OFFICE OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION

STATE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

December 5, 2017

1:15PM

VETERAN’S AUDITORIUM

5825 FLORIDA BLVD.

BATON ROUGE, LA 70806

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

**CALL TO ORDER**

Vice-Chairman Girouard called the regular monthly Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. Mr. Randell Fletcher said the invocation and Mr. Ed Yerger lead in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ROLL CALL**

The roll was called by Ms. LaClasha “Clay” Alexander.

Members and Alternate Members present: Dr. Ernest Girouard, Vice Chairman; Mr. Randell Fletcher, Mr. John Compton, Secretary/Treasurer; Mr. Donavon Taves, LACD President; Mr. John Pat Boudreaux, Mr. Ed Yerger, and Dr. Rogers Leonard, LSU AgCenter.

Members absent: Mr. Reggie Skains; Chairman, and Southern University Agricultural Center Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present: Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF-OSWC/Executive Director SSWCC; Mr. Kevin Norton, NRCS State Conservationist USDA-NRCS; Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC, Mr. Ray Reich, LDAF-OSWC, and Ms. LaClasha “Clay” Alexander- LDAF-OSWC

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Vice Chairman Girouard asked if there were any comments from the public or Commissioners and there were none.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

Vice Chairman Girouard asked for any comments from the public or Commission members about the November 7, 2017 State Commission minutes. Mr. Norton stated that the members had a copy of the initial draft and not the revised copy of the November 7, 2017 minutes. He requested that the revised minutes be reviewed and be presented for approval. Vice Chairman Girouard called for a motion to approve the revised November 7, 2017 State Commission Meeting minutes.

**Motion:**  Mr. Compton made a motion to approve revised copy of the November 7, 2017 State Commission Meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Yerger and passed unanimously.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Vice Chairman Girouard said they would now take up Unfinished Business and asked Mr. Spicer to review the agenda items with the State Commission.

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

Mr. Spicer said that the first month of the new 2017/2018 Farm Bill agreement had been processed as of November 29th with the district earnings in the amount of $78,117. He said this is approximately 8% of the Farm Bill agreement. He said that they will continue to monitor district earnings to ensure that each district is reporting their farm bill activities.

LACD/NACD 2018 Annual Meetings

Mr. Spicer said that the LACD annual meeting will be at the Best Western Inn & Suites in Alexandria, LA. He said that this is the same hotel where the meeting was held last year. He said that another hotel submitted a proposal but the expenses were higher than the Best Western Inn & Suites. He said that the cost of the meeting rooms was expensive and the Best Western is not charging for the meeting rooms. Mr. Spicer said in his opinion, the quality of food was better and not as expensive at the Best Western.

Mr. Spicer encouraged all district supervisors and employees to attend the meeting. He said that supervisors will have the opportunity to have some input on the new 2018 farm bill. He said that they will have a panel discussing the farm bill and will include Mr. Kevin Norton, Dr. Strain, Mr. Tim Palmer, as well as a representative from Congressman Abraham’s office. He said that there are some very informative presentations scheduled for Wednesday afternoon. He said that USDA, NRCS, FSA will make presentations. Mr. Spicer also said that Mr. Tim Palmer, 1st Vice President of NACD, will discuss NACD’s efforts to enhance the conservation title in the farm bill and other items that they are working on. He said that on Thursday morning Ms. Amanda Vincent, DEQ (Department of Environmental Equality) representative, will discuss non-point to point source water quality trading. He said that there will also be a presentation on Thursday from the Water Institute of the Gulf. He said that on Friday we have the live Ethics Training scheduled for supervisors and district employees. Vice-Chairman Girouard said that if supervisors and employees agree to attend that all cell phones should be off during the training. He said that he could tell that last year the trainer was irritated by the distractions during the training session.

Mr. Spicer said that the NACD meeting will be held in Nashville, TN at the Gaylord Opryland Hotel on January 27-31, 2018. He said they have scheduled some great breakout sessions as well as tours.

**NEW BUSINESS**

NRCS State Conservationist Report

Vice-Chairman Girouard said they would now take up New Business and asked Mr. Kevin Norton to give the NRCS report. Mr. Norton handed out the December issue of the Louisiana *Conservation Update* to review. He said that NRCS is working to get a lot of conservation work completed before Christmas. He said regarding upcoming events that NRCS and the LSU AgCenter are hosting two Soil Health and Cover Crop Conferences. These conferences will be held in West Monroe, LA on January 23, 2018, and the 2nd conference will held at LSU campus in Alexandria on January 24, 2018, and both will start at 8:00 am and will end around 4:00 pm. Mr. Norton said that he believed that Dr. Leonard will likely discuss the conferences later in the meeting. He said that he also wanted to mention the Louisiana Women in Agriculture Conference is scheduled for February 22-23, 2018 in Alexandria, LA. He said that they are getting many sponsors for this event.

Mr. Norton said that the continuing resolution that is funding NRCS is expiring on Friday, December 8, 2017. He said that we are waiting for the new resolution to pass and get signed by the president. He said that congress is working to get a resolution signed to fund the government through December 22nd as well as another one that will go into January 2018. He said that it is important that one of the resolutions get acted on by the end of the week. Mr. Norton said that NRCS has not yet received any shutdown procedures, but that they usually don’t come in until the day before the funding expiration date. He said that they are expecting to get instructions on Thursday and that they plan on making preparations for Friday if the House has not passed anything. He said that he is planning to attend the Rice Outlook Conference in San Antonio, TX on Saturday and plans to return on Tuesday providing the funding resolution is passed.

Mr. Norton said that we still have not received our advisory allocations. He said that they are expecting them within the next week. He said that the Environmental Quality Incentives Program cost list has been released and that the offices are working on their rankings tools and will shortly begin the ranking process. He said that they are currently trying to complete the Conservation Stewardship payments for calendar year 2017. He said that the payments are due in to the National Finance Center on December 15th to be considered on a 2017 IRS form 1099.

Mr. Norton said that he wanted to make mention that Agriculture Committees have pushed development of the 2018 Farm Bill to next year (2018). He reminded the Commission that we have the MOU (Memorandum of Understanding), the Cooperative Working agreement, and the Operation Agreement; three primary documents that we use to outline the working relationship of NRCS with the soil and water conservation districts. He said that Louisiana started in late 2015 trying to include revisions and creating new documents to help with auditing issues where NRCS provides districts with office space and other resources. He said that since we are providing districts with things of monetary value some of the documents must be restructured to show the exchange of resources and values that NRCS is getting in return. He said that we are waiting for the national office to approve the templates that have been submitted for approval.

Mr. Norton said that districts will now likely be in competition with other entities over cooperative agreements on a regular basis. He said about 20% of the agreements will be sent out for solicitation through grants.gov. He said that the administration is making an effort to ensure they are getting the best value for the monies being invested. We have not received the details of this requirement and it will not likely play out until our final allocations are received.

Mr. Norton said NRCS took about a 10% reduction in staff when the current administration took office. He said that NRCS went from over 11,000 employees to about 10,378 employees and that they are still under a hiring freeze. He said they have currently begin implementing the restructuring plan that he shared previously with the commission and they are prioritizing staffing under the 13 resource units.

Mr. Norton said that concluded his report. Vice-Chairman Girouard asked for questions or comments from the members or public. Mr. Breaux asked Mr. Norton about 20% of the agreements being outsourced competitively through grants.gov. Mr. Norton said that all of the agreements with the districts through the OSWC result in a 3 and 5 year agreement and will not be a concern at this time and the smaller agreements may be more of a competitive situation.

Vice-Chairman Girouard thanked Mr. Norton for his report.

Correspondence

Vice-Chairman Girouard asked Mr. Spicer to go over the correspondence. Mr. Spicer said that the first item is a letter that Mr. Compton requested, at the last meeting, be sent to Mr. Charles Severance. He said that Mr. Charles Severance resigned from the Capital SWCD board after 29 years of service and is now planning to be an associate member and the letter thanks Mr. Severance for his service to the Capital SWCD and for agreeing to continue his service as an associate member of the board.

Mr. Spicer said the next item is a letter sent on behalf of the SSWCC to Ms. Laura Edwards thanking her for her dedicated service for twenty plus years to the OSWC and the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission.

Vice-Chairman Girouard said the next item is a letter from Calcasieu SWCD requesting Commission approval for Ms. Rose Sharbeno to attend the Texas State Annual meeting on October 21-23, 2018 in Galveston, TX. Vice-Chairman Girouard asked for any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Calcasieu SWCD’s out of state travel request. Vice-Chairman Girouard requested a motion to approve the request.

**Motion:** Mr. Ed Yerger made a motion to approve Calcasieu SWCD’s request for Ms. Rose Sharbeno to attend the Texas State Annual meeting in Galveston, TX on October 21-23, 2018. Mr. Donavon Taves seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Girouard said the next item is a letter from East Carroll SWCD requesting Commission approval for Mr. Donavon Taves, Mr. Bert Lensing, and Ms. Deborah Morris to attend the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting in Nashville, TN on January 27-31, 2018. Vice-Chairman Girouard asked for any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve East Carroll SWCD’s out of state travel. Vice-Chairman Girouard requested a motion to approve the request.

**Motion:** Mr. Ed Yerger made a motion to approve East Carroll SWCD’s request for Mr. Donavon Taves, Mr. Bert Lensing, and Ms. Deborah Morris to attend the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting in Nashville, TN on January 27-31, 2018. Mr. John Compton seconded and passed unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Girouard said the next item is a letter from Rapides SWCD requesting Commission approval for Ms. Brenda Archer to attend the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting in Nashville, TN on January 27-31, 2018. Vice-Chairman Girouard asked for any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Rapides SWCD’s out of state travel request. Vice-Chairman Girouard requested a motion to approve the request.

**Motion:** Mr. Randell Fletcher made a motion to approve Rapides SWCD’s request for Ms. Brenda Archer and to attend the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting in Nashville, TN on January 27-31, 2018. Mr. Pat Boudreaux seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Girouard said the next item is a letter from Upper Delta SWCD requesting Commission approval for Ms. Carlyn Morales, Ms. Lindsey Gaspard, and Mr. Price Gay to attend the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting in Nashville, TN on January 27-31, 2018. Vice-Chairman Girouard asked for any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Upper Delta SWCD’s out of state travel request. Vice-Chairman Girouard requested a motion to approve the request.

**Motion:** Mr. John Compton made a motion to approve Upper Delta SWCD’s request for Ms. Carlyn Morales, Ms. Lindsey Gaspard, and Mr. Price Gay to attend the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting in Nashville, TN on January 27-31, 2018. Mr. Ed Yerger seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Girouard said the next item is a letter from Vermillion SWCD requesting Commission approval for Mr. Christian Richard, Mr. Leland Vidrine, Dr. Ernest Girouard, Mr. Patrick Hebert, and Mr. Sherrill Sagrera to attend the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting in Nashville, TN on January 27-31, 2018. Vice-Chairman Girouard asked for any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Upper Delta SWCD’s out of state travel request. Vice-Chairman Girouard requested a motion to approve the request.

**Motion:** Mr. Randell Fletcher made a motion to approve Vermillion SWCD’s request for Mr. Christian Richard, Mr. Leland Vidrine, Dr. Ernest Girouard, Mr. Patrick Hebert, and Mr. Sherrill Sagrera to attend the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting in Nashville, TN on January 27-31, 2018. Mr. John Compton seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Vice Chairman Girouard said the next few items are articles. He asked Mr. Spicer to go over these items.

Mr. Spicer said the first article regards Mr. Jim Harper, supervisor on the Rapides SWCD, being named to represent the Louisiana Farm Bureau on the Louisiana Water Resources Commission.

Mr. Spicer said the next item is called “We Need a Farm Bill “published by the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA). He said that in the article NASDA lists their current priorities which include Conservation, Trade Promotion, Specialty Crops, Invasive Species, Animal Diseases, Research, and Food Safety. Mr. Norton said that Commissioner Strain just completed his tenure as President this past year and he said that he didn’t remember conservation being so prominent until the Commissioner made it a priority. Mr. Spicer said that he believed that this will continue because the Commissioner will continue to play an important role in NASDA.

Mr. Spicer said the next few articles cover the speaking tour that the Commissioner and Gov. John Bel Edwards conducted across the state. He asked if any of the Commission members were able to attend the meeting. Mr. Fletcher said that he was unable to make the meeting because of the schedule change. Vice Chairman Girouard said that he was able to attend the meeting in Vidrine, LA and he said that Mr. David Daigle was in attendance and gave presentation. Mr. Taves also stated that he and Chairman Skains attended a meeting in North Louisiana.

Mr. Spicer said the next article is “Grant Supports Farm to School Program” that covers a program designed to increase the amount of locally produced foods served to school children. He said the program is in an effort to improve healthy eating. He said that the grant provides $900,000 to support eating healthy grown food for three years.

Mr. Spicer said the next article covers the impacts of too much moisture for growing Louisiana cotton, soybean crops. He said this article discusses the damage to the Louisiana cotton caused by Hurricane Harvey’s heavy rainfall.

Mr. Spicer said the next article lists the USDA, FSA designated natural disaster area. He said that Cameron, Grant, Natchitoches, and Rapides were added to the list of disaster parishes hit by hurricane Harvey.

Mr. Spicer said the next item covers the new LSU website that focuses on Roseau cane die-off. Mr. Spicer asked Mr. Breaux if he had any comments. Mr. Breaux said that he didn’t know if there was any new information. He said that the last field inspection that the LSU AgCenter entomologists made was about two months ago. He said that the Roseau scale infestation didn’t seem to be any worse and in some areas it appeared to be a little less than usual. Mr. Breaux said the levels of die-off are still variable. He said the local residents believe that the areas are being impacted because of the water hyacinth growth. He said that the wave energy pushed water hyacinth over the thinned Roseau cane. He said this shades out what was left of the Roseau cane and this is where the complete die-off occurs. Mr. Breaux said the next visit should be later on this month. He said that he is interested in seeing how everything looks around February or March because this would mark the one year anniversary of the project.

Mr. Spicer said the last article is “Message from Mr. Craig A. McCain, USDA FSA State Executive Director”. He said this article discusses the ARC and PLC programs which offers a safety net to agricultural producers when there is a substantial drop in prices or revenues for commodities.

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments and Reappointments

Vice-Chairman Girouard asked Mr. Spicer to report on the resignations and reappointments of supervisors. Mr. Spicer said there were no resignations this month and there was one request for the State Commission to appoint a new supervisor.

He said the Crescent SWCD is requesting Mr. Blaise Pezold be appointed to fill the elected vacant position formally held by Mr. Paul Simon. The term will begin December 5, 2017 and will expire on June 30, 2020.

Vice-Chairman Girouard asked for comments from the public or Commission members and there were none; he asked for a motion to approve the appointment of Mr. Blaise Pezold to be an elected position on the Crescent SWCD board of supervisors effective December 5, 2017 and expires on June 30, 2020.

**Motion:** Mr. Randell Fletcher made a motion to approve the appointment of Mr. Blaise Pezold to an elected position on the Crescent SWCD board of supervisors effective December 5, 2017 and expires on June 30, 2020.

Mr. John Compton seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

D&O Insurance, Crime-Bond insurance, Workers Comp and Hired/Non-Owned Auto Insurance

Vice-Chairman Girouard asked Mr. Spicer to go over the district insurance renewal proposal. Mr. Spicer said that OSWC received a quote of $58,772.06 for a three year period from Turrentine Insurance Company. He said that there is an increase of about $2,000. He said that the raise in premium is primarily due to an increase in Workers Comp costs.

Vice-Chairman Girouard asked if there were any public or Commission member comments regarding the Turrentine Insurance bids and there were none. Vice-Chairman Girouard called for a motion to accept the insurance bids.

**Motion:** Mr. Ed Yerger made a motion to accept the insurance bids of $58,772.06 annual premium from Turrentine Insurance Agency for the Directors & Officers Liability and/or Crime/Bond, Workers Compensation and Hired/Non-Owned Auto Liability Insurances effective December 8, 2017 and expiring December 8, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Taves and passed unanimously.

Commission Officers’ Election

Vice-Chairman Girouard called for the election of the State Commission officers and asked Dr. Rogers Leonard if he would conduct the election. He said the current officers are: Mr. Reggie Skains; Chairman, Dr. Ernest Girouard, Vice-Chairman; and Mr. John Compton, Secretary/Treasurer. Dr. Rogers Leonard asked for nominations for the Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Secretary-Treasurer.

**Motion:** Mr. Randell Fletcher made a motion that the present slate of officers be re-elected by acclamation to serve as the 2018 officers for the Louisiana State Soil and Water Conservation Commission: Mr. Reggie Skains, Chairman; Dr. Ernest Girouard, Vice Chairman; and Mr. John Compton, Secretary-Treasurer. The term will begin December 5, 2017 and end December 4, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. John Compton and passed unanimously.

Resolved, Mr. Reggie Skains be re-elected Chairman of the State Soil and Water

Conservation Commission. The term will begin December 5, 2017 and end

December 4, 2018.

Resolved, Dr. Ernest Girouard be re-elected Vice-Chairman of the State Soil and

Water Conservation Commission. The term will begin December 5, 2017 and end

December 4, 2018.

Resolved, Mr. John Compton be re-elected Secretary-Treasurer of the State Soil

and Water Conservation Commission. The term will begin December 5, 2017 and end

December 4, 2018.

Vice-Chairman Girouard thanked the State Commission on behalf of all the officers.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

Vice-Chairman Girouard asked Dr. Rogers Leonard to give a report from the LSU AgCenter. Dr. Rogers Leonard stated that the LSU AgCenter is getting prepared to begin their restructuring phase. He said that he has mentioned the restructuring phase in past meetings and this phase is meant to downsize only a few departments. He said that beginning January 1, 2018, county agents will now only be known as agents will focus primarily on four areas: horticulture, animal science, agronomy, and forest/wildlife. He said that these agents will be assigned a 75% staffing plan across the state. Dr. Leonard said that they will do this plan for the five regions across the state. He said that instead of one agent covering all four specialty areas there will be at least 4 others with the same knowledge as the one agent. He said that they plan on taking existing personnel and having them to service not only their areas but possibly others as well. He said that in any given parish we will have four agents available to service the area instead the usual one agent. Dr. Leonard said that the regional directors have had a sizeable input on how they want to place the personnel across the individual regions. He said that the regions vary and that different agents will be assigned accordingly. He said that they plan to have two horticulturalists in North Eastern Louisiana and 8 in the Southeastern Region because it carries about 48% of Louisiana’s population. He said that in previous years, agents would have to get permission to go into another region and that is now about to change. Dr. Leonard said the plan is to provide overall better service to our ranchers and farmers. He said that when the farmers come into the office, they are not concerned with what your title is but can you solve their problem. He said what you will now see at the commodity meetings is the older agents introducing new agents that will now be responsible for certain activities in their parish. He said that he believed that having people that specialize in our primary areas will better prepare them to answer questions. Dr. Leonard said that there will be a transitioning period that will include making adjustments but believes that in 18 months they will be close to the 75% staffing plan.

Dr. Leonard said that we are working with Commissioner Strain to put a quarantine in place on moving Roseau cane. He said that the Roseau cane has been found far north of the coast. He said that we must work on finding the primary source of spread for this disease and try to manage it. He said that there is additional research currently being conducted. He said the populations of the scale have decreased due to the last cold front we had and the upcoming cold will continue to have the same result. Dr. Leonard said that they are looking forward to the field visit in February and expecting conditions to be worse than before. He said that lack of growth during winter will be emphasized.

Dr. Leonard said that they are close to getting their approvals for an EQUIP project to support long term maintenance of a Silvania Weevil program in Lafayette and Iberia parishes. He said that it appears that we will also have a record cane harvest this year but it won’t be completed until January. He said that in 2017 the AgCenter did not recommend the use of oxy herbicides due to lack of information and potential drip. He said that the AgCenter will not recommend this in 2018 as well for the same reasons. Dr. Leonard said that he doesn’t think the applicators have a way of cleaning out the tanks as of yet. He said that our state has had about 4 to 5 complaints but he feels that there are probably more that are unreported. He said that Arkansas has had over 1,000 complaints and many law suits have been filed due to this new technology.

Dr. Leonard said that he wanted to mention a few up events:

1. Tri-State Soybean Meeting (Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas) – Oak Grove, LA – January 5, 2018
2. Arbor Day Celebration- Botanic Gardens, Baton Rouge, LA – January 20, 2018
3. Ag Expo – Ike Hamilton Expo Center, West Monroe, LA – January 19-20, 2018

Dr. Leonard asked if there were any comments from the the public or Commission members. Mr. Boudreaux said that with the 13 parishes in Northeastern Louisiana being serviced with only 4 specialists, what will the other agents be working on. Dr. Leonard said that moving forward we will have 8 agents in that region. He said that Northeast Louisiana has about currently 11 agents. He said that the Northeast Louisiana is heavy on Agronomy. He said that there will be 2 Horticulturalists, 2-Animal Science, 1-Forest/Wildlife, and possibly 4-5 agronomists.

Vice-Chairman Girouard asked if there any more comments from the public or Commission members and there were none.

Vice-Chairman Girouard thanked Dr. Leonard for his report.

**NEXT MEETING**

Vice-Chairman Girouard said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 10, 2018 at 10:00AM, in the NRCS Conference Room, 3734 Government Street, Alexandria, Louisiana 71302.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Vice-Chairman Girouard asked if there were any other comments from the public or Commission members and there were none.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Vice-Chairman Girouard said if there was no other business or comments from the public or Commission members, he will accept a motion to adjourn.

**Motion:** Mr. Ed Yerger made a motion to adjourn at 2:28 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. John Compton and passed unanimously.

/s/ Dr. Ernest Girouard *\_\_\_\_\_\_*

Dr. Ernest Girouard, Vice-Chairman

State Soil and Water Conservation Commission