

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

May 26, 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 Skains 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. Reggie Skains, Chairman, Area I Member	Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice Chairman, Area V Member
Mr. Earl Garber, Secretary-Treasurer, Area IV Member	Mr. Price Gay, LACD President, Member
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II, Member	Mr. Ed Giering, Area III, Member
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member	Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Member

Members Absent:

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

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Ms. Sarah Trichel, LA NRCS State Conservationist	Mr. Chris Martin, Area V Alternate Member
Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director	Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF-OSWC	Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Clay Alexander, LDAF-OSWC	

Public Comments

Chairman Skains asked for public comments and there were none.

Approval of April 28, 2026 minutes

Chairman Skains called for a motion to approve the April 28, 2026 SWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Earl Garber
Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer
Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

April 2026 Drawdown: \$76,994

Total Farm Bill Balance remaining: \$440,353

Legislative Session

Mr. Breaux reviewed a list of final Legislative bills including:

- HB 1- by Mr. Jack McFarland- 2026-2027 General Appropriations Bill (Includes SWCD State Allocation)
- HB 180- by Mr. Charles Owen- Prohibits Foreign Entities from Expropriation
- HB 510- by Mr. Rodney Schamerhorn- Importation of Captured Carbon Dioxide
- HB 647- by Mr. Ryan Bourriaque- Waterway Projects Submission Bec. HB 1232
- HB 802- by Mr. Dixon McMakin- Watershed Restoration Management Provisions
- HB 804- by Mr. Brett Geymann- Louisiana Energy Protection Act
- HB 841- by Mr. Brett Geymann- Expropriation Procedures Provisions
- HB 847- by Ms. Rhonda Butler- Soil and Water Supervisor Provisions (election rules)
- HB 1153- by Ms. Kim Landry Coats- Outdoor Burning
- HB 1205- by Ms. C. Denise Marcelle- Conservation of Aquifer Systems

He discussed the Coordinated Use of Resources for Recreation, Economy, Navigation, and Transportation (CURRENT) Authority. This board was created by the Louisiana Legislature through Act 418 of the 2025 Regular Legislative Session to develop a comprehensive master plan. This plan was to address flood control, water resource management, navigation, recreation, and related infrastructure initiatives outside of the coastal area covered by the LA CPRA.

Mr. Garber inquired about recent LDOTD legislation. Mr. Breaux recommended that the Commission contact LDOTD to have them attend one of the upcoming SWCC meetings to provide a watershed presentation to the Commission.

NEW BUSINESS

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Ms. Sarah Trichel, LA NRCS State Conservationist

Chairman Skains introduced the newly appointed LA State Conservationist, Ms. Sarah Trichel, to the Commission. Ms. Trichel thanked the Commission for their continued support during her acting period. She mentioned that, along with her appointment, Chief Aubrey Bettencourt stepped down as NRCS Chief. Mr. Colton Buckley, current Associate Chief of NRCS and former Chief of Staff, will step into the NRCS Chief role. Chief Buckley's main priority is to be locally led as well as being farmer first. He spoke on wanting NRCS to get back to being conservation planning professionals and being technically proficient.

LA NRCS is working through their financial assistance program obligations. Figures for EQIP, CSP, and ACEP are reaching historic levels this year with over \$100 million obligated. The Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP) has received a lot of interest in doing holistic farm planning and other programs. CEMA 216 Soil Health Testing is a financial assistance opportunity for participants to hire Qualified Individuals (QIs) and Technical Service Providers (TSPs) to provide quantitative testing for biological, chemical, and physical characteristics of soil using approved laboratory methods through EQIP and CSP. One of the requirements of the RPP program is that a producer agrees to perform soil health testing in the first and last year of the contract to establish a starting baseline and to record resulting changes. QIs can be certified professionals, degree holders, experienced technicians, and retired NRCS employees. LA NRCS is in the process of building a list of QIs as a

producer resource for this opportunity. If a producer is interested in being listed as a QI, they should contact LA NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, Audrina Lange, with their contact information.

The LA NRCS hosted a State Technical Committee meeting on May 8th in Alexandria, LA. The meeting was successful and included some great discussion. NRCS is working to expand the conversation on state priorities and getting back to being locally led. NRCS is also working to expand their ranking system to include more scientific questions as well as the resource concern questions.

There have not been any updates on Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs) for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), Feral Swine, and Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG). Ms. Trichel said she expects to see the RCPP NOFO released sooner than the others.

NRCS is working to revise their State Strategic and Business plan. Ms. Trichel stated that she was given five priorities, and she is adding a sixth priority to cultivate an engaged workforce. She defined being engaged as someone who is present, knowledgeable, technically proficient, and mission driven.

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

Dr. Salassi reported that LSU didn't receive the recurring funds they requested during this legislative session, but they are receiving some one-time funds to support research and extension. On July 1st, the University of New Orleans will become LSU New Orleans. New Orleans extension agents, who were once scattered around the area, will be getting office space on the LSU New Orleans campus.

The Baton Rouge campus is in the process of choosing someone to fill the provost position. This position is typically the chief academic officer and second-in-command to the president. The chosen candidate is expected to be announced within the next few weeks.

The LSU AgCenter and faculty are continuing to monitor three new pests that were discovered last year: the rice delphacid, the West Indian cane fly, and the pasture mealybug. The AgCenter is partnering with APHIS and LDAF to assist in prevention measures.

LSU Events:

- June 10, 2026: South Farm Rice Field Day – Crowley, LA
- June 11, 2026: 2nd Annual Hay Day – Coushatta, LA
- June 18, 2026: Hammond Research Station Field Day – Hammond, LA
- June 18–21, 2026: LA Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention – New Orleans, LA
- June 24, 2026: Annual H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station Field Day – Crowley, LA

Dr. Salassi also mentioned that the new Burden Welcome Center at the Rural Life Museum opened on May 18th in Baton Rouge. The Rural Life Museum and the Burden Gardens are a joint effort between the LSU A&M campus and the AgCenter.

LACD Update- Mr. Price Gay, LACD President, Member

- 2026 LACD Scholarship Recipient: Mr. Luke Smith-Jena, LA submitted by the LaSalle SWCD.
- The NACD South Central Region- September 17-18, 2026 in Natchitoches, LA. Registration forms and Sponsorship packets will be available in a couple of weeks.
- NACD Summer Meeting - Grand Rapids, MI- July 17-21, 2026
- LACD Quarterly Meeting- June 11, 2026
- LACDE Meeting- July 30, 2026
- 1st Vice President, Mr. Jason Nolde, will be resigning at the end of June and Mr. Chris Martin will move into that position.

Mr. Phillips added that the LACD Coastal Resources Committee meeting is having their Summer Meeting on June 25-26, 2026 in Hackberry, LA.

OSWC Update- Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director

The Louisiana Outdoors Forever Selection Committee meets tomorrow to discuss application rankings, with Mr. Phillips sitting on the technical advisory committee and Mr. Breaux participating on the project selection board. Following several review sessions held earlier this year, funding announcements are expected to be released soon.

A shoreline planting project sponsored by Lafourche-Terrebonne SWCD takes place later this week. Attendees will include Restore or Retreat, Restore America's Estuaries, and the Coastal Conservation Association of Louisiana, and the USACOE Colonel for the New Orleans District and CPRA Executive Director will also be present. As for upcoming projects, the online supervisor training modules with ProProfs are in progress, and the goal is to have the invoice from them by next Commission meeting, after which module development can begin. OSWC is also setting up to film another "Good Lands" video at Delta Dairy in Northeast, LA, featuring the Miller family's prescribed grazing methods using telemetry collars.

Mr. Breaux also provided an update on fluorogypsum, a synthetic by-product with lingering concerns regarding fluoride levels and plant assimilation. DEQ recently referred Solstice management to LDAF and LSU Ag Center to further investigate agricultural uses for their current supply. The LSU AgCenter suggested conducting research with the St. Gabriel Research Station, stipulating that the material must stay on that property.

Finally, discussions are underway to combine the Agricultural Land and Marshland prescribed burn classes on a case-by-case basis to integrate marshland ecological elements into the standard coursework.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Skains said there is 2 resignations this month:

- Mr. Joe Robinson, Dorcheat SWCD, elected position, effective May 1, 2026.
- Mr. Clay Costello, Morehouse SWCD, elected position, effective March 17, 2026.

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

- Mr. Joe Robinson, Dorcheat SWCD, elected position, effective May 1, 2026.
- Mr. Clay Costello, Morehouse SWCD, elected position, effective March 17, 2026.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said there are 2 re-appointments this month:

- Mr. Patrick Klein, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, appointed position, effective May 28, 2026- May 28, 2029.
- Mr. Patrick Hebert, Vermilion SWCD, appointed position, effective September 19, 2026- September 19, 2029.

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

- Mr. Patrick Klein, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, appointed position, effective May 28, 2026- May 28, 2029.
- Mr. Patrick Hebert, Vermilion SWCD, appointed position, effective September 19, 2026- September 19, 2029.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering
Seconded by: Mr. Earl Garber
Motion passed unanimously.

Meritorious Awards

Chairman Skains presented 4 meritorious award requests:

- Vermilion SWCD is nominating Ms. Mitzi Dohrman (district secretary) to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1560.00.
- Vermilion SWCD is nominating Mr. Michael Perry (district planner) to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,198.08.

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 Skains said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the nomination packets for:

- Vermilion SWCD is nominating Ms. Mitzi Dohrman (district secretary) to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1560.00.
- Vermilion SWCD is nominating Mr. Michael Perry (district planner) to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,198.08.

Motion by: Mr. Earl Garber
Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer
Motion passed unanimously.

District Supervisor Election

The 2026 District Supervisor Election Nominating period has ended.

2 district supervisors will be expiring as of June 30, 2026:

1. Allen SWCD- Mr. Jeffrey Manuel
2. Tangi-St. Helena SWCD- Mr. Trenton Forrest

6 brand new supervisors will be joining district boards:

1. Acadia SWCD- Mr. Joseph Sittig III
2. Bodcau SWCD- Mr. James Craig Smith
3. Calcasieu SWCD- Mr. Trace Porter
4. Capital SWCD- Mr. Dale Cambre
5. East Carroll SWCD- Mr. Nick Van Mol
6. Morehouse SWCD- Alan Haynes

There are no elections this year.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Skains said he had the chance to visit with Senator Glen Womack recently. He asked about the \$209,000 that was taken out of last FY budget. Senator Womack confirmed that the \$209,000 had been added to this FY budget.

Mr. Breaux discussed the importance and usefulness of districts preparing district conservation needs summaries or proposals based on their highest priority resource concerns. These proposals should include things such as the resources concern description, estimated costs, partner and staffing needs, and funding needs. The proposals can be a pre-prepared application for addressing high priority resource concerns in the district. OSWC will be ready to assist all districts in preparing these proposals when requested.

Correspondence

- Letter to U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Brook Collins from Commissioner Mike Strain
- Letter to USDA Assistant Chief, Mr. Jimmy Emmons
- Meta Is Transforming Rural Louisiana with a \$200 Billion Data Center
- Planting Green into cover crops is cutting input costs for Central Illinois Farmer
- Texas Soil and Water Stewardship Week Recognizes the Vital Role of Native Ecosystems
- Resource Conservation Is Our Family's Heritage
- How Louisiana Built A Costal Vegetation Restoration Model Other States Can Adapt

Other Business

Next Meeting

Chairman Skains said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled on Tuesday, June 23, 2026 in the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806.

Public Comment

Adjournment

Chairman Skains said if there was no other business or comments from the public or Commission members, He will accept a motion to adjourn.

Motion: At 3:10 P.M. Mr. Brad Spicer made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Price Gay and passed unanimously.

/s/



Mr. Reggie Skains, Chairman, State Soil and Water Conservation Commission