

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

September 30, 2025  
1:15 PM

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY  
VETERANS MEMORIAL 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 Salassi, LSU AgCenter Member              |

**Members Absent:**

Dr. Crystal Vance-Rogers, Southern University Ag Center, Member

A quorum was present.

**Others Present:**

|                                                                                              |                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Ms. Candis Voorhies, Acting Assistant LA State Conservationist, Partnerships and Initiatives | Ms. Amy McInnis, LDAF General Counsel |
| Ms. Kimberly Watt, D'Arbonne SWCD                                                            | Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director  |
| Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC                                                               | Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC           |
| Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF-OSWC                                                               | Ms. Clay Alexander, LDAF-OSWC         |

**Public Comments**

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

### **Approval of August 26, 2025 minutes**

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the August 26, 2025 SWCC meeting minutes.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the September 30, 2025 SWCC meeting agenda

**Motion by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

**Seconded by:** Mr. Price Gay

Motion passed unanimously.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

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

Mr. Breaux reported that the August 2025 Farm Bill Agreement Total Drawdown was \$44,182 with a remaining balance of \$171,675.

25 districts have maxed out their Farm Bill agreement earnings: Allen, Bodcau, Boeuf River, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River, Caddo, Calcasieu, Capital, Crescent, DeSoto, Dorcheat, Dugdemona, East Carroll, Lafayette, Lafourche-Terrebonne, Lower Delta, Madison, Morehouse, Natchitoches, New River, Red River, St. Martin SWCD, St. Mary SWCD, Tensas-Concordia SWCD, Upper Delta SWCD, and Vermillion. These districts were able to report a total of \$418,733 earned over their allocated farm bill agreement budgets.

OSWC has reached out to districts regarding their un-earned farm bill funds. Districts have responded and OSWC is on the way to sweeping remaining funds and re-distributing the funds to the over-earned districts.

#### **CPA-SWCD Agreements**

Chairman Garber said the Commission received 5 SWCD-CPA Agreements:

- D'arbonne SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Langley, Williams & Company, LLC. The fee is \$1,000.
- Jefferson Davis SWCD is submitting 2 engagement letters from Langley, Williams, & Company, LLC. The first engagement is to apply agreed-upon procedures to meet the intended purpose of the Louisiana Legislative Auditors review requirement, and the fee is \$1,200 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> engagement is to prepare financial statements and won't exceed \$3,500.
- LaSalle SWCD is submitting an engagement letter The Vercher Group. The fee will not exceed \$1,350.
- Madison SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Langley, Williams, & Company, LLC to prepare financial statements. The fee will not exceed \$3,500.
- St. Mary SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Christina Hidalgo, CPA, LLC. The fee is \$2,100.

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

- D'arbonne SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Langley, Williams & Company, LLC. The fee is \$1,000.
- Jefferson Davis SWCD is submitting 2 engagement letters from Langley, Williams, & Company, LLC. The first engagement is to apply agreed-upon procedures to meet the intended purpose of the Louisiana Legislative Auditors review requirement, and the fee is \$1,200 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> engagement is to prepare financial statements and won't exceed \$3,500.
- LaSalle SWCD is submitting an engagement letter The Vercher Group. The fee will not exceed \$1,350.
- Madison SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Langley, Williams, & Company, LLC to prepare financial statements. The fee will not exceed \$3,500.

- St. Mary SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Christina Hidalgo, CPA, LLC. The fee is \$2,100.

**Motion by:** Mr. Ed Giering

**Seconded by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

#### Area V Election Convention- October 28, 2025

The Area V Election Convention will take place on Tuesday, October 28, 2025 at 11AM in the LDAF Veteran's Memorial Auditorium in Baton Rouge. Area V district boards were asked to each submit names of their selections of election convention delegate and alternate delegate by October 16, 2025.

#### LACD Mid-year Meeting Update/NACD South Central Meeting Update

Mr. Gay said this year's South-Central meeting had many great presenters. There were discussions on water quality as well as Arkansas's groundwater issues. They use 80% of their groundwater for irrigation purposes and with the other 20% going to other needs. There are concerns of depleting the aquifers in the upcoming years. Discussions were also had about cover crops and how they can prevent potash runoff. Arkansas has some great projects occurring through the PL-566 program that focus on using surface water versus groundwater. Another topic discussed was their feral hog issues around the state. They have developed a 21-member taskforce to oversee control efforts. They have already removed at least 19,000 hogs over the last year through trapping utilizing drones. Mr. Gay said they visited a Christmas tree farm where they got to see the pruning and labor that goes into preparing a tree to be sold. The 2<sup>nd</sup> excursion during the NACD meeting was to Garvan Woodland Gardens. There was a lovely chapel and a great walking trail. Mr. Gay said he enjoyed the hosting hotel as well as seeing Louisiana being well represented at the meeting.

Mr. Gay mentioned that Louisiana will be hosting next year's NACD South Central meeting. LACD is already planning already beginning planning stages.

Mr. Skains mentioned that the group got to visit with Mr. Jimmy Emmons, Assistant Chief of the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. Mr. Emmons is a third-generation farmer and cow-calf operator from Oklahoma and brings a lot of knowledge. Chairman Garber said Mr. Emmons is a past president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts. Chairman Garber said he remembers Mr. Emmons traveling to see different farmers to promote soil health before he stepped into his current position. He said Mr. Emmons is a positive influence and hopes that many farmers follow his lead.

Chairman Garber said the LACD Mid-Year meeting was great and well attended. He got a chance to give a Commission update as well as challenge LACD to begin discussions on trying to find some dedicated funding for the districts. The Commission will assist LACD in these efforts by having more conversations and making contacts with folks who could assist. Chairman Garber discussed the past funding surveys that districts took and that it may be a great idea to revisit the surveys soon. Mr. Gay said funding efforts has been a hot topic for many years and LACD will continue to work hard in efforts to get dedicated funding for districts. Mr. Breaux said other states that have big conservation budgets include multiple interests from different agencies coming together to drive their conservation funding efforts.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

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

- Total FY 26 LA NRCS obligations: 680 contracts worth approximately \$52 million on about 247,000 acres.
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): 693 applications received with 235 applications obligated at approximately \$26 million  
(CSP Classic- \$15, CSP Renewals-\$11 million) on approximately 168,000 acres
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): 2,513 applications received; 438 applications obligated at approximately \$25 million on approximately 78,000 acres

- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)- 78 applications received, 7 obligated at approximately 570,000 on approximately 1,200 acres. The figures are lower than normal this year because the Open Pine project is the only project taking place in North Louisiana. NRCS recently executed an agreement with Arkansas to begin the Open Pines #2 in FY 26. There will be a rollout meeting in November and there are plans to expand in other parishes in the historical longleaf range that were not in the original project.
- Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE) – Enrolled 30 new easements on approximately 5,000 acres. There is a total of approximately 1,300 easements enrolled on 371,000 acres. Nearly 1,200 wetland easements on 344,00 acres have been restored to historical conditions.

Ms. Voorhies said the Farm Bill Assistance, Program Support Specialist (PSS), LARU (LA Resource Unit) tech, and Watershed Planner agreements were executed prior to the September 30<sup>th</sup> deadline. The agreements are for 4 years but funding was only obligated for FY 26. NRCS plans to review these agreements once they receive their budget and once the national office gives guidance on the process for adding the additional funding to the agreement. Ms. Voorhies stated that there may be a different process to amend agreements due to the change in process this year. She said she expects the same multi-level review process to be in place next year with more knowledge of NRCS programs than they had this year. Ms. Voorhies thanked Mr. Phillips and Ms. Gibson for their efforts in getting the agreements executed in a timely fashion. Mr. Phillips stated that since the LARU and PSS agreements have been executed, districts with vacancies through these agreements will receive guidance to move forward with hiring soon.

Ms. Voorhies said there is a call happening at 2PM today with the Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist, Ms. Sarah Trichel and the National office to discuss the procedures for a possible government shutdown. Ms. Voorhies stated that they have been told to come to work unless given other instructions. Chairman Garber asked Ms. Voorhies how agreement payments and procedures will work if the shutdown happens. Ms. Voorhies stated that the work can still be done but that there would be no employees to process claims. Reimbursement maybe delayed based on how long the shutdown occurs. NRCS offices will close so there will be no access for federal or district employees to use any equipment. Chairman Garber asked Mr. Breaux about the district shutdown procedures. Mr. Breaux stated that guidance has not changed from previously years. Co-located Districts may secure an alternate work location and establish new lines of communications. Mr. Breaux said he reached out to Ms. Trichel regarding sending out shutdown procedures to districts. Ms. Trichel requested that Mr. Breaux wait until he gets word from her which will be after today's call with the national office. Chairman Garber said if commission members and Ms. Voorhies have no comment, he recommends that OSWC send out the guidance to districts if the government shuts down.

#### LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter Member

Dr. Salassi mentioned that LSU has recently been promoting their strategic plan called “Louisiana Solutions, Global Impact” which was released in April or May this year. LSU is using it to educate the public on the research and extension that the AgCenter does. The communication team is doing an excellent job showcasing their faculty members and the research that they are doing.

LSU has been educating their faculty in research security and export control. The process involves controlling the release of research data or information that may have intellectual property implications. Over the last few years, the federal government has wanted to make sure entities such as LSU are protected from adversarial countries and their actions which could include targeted cyberattacks and espionage.

President Trump recently signed an order related to H-1B Visa applications. The H-1B Visas are for non-U.S. citizens applying for a visitor who has an approved H-1B petition. The cost to apply for an H-1B visa went from \$6,000 to \$100,000. When a foreign graduate student working on their PHD graduates from a college such as LSU and is offered a position at the school, they would have to apply for H-1B visa. The school usually pays the cost to apply for an H-1B visa. As an alternative, LSU is considering having their students apply for an O-1 visa which is for foreign nationals with “extraordinary ability” in science, education, business, athletics, arts, or the film/television

industry. Dr. Salassi said there is more documentation requested for this visa, but the school is reviewing all options. The cost for the O-1 visas range from \$1,500- \$15,000.

Dr. Salassi mentioned LSU's newest faculty member, Dr. Kaelyn Fogelman, who started working in LSU's School of Renewable Natural Resources last month. Her area of research is commercial aquaculture which includes crawfish. Dr. Fogelman received her PHD from Auburn University and LSU is looking forward to hearing about her research.

#### A few upcoming field days:

- September 30, 2025- Poultry Field- Hill Farm Research Station-Homer, LA
- October 1, 2025- Dairy and Beef Field Day- Southeast Research Station-Franklinton, LA

#### OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux asked Ms. Joubert to give the OSWC update. Ms. Joubert gave the following updates:

- The Feral Hog Pilot Program- Today is the last day that districts will be able to charge Feral Hog costs and salaries to the agreement. A few districts have already found alternate funding options for the employees.
- 319 Non-Point Source Program- FY 24 workplan has been approved by EPA. The Bayou de Tourtue project which is between Acadia and Vermilion SWCDs has begun and OSWC is waiting for a Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) for Bayou Courtableau which located between St. Landry and Avoyelles SWCD. With the workplan approval, OSWC received approval for an additional 5 "Good Lands" videos. These videos are done with area producers to highlight Agricultural Best Management Practices. Baton Rouge is hosting the annual training meeting that is scheduled on October 27-29, 2025. Mr. Breaux, Mr. Gay, and Mr. Buddy Oubre (one of the previous "Good Lands" producers) will be guest speakers at the meeting.
- Multiple SWCDs are working with schools and FFA programs: Acadia SWCD hosted a land judging training. They will have the land judging competition tomorrow with St. Landry SWCD and other districts. Allen SWCD had a Quad-Parish Forestry contest last week. This event was an FFA invitational with 5-6 schools attending. This event is used to train students for the big competition that will happen at Chicot State Park in October.
- LDAF Market Bulletin: The LDAF communications team has been great with highlighting district activities and outreach. Districts have been able to make the front page of the LDAF Market Bulletin twice in 3 months which is a great opportunity for districts to be more recognized. Districts are encouraged to reach out to OSWC with any spotlight information that they would like to be shared in the bulletin. The goal is to have 4 districts highlighted in the bulletin each year.
- Summer Coastal Resources Committee Meeting: Will be held on Wednesday, October 8, 2025 at the Delcambre Shrimp Festival Building. Registration will start at 8AM.
- Project WET: Project WET is making great strides. The program is receiving education and outreach funding through EPA agreements. Ms. Joubert said she will be attending an in-service workshop at Northwestern State University on Monday, October 6, 2025 to participate in an activity as well as assist with signing students up for the next in-service workshop.
- Calcasieu SWCD hosted a 4-day water festival. 2 days were done in Beauregard Parish and 2 days were done in Deridder Parish. Water festivals have become a big part of conservation districts across the state. Gulf Coast SWCD will host a water festival on October 21, 2025.

#### Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there is 1 appointment this month:

- Mr. Keith Guillory, Allen SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Ethan Mathews-Smith, effective September 30, 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. Keith Guillory, Allen SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Ethan Mathews-Smith, effective September 30, 2025- June 30, 2028.

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

Proposed Legislation and Proposed Rule Changes Regarding Election of District Supervisors

Mr. Breaux said during last Commission meeting, they discussed some of the suggested revisions to the rules. The following suggestions have been added:

1. Changing the title to "Election of District Supervisors"
2. Changing the title of the 1<sup>st</sup> section to "Election of Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors"
3. Changing part A to state "The rules and regulations for electing soil and water conservation district supervisors in each of the 44 soil and water conservation districts annually, as adopted by the Soil and Water Conservation Commission, are as follows."
4. Under General Rules, removing part A stating "Act Number 231 of 1958 provides for an annual state election on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday in June."
5. Under General Rules, Removing the section stating, "This petition shall be signed by the registrar of voters attesting that the names on the petition are qualified voters in the named Soil and Water Conservation District."
6. Under Nominating Rules, changing part A to state "There shall be a 30-day nominating period which shall begin 90 days prior to the qualifying deadline for gubernatorial primary election."
7. Under Nominating Rules, changing part B to state "Nominating petitions must be completed on the nominating petition forms supplied by Secretary of State."
8. Under Nominating Rules, removing parts C-L.
9. Under Nominating Rules, removing parts N-U.

Mr. Breaux stated that in the proposed revisions, districts are still expected to distribute and receive nominating petitions. The current draft states that if districts receive more nominating petitions than the amount of elected supervisor positions to be filled, the candidate information will then be submitted to Secretary of State.

Proposed Legislation changes to R.S.3:1206 and 1207 include:

1. In section 1206, removing "The names of all nominees on behalf of whom nominating petitions have been filed within the time herein designated shall be printed, arranged in the alphabetical order of the surnames, upon ballots, with a square before each name and a direction to insert an X mark in the square before any three names to indicate the voter's preference. All qualified voters within the district who are qualified to vote under the constitution and laws of this state shall be eligible to vote in the election. Only qualified voters shall be eligible to vote."
2. In section 1206, insert "The names of all nominees on behalf of whom nominating petitions have been filed within the time herein designated shall be submitted to the secretary of state."
3. In section 1206, removing "The state commission shall pay all the expenses of such election, shall supervise the conduct thereof, shall prescribe regulations governing the conduct of such election, and shall publish the results thereof."
4. In section 1207, removing "The term of office of each supervisor shall be "three" years..." and changing it to "four" years."
5. In section 1207, changing "The three elected supervisors of the district shall be elected annually, one each year..." to "The three elected supervisors of the district shall be elected every four years, concurrent with the terms of the gubernatorial primary election."
6. In section 1207, removing "These elections of supervisors shall be held throughout the state regularly on the second Saturday in June, each year, in accordance with the general procedure and in the manner prescribed in R.S. 3:1206. Terms of office of all supervisors so elected shall begin on July 1st, following the date of their election."
7. In Section 1207, change "All supervisors presently in office and serving on the governing body of a conservation district, shall remain in office until their terms expire, but from and after August 1st, 1956, all vacancies shall be filled in the manner above prescribed, and whenever the term of any supervisor expires, it shall be filled by an election to be held on the second Saturday in June after the expiration of said term" to "All supervisors presently in

office and serving on the governing body of a conservation district, shall remain in office until the next gubernatorial election”.

#### SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber asked the Commission members if they had any discussion and there were no comments.

#### Correspondence

- Email from Mr. Kris Davis: FY 25 Closeout
- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation: Designing a lower salt future: Examining chloride’s environmental and infrastructure impacts.
- Drovers: Making Every Acre Pull Double Duty
- National Association of Conservation Districts: Letter from Gary Blair, NACD President
- Advocates warn Louisiana’s coastal lawsuits are costing billions

#### Other Business

#### Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 28, 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 3:20 P.M. Mr. Brad Spicer made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Price Gay and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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