

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

January 25, 2022

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

Vice-Chairman Horvath called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. He gave the invocation and Mr. Ed Yerger lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Ms. LaClasha Alexander.

Members and Alternate Members present:

Mr. Steve Horvath-Vice Chairman, Area V
Mr. Jason Nolde, LACD President
Mr. Reggie Skains- Area I Member
Mr. Ed Yerger- Area II Member
Mr. Ruben Dauzat- Area III Member
Mr. Brad Spicer- LDAF Alternate Member
Mr. Earl Garber, Area IV Member
Mr. Ben Langlinais, Area IV Alternate

Members absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center
Representative

Dr. Mike Salassi, LSU AgCenter

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Crystal Bowman, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Caitlin Joubert, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Doug Daigle, Lower Mississippi River Sub-Basin Committee

Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC
Mr. Michael Schooler, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

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

Approval of the minutes

Vice Chairman Horvath called for a motion to approve the December 7, 2021 SSWCC minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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

Mr. Breaux said that November Farm Bill totals during last month's SWCC meeting weren't available at that time because districts were still actively reporting. November's Farm Bill Total was \$136,750 and December's Farm Bill total was \$122,906. The remaining Farm Bill balance is \$512,552 with 9 months remaining to earn it. If districts continue earning at this rate, the balance may be depleted prior to the end of the agreement.

LACD Annual Meeting/ NACD Meeting -Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC

Mr. Breaux said he wanted to remind everyone the Annual LACD meeting is scheduled for April 19-21, 2022. We hope to have more information about LACD at the next Commission meeting. NACD leadership has expressed that the new date makes it difficult for row croppers to attend. Mr. Gary Blair, NACD Secretary-Treasurer, has confirmed that he will attend the meeting. Currently there are plans to include the retired State Conservationists and all of them to be looking forward to it. Mr. Spicer has reached out to each of them and currently they will be a part of the Opening Session. Mr. Breaux also said LACD recently held a virtual Business Meeting. During the meeting, new LACD Officers were elected, and they are: Mr. Jason Nolde, Calcasieu SWCD- LACD President, Mr. Jacob Marceaux, Calcasieu SWCD- LACD 1st Vice President, Mr. Ben Langlinais, Iberia SWCD- LACD 2nd Vice President and Mr. Ruben Dautat, Avoyelles SWCD- LACD Secretary-Treasurer. During the meeting two resolutions were approved:

1. Requesting support for re-establishment of the Feral Swine Task Force- Legislation is being drafted by the Wildlife Federation and would allow Commissioner Strain to appoint 4 people. One the appointments will be from the State Commission to have district representation. The legislation also recommends that the taskforce sunsets at 10 years rather than the 5 years it was previously. Mr. Jack Mcfarland of Winn Parish is expected to submit this legislation.
2. Preventing reversion back to the 2015 WOTUS wetland exemptions- This resolution was submitted immediately on the NACD portal and most likely there are many resolutions from other states on this topic. We are waiting to hear from Mr. Wesley Gibson, South Central Region Rep, with comments on the process.

The NACD Annual Meeting is set to take place February 12-16, 2022 in Orlando, FL. Travel restrictions due to the Omicron variant may be a deterrent for this meeting for lots of people. Mr. Breaux said that he and Mr. Theron Phillips are planning to attend. NACD does plan to have Covid-19 clearances and check-ins.

Sexual Harassment Training for Commission Members- Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC
LDAF attorneys had previously requested that all LDAF Commissions complete this training due. SWCC members and alternates successfully completed these requirements for 2021. We are expecting to hear from the department again for a new link for training in 2022 and this will be distributed to the Commission members.

New Business

Election of Officers- Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice-Chairman

- Vice Chairman Horvath asked for nominations for Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. Mr. Reggie Skains nominated Mr. Earl Garber and Mr. Brad Spicer seconded the nomination. Vice Chairman Horvath asked were there any other nominations and there were none. Vice Chairman said if there were no comments, the Commission would move to accept the nomination for Mr. Earl Garber to be elected Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. There were no comments. **The Commission unanimously elected Mr. Earl Garber as Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission.**
- Vice Chairman Horvath asked for nominations for Vice Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. Mr. Ed Yerger nominated Mr. Steve Horvath and Mr. Brad Spicer seconded the nomination. Vice-Chairman Horvath asked were there any other nominations and there were none. Vice Chairman Horvath said if there were no comments, the Commission would accept the nomination

for Mr. Steve Horvath to continue to hold the position of Vice-Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. **The Commission unanimously elected Mr. Steve Horvath as Vice Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission.**

- Vice Chairman Horvath asked for nominations for Secretary-Treasurer of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. Mr. Ed Yerger nominated Mr. Ruben Dauzat and Mr. Jason Nolde seconded the nomination. Vice Chairman Horvath asked were there any other nominations and there were none. Vice Chairman Horvath said if there were no comments, the Commission would accept the nomination for Mr. Ruben Dauzat to be elected Secretary-Treasurer of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. **The Commission unanimously elected Mr. Ruben Dauzat as Secretary-Treasurer of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission.**

Vice -Chairman Horvath then asked for a motion to confirm the SWCC officer elections as recorded.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously

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

Mr. Kacir said NRCS Field Offices have been operating at a 25% staffing level. However, yesterday he received news Judge Jeffrey V. Brown, South District of Texas judge issued a nationwide temporary restraining order blocking Executive Order 14043 that required federal agencies to implement vaccination requirements for all their employees. USDA followed this announcement with one to all employees that stated staff should refrain from issuing enforcement regarding the vaccination mandate and stop reviewing medical and religious accommodation requests from unvaccinated employees. The Department of Justice has indicated that they intend to appeal the court's decision. Conservation partners to NRCS will still have to follow the "Visitors" protocol that requires them to carry an Attestation Form as well as negative Covid test that should be taken 3 days prior to them entering NRCS offices.

Mr. Kacir said NRCS was supposed to begin their "Return to work" process at the beginning of January and has since been moved a few times due to infection rates increasing. There have not been any new dates announced to have NRCS fully staffed and back in the offices. Some places in the US have been able to return to at least 75% staffing and Louisiana is making strides but not quite there.

NRCS Louisiana offices will not be attending the NACD annual meeting in Orlando, FL. He said some of the NRCS local offices in Florida do not plan to attend. NRCS does have high hopes to attend the Annual LACD meeting in April. He hopes that NRCS can get some of the new employees in for at least a half day of the LACD meeting to be apart of the workshops and to meet some fellow NRCS staff.

LSU AgCenter Center Report- Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC/ Director SSWCC

Dr. Salassi couldn't attend the Zoom call today but did want us to be reminded of the following events:

1. February 9-11, 2022- Louisiana Agriculture Consultant Conference- Paragon Casino-Marksville, LA
2. February 12, 2022- Southwest Louisiana Forestry Association Annual Meeting and Forestry Forum: Let's Visit Again- Rosepine Research Station- Rosepine, LA
3. February 15, 2022- 36th Annual Ark-La-Tex Forestry Forum: Tress are Necessities- LSU University Center- Shreveport, LA.

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Mr. Breaux said there are three resignations this month:

- Caddo SWCD, Mr. Marty Wooldridge, appointed position effective December 7, 2021
- Feliciana SWCD, Mr. John Patrick, appointed position effective November 2, 2021
- Lafayette SWCD, Mr. Eddie Lewis, elected position effective December 15, 2021

Vice Chairman Horvath said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve these resignations:

- Caddo SWCD, Mr. Marty Wooldridge, appointed position effective December 7, 2021
- Feliciana SWCD, Mr. John Patrick, elected position effective November 2, 2021
- Lafayette SWCD, Mr. Eddie Lewis, elected position effective December 15, 2021

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ruben Dauzat

Motion passed unanimously

Mr. Breaux said there is one appointment this month: Feliciana SWCD, Mr. Jeffrey Gardner, elected position formerly held by Mr. John Patrick, effective January 25, 2022- June 30, 2025.

Vice Chairman Horvath said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the appointment of Feliciana SWCD, Mr. Jeffrey Gardner, elected position formerly held by Mr. John Patrick, effective January 25, 2022- June 30, 2025.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Earl Garber

Motion passed unanimously

Mr. Breaux said there were two reappointments this month:

- Avoyelles SWCD, Mr. Ruben Dauzat, appointed position effective February 24, 2022- February 24, 2025
- West Carroll SWCD, Ms. Meagan Percle, appointed position effective February 24, 2022- February 24, 2025

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

- Avoyelles SWCD, Mr. Ruben Dauzat, appointed position effective February 24, 2022- February 24, 2025
- West Carroll SWCD, Ms. Meagan Percle, appointed position effective February 24, 2022- February 24, 2025

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Meritorious Award:

Mr. Breaux said we received three Meritorious Awards Requests:

1. East Carroll SWCD nominating Ms. Deborah Morris, District Secretary, to receive an award of Significant achievement award for \$500
2. Morehouse SWCD nominating Ms. Erin James, District Secretary, to receive an exceptional performance award of 3% of her annual base salary. (\$1,404.00)
3. Morehouse SWCD nominating Mr. Taylen Jarrell, District Technician, to receive an exceptional performance award of 3% of his annual base salary. (\$1,123.20)

The Meritorious award nomination packets were 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.

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

1. East Carroll SWCD nominating Ms. Deborah Morris, District Secretary, to receive an award of Significant achievement award for \$500
2. Morehouse SWCD nominating Ms. Erin James, District Secretary, to receive an exceptional performance award of 3% of her annual base salary. (\$1,404.00)
3. Morehouse SWCD nominating Mr. Taylen Jarrell, District Technician, to receive an exceptional performance award of 3% of his annual base salary. (\$1,123.20)

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Earl Garber

Passed unanimously

Correspondence/Articles:

Vice Chairman Horvath said the first correspondence is an out of state request from Rapides SWCD requesting authorization for Ms. Brenda Archer to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 11-17, 2022, in Orlando, FL.

Vice Chairman Horvath said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the out of state travel request.

Motion by: Mr. Ruben Dauzat

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Articles

- Covid-19 Protocols
- Develop strategies for healthy soil
- Florida Ag Leaders Aim to Enhance Sustainability; Protect Gulf Coast Bays, Estuaries
- U.S. Army Central Review
- The Daily Voice
- LSU AgCenter: Louisiana Conservation and Coastal Updates
- Protect districts that protect soil and water
- USDA to Invest up to \$225 Million in Partner-Driven Conservation on Agricultural and Forest Land
- Rice Industry Leaders Awarded for Superlative Stewardship Practices
- gSSURGO Updated 2021
- Western Energy Monitor

OTHER BUSINESS

Vice Chairman Horvath asked Mr. Daigle if he wanted to make any comments about the Reinvestment Act. The new Bipartisan Infrastructure bill includes common interest in the areas that he works in as well the Commission. Included in the bill were some NRCS Watershed program funds as well as a provision sponsored by Senator David Cassidy. The provision provides direct funding to the 12 states: Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin that are apart of the Gulf Hypoxia Task Force. All 12 states would receive \$1 million/ year each for the next 5 years. The language in the bill states that the funds will be used for implementation of the Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan. EPA will provide some guidance language for the 12 states soon. With the passing of the infrastructure bill, the states avoid having to go through the normal EPA grant process. Each state has an agency that represents them on the

Hypoxia Task Force. These agencies will oversee distributing the funds from the infrastructure bill. The Governor's Office of Coastal Activities represents Louisiana and will be the decision makers for the funds. Mr. Daigle said he believes the OSWC, and the local conservation districts should be at the front of the line for funds because Louisiana's conservation districts could be of great assistance with an upcoming deadline for one of the action plans. Once the guidance is announced, the states will have 60 days to submit their plans for the funds. Mr. Daigle suggested the Commission create a resolution at the next meeting. Mr. Breaux suggested that the Commission preapprove a resolution after review of Mr. Daigle, Vice-Chairman Horvath, and Mr. Spicer.

Vice-Chairman Horvath said if there weren't anymore comments, he would ask for a motion to preapprove a resolution after being reviewed by Mr. Daigle, Vice Chairman Horvath, and Mr. Spicer.

Motion: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Earl Garber

Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Breaux said he spoke with Mr. Ben Langlinais and he advised that the Supreme Court was on the way to hearing and reviewing comments for WOTUS. He asked Mr. Langlinais if he had any comments on this. Mr. Langlinais said he received some information yesterday. There was a couple who were trying to build a home in Idaho but EPA wasn't allowing them to build on it because it was in the Nexus part of the borders of the U.S. Due to changes in the court since the last time the case was tried, this could change the verdict for the couple but the judgement wouldn't be given until 2023.

Mr. Breaux said last year a bill was introduced to create a conservation funding study group. LDAF was included in the bill and the Commissioner assigned him as a member. Mr. Spicer and Mr. Breaux had been a part of a review committee working with the Nature Conservancy along with Mr. Tim Landreneau of NRCS. A report is expected to be submitted next month. The report will include 4 major sectors: working land easements, idle or conservation land easements, public lands, and conservation on working lands and farmlands. There isn't a list of funded entities suggested, but Mr. Breaux was able to suggest "political subdivisions of the state" be added to the report.

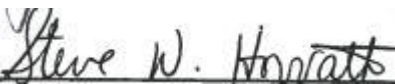
Next Meeting

Vice Chairman Horvath said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 22, 2022 at 1:15PM virtually.

Adjournment

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

Motion: Mr. Brad Spicer made a motion to adjourn at 2:17 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Yerger and passed unanimously.



Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice-Chairman, State Soil and Water Conservation Commission