

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

September 22, 2020
1:15 PM

VETERAN'S AUDITORIUM
5825 FLORIDA BLVD.
BATON ROUGE, LA 70806

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Girouard called the regular monthly Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. Mr. Steve Horvath gave the invocation and Mr. Alan Williams lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander.

Members and Alternate Members present:

Dr. Ernest Girouard - Chairman
Mr. Steve Horvath-Vice Chairman
Mr. Larry Sayes- Secretary-Treasurer
Mr. John Alan Williams- LACD President
Mr. Reggie Skains, Member
Mr. Ed Yerger, Member
Dr. Mike Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Member

Members absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center
Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. John Pitre, NRCS State Resource Conservationist
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC
Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

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

Approval of the agenda

Chairman Giroaurd called for a motion to approve the September 22, 2020 Agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Larry Sayes

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the minutes

Chairman Giroaurd called for a motion to approve the September 1, 2020 SSWCC minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Second by: Mr. Alan Williams

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement- Mr. Joey Breaux, Director, SSWCC

- Farm Bill total remaining funds on agreement ending September 30, 2020 is approximately 76,000. OSWC plans to draw the remaining balance from the agreement and distribute the funds to districts that have over earned. OSWC has been working with Mr. Kendal Hicks and Mr. Kris Davis in developing the new Farm Bill contract.

LACD Annual Mid-Year Meetings- Mr. Joey Breaux, Director, SSWCC

- Due to Covid-19, we were not able to have the normally scheduled LACD Mid-Year Meeting in Alexandria, LA. The Mid-Year meeting is a big part of the planning for the Annual LACD meeting that happens in January. An announcement was sent out to districts for LACD President, Mr. Alan Williams, asking all committees to have their own virtual LACD Mid-Year meetings and all committees are expected to meet before mid-October and submit any resolutions to Mr. Williams and Mr. Breaux.

Area 1 and 2 State Convention-Mr. Joey Breaux, Director, SSWCC

After the previous SWCC meeting, we were able to secure the Lincoln Parish Safety Complex on October 27, 2020. The convention will be held first at 10:00AM and the SWCC meeting will follow at 1:15 p.m. The announcement recently went out and only a few districts have responded with delegates and alternates. OSWC will be looking for more choices to be submitted through email prior to the convention.

CPA-SWCD Engagements-

Chairman Girouard said we have 4 SWCD CPA Engagement letters:

Avoyelles SWCD entering into agreement with J. Aaron Cooper, LLC- \$575 fee
D'Arbonne SWCD entering into agreement with J. Aaron Cooper, LLC-\$650 fee
Jefferson Davis SWCD entering into agreement with J. Aaron Cooper, LLA- \$1,250 fee
Lower Delta SWCD entering into agreement with J. Aaron Cooper, LLA- \$575 fee

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve these engagement letters.

Motion by: Mr. Larry Sayes

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

New Business

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Mr. John Pitre, State Resource Conservationist

Mr. Pitre said he only had a few updates that Mr. Kacir wanted him to share. NRCS is beginning the hiring process for the new 13 restructuring units as previously discussed. He said 13 District Conservationist (DC) positions were announced throughout Louisiana first and 5 candidates were selected. The remaining positions were advertised nationally and the application process has ended. He said NRCS also has an advertisement coming for the Pathway Internships that includes 10 Soil Conservationist positions and 2 engineering positions. NRCS has also hired 4 new engineers to work on the Coastal Wetland Planning Protection Restoration Act staff and are in process of hiring 4 new technicians in the Watershed Construction groups. Mr. Pitre said once the 13 DC positions are filled, NRCS will advertise for the Senior Planner positions, Soil Conservationists, and Soil Conservationists technician positions.

He said 32 of the 44 field offices are currently in Phase 1 of the NRCS Covid-19 Phases. He said phase 1 allows all the employees to be in their offices but does not allow visitors. Remaining offices are in the "gating"

phase which means they are teleworking primarily. The Lake Charles office is currently not functional and does not have power due to Hurricane Laura.

Mr. Pitre said NRCS's fiscal year is winding down. He said they are 80% obligated in EQIP funds and 60% obligated in CSP funds. He said September 28th is the last day of obligation. He said once 2020 funds have been obligated, they will begin processing CSP and GCI payments. The USDA secretary has a goal to have all payments processed by November 6, 2020.

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

- Chairman Girouard said there are 2 supervisor resignations: Avoyelles SWCD, Mr. James Deshotel (elected)-effective June 30, 2020 and Feliciana SWCD, Mr. Keith McCallum, (elected)-effective August 4, 2020.

Chairman Girouard said there are 2 supervisor appointments for a three year term: Feliciana SWCD, Mr. L. Scott Bickham (elected) - effective August 25, 2020-June 30, 2021 and St. Landry SWCD, Mr. Richard Holier, III (appointed) - effective October 19, 2020- March 26, 2023.

Chairman Girouard said there is 1 supervisor reappointment for three year terms: Vermillion SWCD, Mr. Patrick Hebert (appointed) - effective September 19, 2020-September 19, 2023

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the 2 resignations, 1 appointment, 2 reappointments, and the 1 supervisor reappointment.

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

LSU AgCenter Center Report- Dr. Michael Salassi

Dr. Salassi said that when Covid-19 hit around March, LSU instituted a hiring freeze until they could determine the impacts on their budget. He said they are now starting to fill some vacant positions. He said Dr. Dan Fromme, who is LSU's corn and cotton specialist, retired at the end of August. LSU has advertised for his position and hope to fill the position around the first of the year. He said there is also an agronomist position that will be stationed at the Dean Lee Station in Alexandria who will specialize in soybeans and sugarcane. Dr. Groth, Plant Pathologist in Rayne, is also planning to retire in January and they plan to advertise his position as well. He said Dr. Ron Levy, who has been the coordinator over the Master Farmer Program, will now be taking over the rice extension specialist work. Dr. Donna Gentry will now be taking over the Master Farmer program as coordinator.

Correspondence- Mr. Joey Breaux, Director, SSWCC

EPA Administrator Wheeler Meets with Farmers and Local Officials on Efforts to Provide Regulatory Certainty

Administrator Andrew Wheeler and many others participated in a roundtable discussion. They discussed important topics such as President Trump's Administration's Navigable Waters Protection Rule, which is providing regulatory certainty for farmers across the country and the Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Federal Advisory Committee. EPA determined that certain mitigation measures are warranted for Atrazine, Propazine, and Simazine to address potential human health and ecological risk.

Can Loans Tied To Soil Health Save Agriculture?

Robyn O'Brien and Mr. Don Shaffer joined together to launch rePlant Capital, a new investment fund, to help with the crisis of capitalism by tying interest rates for farm loans to improvements in soil's carbon and water storages as a way to save farmers from the disastrous impacts of climate change. The company was launched

earlier this year after realizing they were fed up with traditional financing options for farmers and ready to get creative.

USDA to Provide Additional Direct Assistance to Farmers and Ranchers Impacted by the Coronavirus

President Trump and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced that agricultural producers could see an additional \$14 billion dollars of funding to cover continued face market disruptions and associated costs because of COVID-19. Signups for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP 2) will begin September 21st and run through December 11, 2020. The payments will be made into three categories: Price Trigger Commodities, Flat-rate Crop, and Sales Commodities. There is a payment limitation of \$250,000 per person or entity for all commodities combined and producers will also have to certify they meet the Adjusted Gross Income limitation of \$900,000 unless at least 75% or more of their income is derived from farming, ranching, or forestry-related activities.

Statewide Update from Mr. Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist

Mr. Kacir went over some NRCS updates. He discussed end of FY obligated funds which have been completely obligated but said that he was appreciative of the effort from everyone. He also stated that most of the field offices were in phase 1 of NRCS Covid-19 phases. The rest are currently in the gating stage. He also mentions that the Lake Charles Field Office is without power due to Hurricane Laura and to that everyone should prepare for Hurricane Sally. He also states that the restructuring process is moving forward and selections have been made for 5 DC positions.

Post Laura Damage Assessment and Clean-up Continues-USA Rice

USA Rice visited Lake Charles, LA to survey the effects of the rice industry following Hurricane Laura. Most of the concern was about getting power to drying facilities to maintain the crop for quality. Harvest is getting underway in northeast Louisiana and Arkansas, where damage to downed and wind-battered rice from Laura's blasts are being viewed.

USDA Updates Conservation Provisions for Highly Erodible Land and Wetlands

USDA published its final rule that determines whether land is considered highly erodible or a wetland. The final rule follows a focused effort by NRCS to improve consistency and use of science in making determinations. The rule endorses most of the changes made by the December 2018 interim final rule and makes these additional final updates:

1. Adding the requirement of the 2018 Farm Bill that USDA will make a reasonable effort to include the affected person in an on-site investigation conducted prior to making a wetland violation technical determination.
2. Further clarifying how wetland hydrology is identified for farmed wetlands and farmed wetland pasture.
3. Adding clarification to the consideration of best-drained condition for wetland hydrology in keeping with definition of prior converted cropland.
4. Relocating the provision that wetland determinations can be done on a tract, field, or sub-field basis in order to improve clarity.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

Chairman Girouard said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 27, 2020 at 1:15 P.M. at the Lincoln Parish Public Safety Complex, 161 Road Camp Road, Ruston, Louisiana 71270.

Public Comments

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

Adjournment

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 2:02 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Horvath and passed unanimously.

/s/ Dr. Ernest Girouard 

Dr. Ernest Girouard, Chairman State Soil and Water Conservation Commission