

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

September 28, 2021
1:15 PM
ZOOM VIRTUAL FORMAT

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

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Girouard called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation 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 Alexander.

Members and Alternate Members present:

Dr. Ernest Girouard – Chairman, Area IV
Mr. Steve Horvath-Vice Chairman, Area V
Mr. John Alan Williams- LACD President
Mr. Jason Nolde, LACD 1st Vice President
Mr. Reggie Skains- Area I Member
Mr. Ed Yerger- Area II Member
Mr. Ed Giering- Area III Alternate
Mr. Brad Spicer- LDAF Alternate Member
Dr. Mike Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate Member

Members absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center
Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist Mr. Michael Schooler, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. LaClasha “Clay” Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

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

Approval of the Agenda

Chairman Girouard called for a motion to approve the September 28, 2021 SSWCC agenda. Mr. Skains asked Chairman Girouard if the Commission could revise the agenda to include the “Federal Shutdown”.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the agenda as revised to include “Federal Shutdown”

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the minutes

Chairman Girouard called for a motion to approve the August 24, 2021 SSWCC minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Alan Williams

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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

The Farm Bill reporting system closed on September 10th with August's Farm Bill total earnings being \$17,498. The system will open on October 10th for districts to enter their September hours. OSWC has been in contact with districts who under earned and they advised OSWC how much of their remaining funds they were expecting to use. The unused farm bill funds were divided into the 32 over earning districts giving them an additional \$955 each. These districts will invoice for these funds in October.

District Funding- Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC

Mr. Breaux said Commission members should have received an email on September 10th advising that OSWC received the state allocation amount for districts and that with no objections, the allocations would be sent without further delay. Since the SWCC's approval of the current District allocation formula at last year's August meeting, none of the formulas critical elements have changed and each SWCD's annual allocation amounts have been prepared and sent to them.

LACD Annual Mid-Year Meeting- Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC and Mr. Alan Williams, LACD President

Mr. Breaux said we wanted to remind standing committees about having their own virtual LACD Committee meetings. After Committees meet, they are to submit to OSWC any resolution topics, conservation concerns, etc. they feel should be included in the Annual LACD Meeting. The Resource Conservation Planning & Application committee has already had their meeting and the Coastal Resources Committee meeting is scheduled soon. The information for the Legislative Committee was also emailed out to most of the members. OSWC is working to make sure the information gets to anyone that may have been missed accidentally. The Legislative Committee will meet on October 13th. One topic on the Legislative Committee's agenda this year is reauthorizing the Feral Swine task force. Conservation districts were not happy with not being represented on this task force initially. The task force was originally setup to take care of a few key functions and was set to sunset after the task functions were completed. Another agenda item for the Legislative Committee will be the creation of the "Outdoor Conservation Study Group" created by Rep. Zeringue. The group will begin studying potential funding sources that could be benefit on enhanced state conservation funding.

Area 3 and 4 State Convention- Dr. Ernest Girouard, Chairman

Dr. Girouard said Area 3 and 4 should have received a letter requesting that their districts submit delegates and alternates for the Area 3 and 4 Election Convention scheduled to take place on December 7, 2021 virtually. The Commission has requested that each district name a delegate and an alternate delegate to OSWC by November 10, 2021. Mr. Breaux said this will be the first time the Commission has had a virtual Election convention. He said he believes there will be challenges especially regarding breakouts. OSWC has done a few test runs and everything has run smoothly. Mr. Spicer suggested OSWC collect contact numbers for the alternates to make sure we have a quorum for the election.

New Business

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Mr. Chad Kacir, State Conservationist

Mr. Kacir said NRCS is getting ready to wrap up their federal fiscal year. NRCS approved approximately 550 EQIP contracts with a total of \$22.4 million, 110 Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contracts with a

total of \$11 million, 80 CSP renewal contracts worth \$8.8 million, 28 new WRE contracts at \$26 million, restoration work on 13,000 acres, and 500 Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts for FSA.

Mr. Kacir said that Ms. Jackie Guillory, his Executive Assistant, got a promotion to work with NRCS's FPAC Business Center. The announcement for that vacant position had already been posted and has already closed. Another position that NRCS will be opening up soon is the Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships. The position had been formerly held by Mr. Scott Edwards.

Mr. Ed Giering asked what the cost share amount for the EWP agreements will be. Mr. Kacir said NRCS will most likely follow FEMA's lead and have 90/10 as their agreement share.

COVID Field Office Requirements & Options- Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC

Mr. Breaux said there was an NRCS conference call on this topic last week. Numerous district employees were on the call and reached out to OSWC with some concerns. Some of their concerns included the vaccination mandate and understanding what district options were. District employees did understand NRCS's reasonable accommodations scenarios and favored similar opportunities for SWCD staff. Mr. Breaux said he would access NRCS's reasonable accommodations for a starting point for development of an SWCD's reasonable accommodation policy draft; the drafts will be made available for review prior to next month's meeting. The Commission and LACD may want to discuss options with NACD if the majority of the districts are interested in influencing a reorientation of the field office COVID response at a national level. If the Commission wishes, OSWC will be ready to assist in reaching out to NACD on the district's behalf.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would ask for a motion to approve Mr. Breaux drafting some guidance that if necessary could be used as vaccine exemption reasonable accommodations scenarios for district employees, as well as essential considerations for teleworking workplans.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

LSU AgCenter Center Report- Dr. Michael Salassi

Dr. Salassi said LSU is in the middle of filling several faculty positions. Every year LSU has staff members that retires leaving positions vacant or on the way to being vacant in upcoming months.

LSU is currently advertising for the following positions:

1. Field Crops Anamologist- Dean Lee Research Station- Alexandria, LA
2. Agronomist- Macon Ridge Station- Winnsboro, LA
3. Director of School of Plant, Environmental, and Soil Science- LSU Campus-Baton Rouge, LA
4. Agronomist- H. Rouse Caffey Rice Station- Crowley, LA
5. Rice Wheat Scientist- H. Rouse Caffey Rice Station- Crowley, LA
6. Rice Pathologist- H. Rouse Caffey Rice Station- Crowley, LA

Dr. Salassi said LSU is starting to process and collect research proposals that will be submitted to the commodity boards for funding. There are three commodity boards: The Rice Research Board, The Soybean and Grain Research and Promotion board, and Cotton Incorporated State Support Committee that will meet in November. These groups will give LSU \$3 million of research funding for next year. LSU has a great relationship with these boards and LSU appreciates the boards supporting the work that they do.

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Girouard said there are three resignations this month: Catahoula SWCD, Mr. H.C. Peck Jr., elected position, effective July 21, 2021; Rapides SWCD, Mr. Max Johnston, appointed position, effective September 28, 2021; and Rapides SWCD, Mr. Danny Coombs, elected position, effective September 28, 2021.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the resignations of Catahoula SWCD, Mr. H.C. Peck Jr., elected position, effective July 21, 2021; Rapides SWCD, Mr. Max Johnston, appointed position, effective September 28, 2021; and Rapides SWCD, Mr. Danny Coombs, elected position, effective September 28, 2021.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously

Chairman Girouard said there are four appointments this month: Dugdeмона SWCD, Mr. Mervin Parker, elected position formerly Mr. Robert Bruce Frazier, effective October 1, 2021- June 30, 2024; Rapides SWCD, Mr. Danny Coombs, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Max Johnston, effective September 30, 2021- June 26, 2023; Rapides SWCD, Mr. Richard Melder, elected position formerly held by Mr. Jim Harper, effective September 30, 2021- June 30, 2023; and Rapides SWCD, Mr. Trey Decker, elected position formerly by Mr. Danny Coombs, effective September 30, 2021- June 30, 2024.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve these appointments: Dugdeмона SWCD, Mr. Mervin Parker, elected position formerly Mr. Robert Bruce Frazier, effective October 1, 2021- June 30, 2024; Rapides SWCD, Mr. Danny Coombs, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Max Johnston, effective September 30, 2021- June 26, 2023; Rapides SWCD, Mr. Richard Melder, elected position formerly held by Mr. Jim Harper, effective September 30, 2021- June 30, 2023; and Rapides SWCD, Mr. Trey Decker, elected position formerly by Mr. Danny Coombs, effective September 30, 2021- June 30, 2024.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Alan Williams

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Girouard said there are two reappointments this month: Feliciana SWCD, Mr. Daniel DeLee Jr., appointed position effective November 23, 2021- November 22, 2024; and Iberia SWCD, Mr. Ben Langlinais, appointed position effective November 26, 2021-November 26, 2024.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve these reappointments: Feliciana SWCD, Mr. Daniel DeLee Jr., appointed position effective November 23, 2021- November 22, 2024; and Iberia SWCD, Mr. Ben Langlinais, appointed position effective November 26, 2021- November 26, 2024.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence/Articles:

Chairman Girouard said the first correspondence items are engagement letters from Caddo SWCD and St. Landry SWCD SWCD requesting approval from the Commission to enter into agreement with J Aaron Cooper, CPA LLC to conduct the district's FYE June 30, 2021 audits at the cost of \$575 and Gulf Coast SWCD requesting approval from the Commission to enter into agreement with Gragson, Casiday & Guillory, LLP to conduct the district's FYE June 30, 2021 audit at a fee not to exceed \$5,000.

Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Caddo SWCD and St. Landry SWCD SWCD requesting approval from the Commission to enter into agreement with J Aaron Cooper, CPA LLC to conduct the district's FYE June 30, 2021 audits at the cost of \$575 and Gulf Coast SWCD requesting approval from the Commission to enter into agreement with Gragson, Casiday & Guillory, LLP to conduct the district's FYE June 30, 2021 audit at a fee not to exceed \$5,000.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains
Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer
Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Girouard said the second set of correspondence regards shared employee agreements between Lower Delta SWCD and Upper Delta SWCD. These districts will share 1) a secretary, Ms. Stephanie Garvin, for which Lower Delta will serve as the control district, and Upper Delta will be billed for 50% hours worked and 2) a technician which will be paid through the Targeted Technician agreement. Lower Delta will again be the control district, and Upper Delta will be billed for 50% hours worked. Chairman Girouard said if there were no comments he would call for a motion to approve the shared employee agreements between Lower Delta SWCD and Upper Delta SWCD.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Yerger
Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer
Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Girouard said the next correspondence is the obituary for Mr. Max Johnston. Mr. Johnston was a board member on the Rapides SWCD board for 32 years. He was a friend, an avid supporter of conservation and will be truly missed. Mr. Spicer said Mr. Johnston had worked in conservation for 75 years. He met Mr. Johnston in 1965 as the Area 5 State Forester. Mr. Skains said Mr. Johnston grew up in his hometown of Downsville, LA and they went to the same high school. Mr. Johnston would faithfully attend their annual high school alumni banquet. The community in Downsville was always proud of Mr. Johnston and his success. Mr. Breaux said Mr. Johnston never missed an opportunity to do in anything on behalf of districts. He was a champion for all conservation districts and he will definitely be missed. Mr. Spicer suggested the Commission draft a letter to Mr. Johnston's family to show the Commission's gratitude for his many years of conservation work.

Articles

- Waters of the United States Update
- U.S. Army Central Review of Legislative & Regulatory Actions
- Leaders on the Land
- Why The south is Decades Ahead of the West in Wildlife Prevention
- RCD No-Cost Chipping Program Gaining in Popularity

Federal Shutdown

Mr. Kacir said NRCS had a meeting with the chief on Monday. The only comment made by the leadership was that they were looking into shutdown procedures. Mr. Kacir believes that the leadership has funds that Louisiana can operate with if a shutdown were to happen. NRCS doesn't expect to have any details of a shutdown until Friday morning. Mr. Breaux said the Field Office Shutdown protocols that OSWC has developed for districts to use over the last few occasions that this has happened are still relevant. District employees only need to coordinate with NRCS and OSWC will issue guidance when necessary.

OTHER BUSINESS

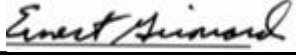
Next Meeting

Chairman Girouard said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 26, 2021 at 1:15PM virtually.

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. Alan Williams made a motion to adjourn at 3:04 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Brad Spicer and passed unanimously.

/s/ Dr. Ernest Girouard 

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