Mr.	<del>Vacant</del> <b>Rodney Mckay</b>	06/30/2025
Saline	Mr.	<del>John W. Hays</del> <b>Jim Baldwin</b>	06/30/2025
St. Landry	Mr.	Ike Boudreaux	06/30/2025
St. Martin	Mr.	Mark Simon	06/30/2025
St. Mary	Mr.	Rickey P. Bourque II	06/30/2025
Tangi-St. Helena	Mr.	Paul Alford	06/30/2025
Tensas-Concordia	Mr.	Jon William Hardwick Jr.	06/30/2025
Upper Delta	Mr.	Donald Schexnayder	06/30/2025
Vermilion	Mr.	Sherrill Sagrera	06/30/2025
West Carroll	Mr.	Michael Blake Elliott	06/30/2025

**Motion by:** Mr. Price Gay

**Seconded by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

### Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there are 3 resignations this month:

- Mr. Ethan Mathews-Smith, Allen SWCD, elected position, effective June 12, 2025.
- Mr. Stacy Allee, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position, effective June 17, 2025.
- Mr. Danny Coombs, Rapides SWCD, appointed position, effective May 14, 2025.

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

- Mr. Ethan Mathews-Smith, Allen SWCD, elected position, effective June 12, 2025.
- Mr. Stacy Allee, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position, effective June 17, 2025.
- Mr. Danny Coombs, Rapides SWCD, appointed position, effective May 14, 2025.

**Motion by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

**Seconded by:** Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 3 appointments this month:

- Mr. Bradly Groves, DeSoto SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Ricky Weeks, effective June 24, 2025- June 30, 2027.
- Mr. Stacy Allee, Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Frank Sotile Jr., effective June 24, 2025- May 4, 2026.

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

- Mr. Bradly Groves, DeSoto SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Ricky Weeks, effective June 24, 2025- June 30, 2027.
- Mr. Stacy Allee, Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Frank Sotile Jr., effective June 24, 2025- May 4, 2026.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 6 re-appointments this month:

- Mr. Charles Istre, Allen SWCD, appointed position, effective July 27, 2025- July 27, 2028.
- Mr. Michael Lavergne, Calcasieu SWCD, appointed position, effective July 27, 2025- July 27, 2028
- Mr. Robert Judice Jr., Iberia SWCD, appointed position, effective November 27, 2025- November 27, 2028.
- Mr. Edward Yerger, Madison SWCD, appointed position, effective October 25, 2025- October 25, 2028
- Mr. Chandra Chauvin, St. Mary SWCD, appointed position, effective June 25, 2025-June 25, 2028
- Mr. Rustum Ernest Girouard Jr., Vermillion SWCD, appointed position, effective November 27, 2025- November 27, 2028.

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

- Mr. Charles Istre, Allen SWCD, appointed position, effective July 27, 2025- July 27, 2028.
- Mr. Michael Lavergne, Calcasieu SWCD, appointed position, effective July 27, 2025- July 27, 2028
- Mr. Robert Judice Jr., Iberia SWCD, appointed position, effective November 27, 2025- November 27, 2028.
- Mr. Edward Yerger, Madison SWCD, appointed position, effective October 25, 2025- October 25, 2028
- Mr. Chandra Chauvin, St. Mary SWCD, appointed position, effective June 25, 2025-June 25, 2028
- Mr. Rustum Ernest Girouard Jr., Vermillion SWCD, appointed position, effective November 27, 2025- November 27, 2028.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

#### Meritorious Award

Chairman Garber said we received 2 Meritorious award requests:

- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Cecilia Spiess to receive the exceptional performance award of \$1,560.
- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Cecilia Spiess to receive the Significant Achievement 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:

- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Cecilia Spiess to receive the exceptional performance award of \$1,560.
- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Cecilia Spiess to receive the Significant Achievement Award of \$500.

**Motion by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

**Seconded by:** Mr. Price Gay

Motion passed unanimously.

#### SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber said he hopes Commission members have been thinking about the district supervisor election process and ideas for adding the topic to our goals list. It is imperative that district supervisors learn more about the election process to be prepared for a possible election in their district. Supervisors should be prepared to also learn more about their roles in the election process. The Commission is available to give guidance and support, but the election process is conducted by the district supervisors. The election that happened recently in Crescent SWCD gave quite the learning opportunity for district supervisors in heavily populated areas. Mr. Skains said this would be a great time to prepare some revised legislation to submit for next year's legislative session. Chairman Garber said Commissioner Strain advised him and Mr. Breaux that reviewing current state laws for this process should be a top priority before the next session. Mr. Spicer said we should review the district supervisor election process for other states as well.

#### Correspondence

- LSU AgCenter-H, Rouse Caffre Rice Research Station Newsletter- Volume 22 Issue 2
- United States Senate Committee Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry- Section-by-Section
- Progressive Farmer: USDA Budget Cuts and Conservation
- Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality Communication: LDEQ Certifies Louisiana's First Pollutant Reduction Credits through Water Quality Trading Program

- Draft Restoration Plan for Chandeleur Islands Released for Public Review
- Partnership For Our Working Coast Competitive Grant Program Proposals Deadline Reminder

#### Other Business

#### Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, July 22, 2025 in 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:** At 2:07 P.M. Mr. Brad Spicer made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Giering and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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