

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

February 24, 2026
1:15 PM

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY
VETERANS MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM
5825 FLORIDA BLVD
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70806

MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Garber called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 PM.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Ms. Clay Alexander.

Members and Alternates 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. Price Gay, LACD President, Member
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member	Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter Member	Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member

Members Absent:

Dr. Crystal Vance, Southern University Ag Center, Alternate Member

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Ms. Sarah Trichel, Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist	Mr. Doug Daigle, LA Hypoxia Workgroup Director
Dr. Jacqueline McComb, Southern University Ag Center, Assistant Professor	Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC	Ms. Clay Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

Chairman Garber asked for public comment and recognized Mr. Doug Daigle. Mr. Daigle updated the Commission on gulf hypoxia issues including last year's resolution recommending enhanced state participation in Gulf Hypoxia efforts. In December, Representative Orgeron arranged for a joint meeting with Senate and House Natural Resources Committees. This meeting was to emphasize the recently passed resolution which involved participation of all agencies. Another provision added to this resolution was that OSWC should co-chair

the LA Interagency nutrient team. The legislation states that this team must give an annual update to help reach hypoxia action plan goals.

Mr. Daigle said the Hypoxia Taskforce met in early February in Washington, DC with a virtual option available. This was the first meeting with the new administration and its new appointees. Many states got the opportunity to give an update to everyone and show that they are working towards their goals. Mr. Daigle said presentations were good and that he is expecting the annual presentations to get better with the new resolution in place.

Approval of January 7, 2026 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the January 7, 2026 SWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Price Gay

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the February 24, 2026 Agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

Mr. Breaux said that since the SWCC met earlier in January at LACD, the group did not receive December's Farm Bill figures and districts have now also reported January hours.

December 2025 Drawdown: \$131,788

January 2026 Drawdown: 168, 775

Remaining Balance: \$823,210

Legislative Session

Mr. Breaux mentioned that the legislative session will begin on March 9, 2026. Some of the drafted bills include:

- HB 250-presented by Christopher Turner- Removes the requirement for immediate family members of certain public servants to disclose certain information and removes the requirement for certain public servants to disclose certain information about their immediate family members.
- HB 5-Presented by Mike Johnson- Authorizes individual parishes to determine whether or not Class VI carbon dioxide injection wells, carbon dioxide sequestration, and pipelines transporting carbon dioxide may be permitted within their parish by action of the parish governing authority or by local option election
- HB 6-Presented by Mike Johnson- Authorizes the governing authority of Rapides Parish to determine whether carbon dioxide sequestration and pipelines transporting carbon dioxide may be permitted within the parish.
- HB 7- Presented by Mike Johnson- Removes expropriation authority for carbon dioxide pipelines and storage facilities, prohibits expropriation by private entities related to carbon dioxide transport and sequestration, and removes unitization authority for carbon dioxide storage facilities.
- HB 79-Presented by Robert Carter- Removes the damage caps for injuries resulting from carbon capture and storage.
- HB 80- Presented by Robert Carter- Establishes strict liability for damages caused from carbon storage and transportation.
- HB180- Presented by Charles Owens- Provides relative to expropriation by private entities.
- HB 192- Presented by Charles Owens- Prohibits expropriation of property by foreign adversaries or agents of a foreign adversary.

- SB 47- Presented by Beth Mizell- Requires certain email and telephone contact information for individual members of a board and commission.
- SB 61-Presented by William “Bill” Wheat Jr.- Authorizes parish governing authorities and citizens to determine whether class VI injection wells, carbon dioxide sequestration, or carbon dioxide pipelines may be permitted within a parish.
- SB 62-Presented by William “Bill” Wheat Jr.- Provides relative to construction of pipelines on certain water bodies.
- SB 63- Presented by William “Bill” Wheat Jr.-Prohibits construction of pipelines on certain wildlife management areas.

Mr. Breaux said that he has been in discussions with the Commissioner regarding the \$209,000 that was removed from the budget last year. He said he will be working with the Commissioner to restore this amount, and that it will finally become part of the line-item.

NACD Annual Meeting Update/NACD Spring Fly-In- March 25, 2026

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Gay if he had any comments. Mr. Gay said he wanted to first comment on the LACD meeting which was a success. He said that he was happy that the meeting was held at a different location this year to have a change of scenery. Senator Womack and Representative McFarland attended this year and have proven to be champions for Louisiana conservation.

Mr. Gay said the NACD Annual meeting was a success. Louisiana was represented well with approximately 20 people in attendance at the meeting. He said they got to hear from Chief Bettencourt who discussed the new Regenerative Pilot Program (RCP). This program is a farmer first, outcomes-based approach to conservation designed to return NRCS to its core mission- helping people help the land. Mr. Gay also enjoyed the presentations given by Dr. Salassi and the LSU team who discussed Feral Hogs and the damage that they are causing nationally. Dr. Glen Gentry discussed LSU’s toxicant for Feral Hogs which is still in waiting stages to be patented. Mr. Gay also mentioned that they are prepping for the NACD Fly-In on March 25, 2026 and have already gotten the opportunity to meet the NACD team during the Annual meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

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

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

~~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- Ms. Sarah Trichel, Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist

Ms. Trichel said she wanted to discuss the available financial assistance programs available to producers who had damages from the winter storm:

1. Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)- provides technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers and forest landowners to address natural resource concerns such as damage trees within a timber stand, waste storage facilities with collapsed roofs, or Hi-Tunnel systems. Producers with current EQIP contracts can have their agreements modify to include the damage.
2. Emergency Watershed Program (EWP)- offers technical and financial assistance to help local communities relieve imminent threats to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms, and other natural disasters.

Ms. Trichel reported that NRCS is currently training both staff and partner staff on the Regenerative Conservation Pilot (RCP) program. The RCP is a five-year agreement implemented through EQIP and CSP. She noted that the program should be relatively easy for field offices to adopt since the language and structure are already familiar. One requirement of the program is that producers conduct soil testing during the first and final years of their contract. NRCS is looking forward to reviewing the test results to determine whether the various practices have positive or negative impacts on soil health.

Ms. Trichel said she plans to work with conservation districts to identify Qualified Individuals (QIs) to conduct soil health testing. These individuals must be trained and competent professionals who assist farmers and ranchers with soil health practices. QIs may include certified professionals, degree holders, or experienced technicians. NRCS already maintains a database of cropland QIs but will need assistance developing similar databases for livestock and forestland QIs. She also noted that QIs will be paid directly by the participant, not by NRCS. The expected rate for QIs is approximately \$600–\$800 to collect the sample and submit it to a laboratory. NRCS has also compiled a list of qualified soil health testing laboratories where samples may be sent. Dr. McComb added that this could provide a good opportunity for recent graduates from local universities to obtain QI qualifications and assist with the pilot program.

NRCS has not yet received any updates regarding a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the Feral Swine Pilot Program. Ms. Trichel stated that she will notify everyone as soon as the opportunity becomes available. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) NOFO is expected to be released soon. This partner-driven conservation program funds solutions to natural resource challenges on agricultural lands. Currently, one RCPP project is underway in northern Louisiana, hosted by the American Bird Conservancy.

Ms. Trichel also reported that the previously mentioned 4:1 staffing ratio—where 4 employees would be lost for every 1 new hire—is no longer the standard. However, NRCS is still using a committee to review all hiring actions. Many current vacancies are being targeted toward recent college graduates and participants in the Pathways Internship Program.

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

LSU staff has been working on creating testing and control measures for 3 insect pests that are new or returning to Louisiana:

1. Rice Delphacid
2. West Indian cane fly
3. Pasture Mealybug

USDA-APHIS is planning to a survey in Louisiana and Texas to get a scope on each of the state's landscape.

LSU has some new staff changes:

1. Dr. Tyler Musgrove-stationed at the Rice Research Station-Crowley, LA
2. Dr. Leo Vieira- Soil Fertility and Agronomy- stationed at the Scott Research Center- Winnsboro, LA
3. Dr. Al Orgeron- Regional Director for the Southeast region-Gonzales, LA
4. Dr. Michael Pontif-Resident Director- stationed at the Sugar Research Station- Jeanerette, LA

Earlier this month, LSU approved the release of 4 new rice varieties: a conventional long grain, a conventional medium grain, Provisia, and a Clearfield line.

LSU Events:

- February 27, 2026- 2nd Annual Soil Health and Cover Crop Field Day- Bossier City, LA
- April 22, 2026- 2026 Wheat and Oat Field- Winnsboro, LA

Dr. Salassi said he and the team really enjoyed the NACD Annual Meeting. Chairman Garber said he believed the attendees enjoyed their presentation.

Chairman Garber asked Dr. McComb if she had any comments regarding activities at Southern University. Dr. McComb mentioned the 83rd Southern University Ag Center's Annual Livestock & poultry show that is happening on February 26-28, 2026.

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux reported that several red flag warnings were issued this week, while multiple prescribed burns were taking place at the same time. Current law states that agricultural prescribed burns are exempt from burn bans. However, Commissioner Strain has been reviewing the certification laws and may consider revising the educational materials to clarify that prescribed burning should not occur during a red flag warning.

Mr. Breaux also reported that black vultures have recently been implicated in depredations involving newborn calves. Louisiana has approved "take" permits that allow landowners to remove up to five birds. In addition, there have been reports in Cameron and Calcasieu Parishes of Caracara birds being spotted and accused of killing calves. Mr. Breaux stated that the take permits may eventually need to be expanded to include these birds as well.

Mr. Breaux also shared that OSWC recently filled the vacancy left by Ms. Marinna Curtis. Ms. Amelia Day has been hired to assist Mr. Jerry Davenport with watershed and PL-566 projects. She will begin working in Baton Rouge and will be based out of West Monroe, Louisiana. Ms. Day previously worked as a student trainee with NRCS on their soil survey crew.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there is 3 resignations this month:

- Mr. James Knight, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, elected position, effective January 13, 2026
- Mr. Burnell Muse, Capital SWCD, elected position, effective February 23, 2026
- Mr. Robert Morris, Upper Delta SWCD, appointed position, effective February 10, 2026

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

- Mr. James Knight, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, elected position, effective January 13, 2026
- Mr. Burnell Muse, Capital SWCD, elected position, effective February 23, 2026
- Mr. Robert Morris, Upper Delta SWCD, appointed position, effective February 10, 2026

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 2 appointments this month:

- Mr. James Knight, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Hezzie Crain, effective February 24, 2026- May 26, 2026
- Mr. Scott Lowrey, D'Arbonne SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Stephen Wade, effective February 24, 2026- June 30, 2028

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

- Mr. James Knight, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Hezzie Crain, effective February 24, 2026- May 26, 2026
- Mr. Scott Lowrey, D'Arbonne SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Stephen Wade, effective February 24, 2026- June 30, 2028

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 9 re-appointments this month:

- Mr. David Lowe, Dorcheat SWCD, Appointed position, effective March 23, 2026- March 23, 2029
- Mr. Timothy Wild, Jefferson Davis SWCD, Appointed position, effective June 11, 2026- June 11, 2029
- Mr. Timothy Allen, Lafourche-Terrebonne SWCD, appointed position, effective June 10, 2026- June 10, 2029
- Mr. Jason Waller, Morehouse SWCD, Appointed position, effective February 26, 2026-February 26, 2029
- Mr. Ethan Poland, Northeast SWCD, Appointed position, effective February 24, 2026-February 24, 2029
- Mr. John P. Boudreaux, Sabine SWCD, Appointed position, effective March 23, 2026- March 23, 2029
- Mr. Richard Hollier III, St. Landry SWCD, Appointed position, effective March 26, 2026-March 26, 2029
- Mr. Andrew Price Gay, Upper Delta SWCD, Appointed position, effective May 13, 2026- May 13, 2029
- Mr. Theron Ty Rogers, West Carroll SWCD, Appointed position, effective February 24, 2026- February 24, 2029

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

- Mr. David Lowe, Dorcheat SWCD, Appointed position, effective March 26, 2026- March 26, 2029
- Mr. Timothy Wild, Jefferson Davis SWCD, Appointed position, effective June 11, 2026- June 11, 2029
- Mr. Timothy Allen, Lafourche-Terrebonne SWCD, Appointed position, effective June 10, 2026- June 10, 2029
- Mr. Jason Waller, Morehouse SWCD, Appointed position, effective February 26, 2026-February 26, 2029
- Mr. Ethan Poland, Northeast SWCD, Appointed position, effective February 24, 2026-February 24, 2029
- Mr. John P. Boudreaux, Sabine SWCD, Appointed position, effective March 23, 2026- March 23, 2029
- Mr. Richard Hollier III, St. Landry SWCD, Appointed position, effective March 26, 2026-March 26, 2029
- Mr. Andrew Price Gay, Upper Delta SWCD, Appointed position, effective May 13, 2026- May 13, 2029
- Mr. Theron Ty Rogers, West Carroll SWCD, Appointed position, effective February 24, 2026- February 24, 2029

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Meritorious Awards

Chairman Garber presented 3 meritorious award requests:

- Madison SWCD is nominating Ms. Patches McDaniel to receive a significant achievement award of \$500.00.
- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Tamekia Showers to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,168.00
- West Carroll SWCD is nominating Ms. Kaitlin Franklin to receive a significant achievement award of \$500.00

The meritorious award nomination packet 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 packets for:

- Madison SWCD is nominating Ms. Patches McDaniel to receive a significant achievement award of \$500.00.
- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Tamekia Showers to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,168.00
- West Carroll SWCD is nominating Ms. Kaitlin Franklin to receive a significant achievement award of \$500.00

Motion by: Mr. Price Gay

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

District Supervisor Election

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Breaux if he had any comments regarding this year's election. Mr. Breaux said the election process will remain the same this year. Mr. Breaux said everyone should have received a draft of the election information that will be sent out districts regarding this year's election. Mr. Breaux mentioned adding an addendum to the normal memo that would advise supervisors to be available in early May-Mid June for a possible election and that all board members be available to assist with the election in some capacity.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the district supervisor election packet with suggested addendum.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Breaux said during the last SWCC meeting, the Commission discussed possible changes to the current election laws (R.S. 3:1206 and 1207). One of the proposed changes included term limits going from 3 to 4 years and having them concurrent to the Commissioner's term. After discussions with the Secretary of State, it was concluded that it would not be possible to add this to the State ballot. So, the terms will continue to be staggered every three years and will be considered a private election if multiple nominating petitions are received by a district. The process is common and most used by political subdivisions like SWCDs. Voting machines are available in local precincts that districts would have available for their use. Cost would be minimum of \$200 a machine for the district election. Another important change will be Section C under 1206 that states "*Elections held pursuant to this Section shall be*

conducted by the secretary of state. The secretary of state and the commissioner of agriculture and forestry are authorized to adopt rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out the intent and purposes of this section.” Mr. Breaux said the Secretary of State will need a 6-month notice for an election. The new nominating period would then likely be changed to November 1st- January 15th.

SWCC Goals

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

Correspondence

- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation: Insights from farmer advocates on the role of informal peer-to-peer learning in promoting conservation
- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation: Water quality considerations for using surface water bodies as an alternative irrigation water source in the Mississippi Alluvial Plain, Mississippi, USA
- Clean Water Act “ Waters of the United States” Update
- Removing livestock from grasslands could compromise long-term soil carbon storage
- Louisiana Master Farmer Program participants honored at ceremony
- Drovers: How Today’s Producers Are Rebuilding Soil, Ecosystems and Profit Margins

Other Business

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled on Tuesday, March 24, 2026 in the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806. Due to the Spring Fly-In, Chairman Garber suggested that we change the date. Chairman Garber recommended changing the date to March 31, 2026. He asked for comments and their none. He called for a motion to approve changing the next Commission meeting date to March 31, 2026.

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay


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 3:09 P.M. Mr. Price Gay 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