

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

February 25, 2025
1:15 PM

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY
MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE CONFERENCE ROOM
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. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member
Mr. Price Gay, LACD President
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter Alternate Member
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member
Mr. Jason Nolde, Area III Alternate Member

Members Absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Sam Adams, Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist
Mr. Josh Anderson, Acting LA NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Initiatives
Mr. Joey Breau, SWCC Exec. Director
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.

Recognition of Mr. Sam Adams, LA NRCS State Conservationist, Acting

Chairman Garber welcomed Mr. Adams to Louisiana and thanked him for coming the Commission meeting. Mr. Adams first met several Louisiana Conservation members during the NACD meeting. He said that he appreciates everyone's kindness and generosity which makes his job a lot easier. Mr. Adams mentioned that he is from a small town in Iowa called Linton. He began working with a hog farmer in 5th grade and stayed until he was a senior in high school. He earned a Wildlife Management degree from Iowa State University and has been able to work in different fields such as a Waterfowl Biologist. He has also worked in different states like South Dakota and Colorado. He serves as the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs in Iowa. Mr. Adams is married and has 3 sons (ages 17, 15, and 4). Mr. Adams hopes to provide support and leave recommendations to the future full time State Conservationist after he has completed his assignment.

Approval of the February 25, 2025 agenda

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the February 25, 2025 SWCC agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of January 8, 2025 minutes

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

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

December 2024 FB Total Drawdown: \$125,458

January 2025 FB Total Drawdown: \$ 123,546

The total remaining balance for farm bill is \$611,177. 4 Districts have already maxed out their total farm bill allocated amounts: Bodcau, Boeuf River, DeSoto, and Lower Delta.

NACD Spring Fly-In

Chairman Garber reminded Commission members about the upcoming NACD Fly-In scheduled on March 26th. He asked the Commission members if they had any comments. Mr. Gay said he, Ms. Courtney Gerace, Mr. Breaux, Mr. Skains, and Mr. Adams plan to fly in on March 25th. The group plans to meet that afternoon to discuss their talking points for the next day. Mr. Skains said he has been reaching out to make appointments to meet with available congressman to discuss conservation in Louisiana. Mr. Skains. He said he believes it would also be a great idea to visit the House Appropriations Committee office while they are visiting.

NEW BUSINESS

LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter

Dr. Salassi said LSU is working to use all the \$4 Million given to them through State Appropriations before the end of the fiscal year. They are also on the way to hiring a few new staffers: an Agronomist at the Macon Ridge station in Winnsboro and a Soil Microbiologist position on campus. Mr. Glen Gentry who had been serving as the interim Regional Director in the Southeast region is now in the position permanently and LSU is now looking for a Regional Director for the Hammond Research Station.

Louisiana was one of three states to receive approval for their broadband program proposal from the federal government. With these funds, The AgCenter is set to receive \$20 million which will be used to put field sensors across the state. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration has been strict on requesting that most of the funds be used toward fiber optics instead of satellite or wireless services.

Dr. Salassi said LSU is meeting this afternoon to discuss different grants decreasing their indirect cost rates. Most universities have indirect costs on federal grants that are in the 40-50% range. National Institutes for Health (NIH) for example are planning to drop indirect costs to around 15%. LSU gets 3-4 NIH grants a year so LSU could be looking at losing approximately \$400,000 due to the decrease. If all agencies went to a 15% indirect cost rate, LSU could lose about \$3-4 million.

Over the last few months, LSU has been a part of several commodity board meetings. The Sugarcane Commodity meeting is the only one left to attend. The following funds are expected to be coming to AgCenter:

- The Rice Research Board: \$1.3 million

- Louisiana Soybean and Grain Research Grain and Promotion Board: \$ 1.6 million
- Louisiana Cotton State Committee: Funding 6-7 projects at approximately \$68,000
- Louisiana Sweet Potation Commission: \$60,000-70,000

LSU AgCenter events are coming up:

- February 28, 2025-Cover Crops Field Day- Red River Research in Bossier City, LA

Election of Officers

Chairman Garber said the next item on the agenda was Election of SWCC Officers. He opened the floor to nominations for Chairman of the SWCC. **Mr. Reggie Skains nominated Mr. Earl Garber to remain SWCC Chairman and Mr. Price Gay seconded the nomination.** Chairman Garber asked Commission members if they had any more nominations and there were none. The Commission unanimously elected Mr. Earl Garber to remain the SWCC Chairman.

Chairman Garber opened the floor for nominations for Vice-Chairman of the SWCC. **Mr. Reggie Skains nominated Mr. Steve Horvath to remain SWCC Vice Chairman and Mr. Ed Yerger seconded the nomination.** Chairman Garber asked Commission members if they had any more nominations and there were none. The Commission unanimously elected Mr. Steve Horvath to remain the SWCC Vice-Chairman.

Chairman Garber opened the floor for nominations for Secretary-Treasurer of the SWCC. **Mr. Steve Horvath nominated Mr. Reggie Skains to remain SWCC Secretary-Treasurer and Mr. Price Gay seconded the nomination.** Chairman Garber asked Commission members if they had any more nominations and there were none. The Commission unanimously elected Mr. Reggie Skains to remain the SWCC Secretary-Treasurer.

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Mr. Sam Adams, Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist

Mr. Adams said NRCS has been experiencing job losses recently. He said he has been asking that employees show empathy and respect to those that are losing their jobs. There have been several executive orders coming from President Trump recently and he has been reading through all of those to see what applies the LA NRCS. A lot of federal employees were offered a deferred resignation option which gives allows them to continue getting a paycheck and receive normal benefits until the end of the federal fiscal year. (September 30th) The deadline to opt in the deferred resignation option is this Friday. Employees do not have to inform their supervisor of their decision to opt in the deferred resignation option. Mr. Adams said they he knows of 9 employees with LA NRCS that have accepted the deferred resignation. Mr. Skains asked Mr. Adams if employees were able to withdraw their application for the deferred resignation option and Mr. Adams said no. Mr. Adams said the employees can work another job (not through the federal government) while on the deferred resignation option. NRCS is currently under a 90-day hiring freeze and LA NRCS is expected to submit a plan to headquarters on how they plan to work through the hiring freeze and deferred resignation option.

There are some executive orders discussing non-government organizations (NGOs) and asking that they review their agreements to verify that they are in the national interest. Headquarters is requesting comments on NGOs and their necessity. Chairman Garber said districts are concerned with deliverables of NGOs within the conservation districts. Mr. Adams mentioned there is a lot of funding going to a certain group of people and there are now for-profit companies offering "NRCS-like" services for a premium. NRCS agreements are currently frozen with some flexibility. Mr. Anderson has been sorting through current NRCS agreements to identify the agreements that include Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds. Agreements with IRA funding must be reviewed to determine how much IRA funding is in the agreement as well as the deliverables. Mr. Adams also mentioned that agreements are being held due to language mention diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in their agreement language. NRCS is also preparing for a possible government shutdown by discussing a contingency plan.

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux said OSWC is working revising workplans and projects to adapt to the wishes of the new Non-Point Source administrators. A few of the OSWC staffers are assisting with efforts in these revisions. Mr. Breaux said he appreciates the revisions being done to help move between watershed projects to get the older funding spent

quicker. The staff is also quite excited about possibly getting consultants to begin working on the watershed implementation plans (WIPs) which have been previously held up for years waiting on DEQ. When these consultants are hired, it is expected that most projects will be completed within months instead of years. With this being a professional service, districts would not have to bid it out but would be able to just hire someone of their choice.

Mr. Breaux said OSWC did get approval to cost share transport poultry litter out of North Louisiana production areas into areas of need. EPA also permitted OSWC to raise the costs due the overall fuel increase across the state since Covid-19. They also approved transport of poultry litter from Mississippi if the MS watersheds drained into Louisiana impaired waterbodies. OSWC has received a lot of additional approvals since the program began which includes the addition of "other agricultural waste" such as biochar. Mr. Breaux said over the past few he has been assisting a few mills with their rice hulls overflow. Most of the waste stream seems to be accounted for except for a mill in Lacassine, LA and they are struggling. Mr. Breaux said he was able to meet with one of the American Biocarbon members at the NACD Annual Meeting in Salt Lake to discuss the matter. After that discussion, Mr. Breaux able to meet with a few American Biocarbon members last week. They are now discussing possibly setting up at the Lacassine location to use a smaller Tigercat biochar machine or find a feasible way to haul rice hulls to White Castle, LA.

Mr. Breaux said he also met with the Idlewild Institute recently to give them an LDAF update. He was able to update them on topics such as 319 and coastal revegetation. The group seemed to be quite interested in the Louisiana Outdoors Program which Mr. Breaux mentioned when he asked about a state-funded conservation program. He said the Idlewild Institute membership primarily consists of retired researchers, judges, and attorneys.

Mr. Breaux said he was able review some updated budget figures from the Office of Management and Budget downtown. The figures he reviewed showed Commissioner Strain's originally budget \$2 million request for OSWC. These updated figures are not the final figures, and it is still suggested that everyone still reach out their local legislators to continue the support for Commissioner Strain's budget.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there is 5 resignations this month:

- Ms. Harol Thompson, Dorcheat SWCD, appointed position, effective February 20, 2025. (served on the board since September 23, 2003)
- Mr. Don Price, Dugdemona SWCD, appointed position, effective March 25, 2025. (served on the board since May 15, 2001)
- Mr. Grant Crochet, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position, effective February 19, 2025
- Mr. Darrell Sinagra, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, elected position, effective October 16, 2024.
- Mr. William Brasher, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, elected position, effective September 25, 2024.

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

- Ms. Harol Thompson, Dorcheat SWCD, appointed position, effective February 20, 2025. (served on the board since September 23, 2003)
- Mr. Don Price, Dugdemona SWCD, appointed position, effective March 25, 2025. (served on the board since May 15, 2001)
- Mr. Grant Crochet, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position, effective February 19, 2025
- Mr. Darrell Sinagra, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, elected position, effective October 16, 2024.
- Mr. William Brasher, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, elected position, effective September 25, 2024.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 2 appointments this month:

- Mr. Grant Crochet, Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Chris Mattingly, effective February 25, 2025- May 4, 2025
- Mr. Michael Houeye, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. William Brasher, effective February 25, 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:

- Mr. Grant Crochet, Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Chris Mattingly, effective February 25, 2025- May 4, 2025
- Mr. Michael Houeye, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. William Brasher, effective February 25, 2025- June 30, 2027.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said the Commission received 2 reappointments:

- Mr. Danny Martin, Bodcau SWCD, appointed position, effective March 23, 2025- March 23, 2028.
- Mr. Everette Calloway, Boeuf River SWCD, appointed position, effective May 1, 2025 - May 1, 2028.

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

- Mr. Danny Martin, Bodcau SWCD, appointed position, effective March 23, 2025- March 23, 2028.
- Mr. Everette Calloway, Boeuf River SWCD, appointed position, effective May 1, 2025 - May 1, 2028.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

Meritorious Award

Chairman Garber said we received 2 Meritorious award requests:

- D'Arbonne SWCD is nominating Julia Thompson to receive an Exceptional Performance Achievement Award of \$1,000.
- Jefferson Davis SWCD is nominating Mary Nicole McGee to receive an Exceptional Performance Achievement Award of \$1,168.

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:

- D'Arbonne SWCD is nominating Julia Thompson to receive an Exceptional Performance Achievement Award of \$1,000.
- Jefferson Davis SWCD is nominating Mary Nicole McGee to receive an Exceptional Performance Achievement Award of \$1,168.

Motion by: Mr. Jason Nolde
Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer
Motion passed unanimously.

District Supervisor Election- June 14, 2025

Chairman Garber said the draft Annual District Supervisor's Election packet has been prepared for the Commission's review. The list with instructions and a blank petition is included in the packet. If a district board has more than 1 candidate interested in the vacant elected position, the board must hold an election on Saturday, June 14, 2025. The nominating period will begin April 1st and end on April 30th. All supervisors who had no opposition will be duly elected at the June SWCC meeting. Chairman Garber asked that the Commission approve the packet to be emailed out so that they can discuss the election during their March board meetings.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the District Supervisor Election packet.

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

Prospective Surface Water Sales Discussion

This discussion started a while back with the Calcasieu SWCD. There was some interest in selling water from the Louisiana side of the Sabine Authority to the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Calcasieu was against the idea because this was a resource and there wasn't a water plan in place in the state. There was also political interest in the sale that approved the sale during that time. Past Calcasieu SWCD supervisor, Mr. George Dauzat, stood before Louisiana legislators and fought against the sale. With Calcasieu SWCD's influence, legislators passed a law that any proposal to move Louisiana water out of state requires approval from the Louisiana Department of Energy and Natural Resources, Both legislative natural resources committees, as well as signature from the governor. Recently, Texas Sen. Charles Perry proposed a possible transfer of 1.1-million-acre feet of water being piped into the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Mr. Breaux reached out to Mr. Britt Paul and a few others regarding this proposed legislation. The Sabine River Authority will meet Thursday and discuss this possible transfer. A people in Texas believe the water could be transferred from a few places including Lake of the Pines, Caddo, and Toledo Bend. Currently, Texas law prohibits inter-basin movement of water which only gives them the option to buy from a body of water in Louisiana.

SWCC Goals

Mr. Breaux explained the importance of the "SWCC goals" list to Mr. Adams. He suggested that the Commission focus on guiding supervisors to review their Supervisor Handbook as much as possible to answer any questions that they may have. He says the handbook isn't law but serves an important guide for every supervisor.

Correspondence/Articles:

- Biochar-amended soil can further sorb atmospheric CO2 for more carbon sequestration
- US Army: Central Review
- Federal Agencies Ordered to Pause Spending of Inflation Reduction Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Funds
- Illinois Farmer Today: Carbon raises questions for sustainable Ag
- Inside Louisiana nutria rodeo started by 'drunken fisherman' that makes saving the cost fun
- USDA Ask the Expert: A Q&A on Current Conservation Trends with Brianna Henry

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

Mr. Breaux said next date for the State Commission meeting is Tuesday, March 25, 2025. Due to that date being a travel day for the NACD Fly-In, He recommended that the Commission change the date to Tuesday, March 18,

2025. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, He would call for a motion to change the current Commission date from March 25, 2025 to March 18, 2025.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 18, 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. Brad Spicer made a motion to adjourn at 3:27 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Price Gay and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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