

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

February 28, 2023
1:15 PM

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

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Garber called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. Mr. Reggie Skains gave the invocation and Chairman Garber lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

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

Members and Alternate Members present:

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

Members Absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Ms. Candis Voorhies, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Initiatives
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC / Director
Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

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

Approval of the agenda

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the February 28, 2023 SSWCC agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the January 11, 2023 SSWCC minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement-

Mr. Breaux said January's Farm Bill drawdown was \$135,032 bringing the FY Farm Bill balance to \$1,037,337. Farm Bill reports show that Calcasieu and DeSoto have maxed out their Farm Bill funds. If districts current reporting trends continue, the FY Farm bill balance will max out before end of the year.

NACD Fly-In- March 22-23,2023

Chairman Garber said the NACD Fly-In will be held in person March 22-23, 2023. He said that he wouldn't be able to attend the Fly-In but has asked Mr. Skains to take his place with Mr. Breaux and Mr. Langlinais. Mr. Breaux said that most of the scheduled meetings occur on the first day. Schedules with the Congressmen and Senators haven't been finalized yet but there are plans to have it done the week before the Fly-In.

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Ms. Candis Voorhies, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnership and Initiatives

Chairman Garber welcomed Ms. Voorhies and asked that she give the NRCS State Conservationist report. Ms. Voorhies presented the Commission with the following information:

NRCS Staffing

- 202 Full-time Employees
- State Grazing Land Specialist vacancy closed today (02/28/2023)
- Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations vacancy (Area 1) closes 03/10/2023. Mr. Scott Breedlove will cover this position for the next 120 days.
- 7 Soil Conservationist Technicians vacancies available (Monroe, Clinton, Lake Charles, New Orleans, Ville Platte, and Donaldsonville)
- 13 Soil Conservationist vacancies (Coushatta, Bastrop, Marksville, Leesville, Addis, Denham Springs, Lake Charles, Rayville, Tallulah, Opelousas, Franklinton, Crowley, and New Iberia)
- LARU DCs vacancies (LARU 6,10,13) will be advertised soon.

Chairman Garber asked if NRCS has a numeric employee goal. Ms. Voorhies stated that if NRCS has the funds to hire then they would take advantage. NRCS has been having some difficulties hiring internally as well as nationwide.

NRCS Programs

- EQIP Classic signup ended on November 18, 2022. NRCS was on schedule to assess and rank applications but had to pause the process due to a glitch in the computer applications. They had to review some applications for a 2nd time, but they are now on schedule and plan to announce selections for preapproval soon. (FY 23 budget- \$20 Million)
- CSP Classic signup ended on January 20, 2023. NRCS is currently in the assessment phase and the ranking deadline for these applications is April 28th. (FY 23 budget- \$12 Million)
- Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds have arrived. Signups were announced last Friday after NACD. The deadline to signup for EQIP and CSP IRA funds is March 17, 2023.
- IRA EQIP and CSP are almost the same as EQIP and CSP Classic. The only difference is the IRA EQIP requires one Climate Smart Practice. (FY 23 IRA Funding- \$2.3 Million for EQIP and 4.8 million for CSP)
- Louisiana Women in Ag Conference- April 14,2023- Alexandria, LA

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

Dr. Salassi advised the Commission members about the upcoming events:

- March 3, 2023- LSU Hall of Distinction Award Ceremony-Baton Rouge, LA (Inductees include Mr. Gerard Frey-Acadia SWCD, Mr. Steve Linscombe, and Mr. Jackie Theriot.
- March 30, 2023- Soil Health Field Day, Northeast Research Station- St. Joseph, LA- 9AM

Dr. Salassi also mentioned that the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (AAPLU) are working on getting more funding for agricultural experiment stations. About 2-3 years ago, AAPLU conducted a nationwide survey that concluded that there's an estimated \$11 billion needed for infrastructure to the experiment stations. This year, AAPLU will attempt to use the Research Facilities act that was created in the 1960s to add approximately \$5 billion to the farm bill budget for infrastructure.

Dr. Salassi said that concluded his report and Chairman Garber thanked him.

OSWC Report- LA Watershed Initiative

Mr. Breaux said there have been many recent updates regarding the LA Watershed Initiative. Mr. Pat Forbes has requested to get in front SWCDs to discuss nature-based solutions while getting more of an understanding about districts. He was able to attend the Area 4 meeting and asked Mr. Breaux about "Agricultural Best Practices". Mr. Breaux discussed Best Management Practices (BMPs) with Mr. Forbes and he asked were there any practices that help in floodplain management and improving watershed dynamics. Mr. Breaux said a 319 workplan could be used by replacing "water quality" with "watershed management" using some of the same practices. The revised workplan could overlay district-led PL-566 work areas based on HUC 12's. Mr. Forbes was interested in the idea and offered to cover any required match that he may, but current plans don't cover watershed management as written. There are plans for a conference call to discuss these plans further with Mr. Forbes and help districts to prepare many opportunities that may be coming their way regarding carbon friendly and soil health practices. Mr. Langlinais said the planning process for PL-566 plans requires a lot of information and some of the information is not easily accessible. The information must be modeled correctly, or you won't be approved for the funding.

LA Outdoors Forever-Potential SWCD Projects

Mr. Breaux said the Commission has been discussing the LA Outdoors Forever funding that will become available soon. The flyer that was sent out to district supervisors and district secretaries gives advance notice of their request for proposal (RFP) which is scheduled to be released on March 20th. The deadline to submit pre-applications will be May 19th. Eligible project types include:

1. land conservation of important natural areas, including fish and wildlife habitat.
2. Historic properties adjacent to or integral to habitat restoration or enhancement.
3. Working land, farms, and forested land
4. Water quality projects related to land conservation or land management, including those lands that protect drinking water supplies.
5. Recreational properties related to important natural areas and public use.

Deadlines to remember:

Request for proposal- March 20, 2023

Deadline to submit pre-applications- May 19, 2023

Eligible projects are invited by the Technical Advisory Board to complete a full application- June 19, 2023

Stewardship Proclamation

Mr. Breaux said he has been in discussions with Mr. Todd Parker and Commissioner Strain regarding getting a signature from the governor on the proclamation. They discussed having the commissioner sign it first and then have it taken over to the governor. The idea is to have the commissioner sign the proclamation at one of the commission meetings. Mr. Breaux said ideas can be discussed later.

SWCC Resignation

Chairman Garber said we received a resignation letter from Mr. Ruben Dauzat, Avoyelles SWCD, who represents Area 3 on the Commission. He asked that the members review the letter presented and if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to accept the resignation. Mr. Spicer suggested the Commission send a special letter to Mr. Dauzat to wish him well and to thank him for his service to the Commission.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber stated during Area 3's meeting at LACD this year, there was a recommendation that Mr. Ed Giering would fill Mr. Dauzat's position as the Area 3's Commission member and Mr. Greg Monceaux of Allen SWCD would be Area 3's Commission member alternate. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the recommendation.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

Resolved, Mr. Ed Giering, Natchitoches Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as the Area III Member of the State Commission and Mr. Gregory Monceaux, Allen Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as Area III Alternate Member of the State Commission with their terms beginning February 28, 2023 and expiring December 7, 2024.

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there are 2 SWCD supervisor resignations this month:

- Mr. Danny Martin, Bodcau SWCD, elected position, effective February 23, 2023.
- Mr. Kent Blade, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, elected position, effective February 9, 2023.

Mr. Breaux advised that the resignation letter for Mr. Martin should be revised to show that he is resigning from his "elected" position and resubmitted.

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

- Mr. Danny Martin, Bodcau SWCD, elected position, effective February 23, 2023.
- Mr. Kent Blade, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, elected position, effective February 9, 2023.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ben Langlinais

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said we have 6 SWCD supervisor appointments this month:

- Mr. Patrick Beauvais, Bodcau SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Danny Martin, effective February 28, 2023- June 30, 2023.
- Mr. Danny Martin, Bodcau SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Elmore Morris, effective February 28, 2023- March 22, 2025.
- Mr. Alvin "Brusier" Melancon, Crescent SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Blaise Pezold, effective February 28, 2023- June 30, 2023.
- Ms. Melissa Echols, D'Arbonne SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Kenneth Halley, effective February 28, 2023- June 30, 2024.
- Mr. Kent Blades, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Hank Schumacher, effective February 28, 2023- May 24, 2024.

- Mr. Darrell Sinagra, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Kent Blades, effective February 28, 2023- June 30, 2023.

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

- Mr. Patrick Beauvais, Bodcau SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Danny Martin, effective February 28, 2023- June 30, 2023.
- Mr. Danny Martin, Bodcau SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Elmore Morris, effective February 28, 2023- March 22, 2025.
- Mr. Alvin "Brusier" Melancon, Crescent SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Blaise Pezold, effective February 28, 2023- June 30, 2023.
- Ms. Melissa Echols, D'Arbonne SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Kenneth Halley, effective February 28, 2023- June 30, 2024.
- Mr. Kent Blades, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Hank Schumacher, effective February 28, 2023- May 24, 2024.
- Mr. Darrell Sinagra, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Kent Blades, effective February 28, 2023- June 30, 2023.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ben Langlinais

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 4 SWCD supervisor re-appointments this month:

- Ms. Annette Blount, Bodcau SWCD, appointed position, effective March 22, 2023- March 22, 2026.
- Mr. Richard Fontenot, Evangeline SWCD, appointed position, effective March 26, 2023- March 26, 2026
- Mr. Randell Fletcher, Grant SWCD, appointed position, effective March 28, 2023-March 28, 2026
- Mr. Jeffrey Durand, St. Martin SWCD, appointed position, effective March 26, 2023- March 26, 2026

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

- Ms. Annette Blount, Bodcau SWCD, appointed position, effective March 22, 2023- March 22, 2026.
- Mr. Richard Fontenot, Evangeline SWCD, appointed position, effective March 26, 2023- March 26, 2026
- Mr. Randell Fletcher, Grant SWCD, appointed position, effective March 28, 2023-March 28, 2026
- Mr. Jeffrey Durand, St. Martin SWCD, appointed position, effective March 26, 2023- March 26, 2026

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

District Supervisor Election-June 10, 2023

Mr. Breaux said the draft Annual District Supervisor's Election packet has been prepared for the Commission's review. The list with instructions and a blank petition is included in the packet. If a district board has more than 1 candidate interested in the vacant elected position, the board must hold an election on Saturday, June 10, 2023. All districts are also asked to email their election notices with locations to OSWC before April 1, 2023, which is the start of the nominating period. All supervisors who have no opposition will be duly elected at the May SWCC meeting. Mr. Breaux asked that the Commission approve the packet to be emailed out to districts to have it ready for them to discuss at their March board meeting.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the District Supervisor Election packet.

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

Meritorious Award:

Chairman Garber said we received one Meritorious award request:

- Boeuf River SWCD nominating Ms. Chaka Webb, District Technician, to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,000.

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

- Boeuf River SWCD nominating Ms. Chaka Webb, District Technician, to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,000.

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

Correspondence/Articles:

- Omnibus spending bill didn't leave ag out
- What they are saying: Industry leaders back legislation to reverse Biden WOTUS rule
- Louisiana Conservation & Commodity Updates- January 2023- Issue 1
- Planting Seeds: Multi-million investment to reforest Kisatchie National Forest Underway
- Rain or Drought? What to expect from the weather following the end of La Nina?
- AG Daily

OTHER BUSINESS

- Chairman Garber asked Mr. Langlinais if he had any comments regarding the LACD Executive Director's position. Mr. Langlinais said this position will be funded through an NRCS agreement that Mr. Kacir presented during the LACD meeting. Ms. Voorhies was able to compose a job description for the position that is currently under review. LACD is also working to make sure they have their SAMS and DUNS information in place so that they can receive payment from NRCS. There are plans to have meetings with the LACD board of directors ad hoc committee to further discuss edits to the job description. Mr. Breaux said he was able to also meet West Virginia's Executive Director at NACD and has been in contact with her, hoping for an opportunity for her to share any useful insight in position development.
- Chairman Garber mentioned that Mr. Langlinais has moved into the LACD President position leaving the SWCC Area 4 alternate position vacant. In response to this, the plan is to reach out to Area 4 SWCDs and have them recommend someone to fill the alternate position. These choices will be brought up at the next Commission meeting. Mr. Breaux stated that the new alternate member will fill the unexpired term which ends December 7, 2024.

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 28, 2023 in the Management and Finance Conference Room, 5825 Florida Boulevard, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70806.

Adjournment

Chairman Garber 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 3:06 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Yerger and passed unanimously.



/s/

Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman, State Soil and Water Conservation Commission