

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

March 28, 2023
1:15 PM

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY
MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE CONFERENCE ROOM
5825 FLORIDA BOULEVARD
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Garber called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. Mr. Steve Horvath 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 March 28, 2023 SSWCC agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the minutes

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

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement-

Mr. Breaux said February's Farm Bill drawdown was \$124,828. The total remaining balance for this FY Farm Bill is \$507,423. Four districts have maxed out of their funds: Calcasieu (\$15,730), Capital (\$204), DeSoto (\$5,309), and Lower Delta (\$2,717). Mr. Breaux stated that OSWC will soon be working with NRCS to amend the current agreement or to initiate a new Farm Bill agreement. Chairman Garber asked Ms. Voorhies if it would be beneficial to amend the current agreement or initiate a new one. Ms. Voorhies stated that with future Infrastructure Reduction Act (IRA) funds arriving, it may be beneficial for NRCS to initiate a new Farm Bill agreement. Chairman Garber suggested that initiating a new agreement within the next year and half should be the goal. Ms. Voorhies said NRCS has not issued any guidance on how IRA funds will be expended.

Legislative Regular Session/State Funding

Mr. Breaux said Grassroots reports have been discussed during a recent meeting with Commissioner Strain regarding a sustained source of income for conservation district operating budgets. Commissioner Strain agreed that more funding was needed for conservation districts and that he would continue his efforts. Chairman Garber said we must make sure conservation district needs are known to everyone who can assist in all efforts especially funding. Mr. Breaux said districts must continue to prepare Grassroots reports to reflect the statewide needs of conservation districts to legislators. Mr. Giering asked the Commission what districts could do to further assist funding efforts. Mr. Breaux said there have been many ideas proposed on how to get more funding to districts, but it has to be presented at the right time. Also, efforts to assist districts with funding could be sourced by our future LACD Executive Director. Mr. Skains stated that there will be some new legislators to educate on conservation efforts which will help as well. Chairman Garber said he knows that timing is a key factor in asking for funding but suggests a request in increased funding this year.

Mr. Spicer reviewed HB125 presented by Representative Michael Echols, providing relative to protection of LA ag land from foreign adversarial ownership. He said that the legislation should be expanded to request that there be information on any foreign owners of Louisiana land. Chairman Garber said if no one has any comment, he would call for a motion to request that the wording of HB 125 be rephrased to request information on any foreign ownership of Louisiana land, in addition to US adversaries.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Passed unanimously.

Mr. Breaux referenced copied of a list of pre-filed bills as of March 27, 2023.

NACD Fly-In Update

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Breaux, Mr. Skains, and Mr. Langlinois for an NACD Fly-In update. Mr. Breaux and Mr. Langlinois agreed that it was a very productive meeting. Mr. Skains said they were able to meet with all 8 Louisiana Congressional Delegation offices and were also able to meet with the Chief of Staff of the House Appropriations Committee. Congressman Garrett Graves lead a night tour of the Capital Building which included a meeting with the Speaker of the House, Mr. Kevin McCarthy. They also visited the House Chamber and were able to sit in the Congressmen's seats. Mr. Breaux said they did run into a few familiar faces while heading to the meetings, including Mr. Chip Kline of Governors Office of Coastal Activities, numerous CPRA staff as well as many parish presidents. Prior to the tour, they were invited to a crawfish boil being held in the

Longworth Building. Mr. Breaux said there were productive conversations and many of the meetings ran out of time.

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

Chairman Garber asked Ms. Voorhies to give the NRCS State Conservationist report. Ms. Voorhies presented the Commission with the following information:

NRCS Staffing

- 207 Full-time Employees
- Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations vacancy (Area 1) closes 03/10/2023. Mr. Scott Breedlove will cover this position for the next 100 days.
- Advertisement for LARU DCs vacancies (LARU 6,10,13) closed on 03/23/2023. Interviews will be conducted soon.
- Entry Level Business Tools Coordinator vacancy
- Area Biologist vacancy
- Area Agronomist vacancy
- 2 Civil Engineers vacancies

NRCS Programs

- EQIP Classic signup ended on November 18, 2022. Preapprovals are complete and obligations are expected to be completed by the end of May.
- 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.
- Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) EQIP and CSP signups ended March 27th. Eligibility, assessment, ranking, and cost estimates will be due on April 28th.
- In the process of negotiating a partnership with Ducks Unlimited for a new RCPP project. Expected to be approved in a couple of weeks and signups will follow.
- Notice of Funding opportunity for outreach and technical agreements- signups end May 10th and is on Ezfed and Grants.gov.
- Louisiana Women in Ag Conference- April 14,2023- Alexandria, LA

Chairman Garber asked Ms. Voorhies about the IRA signups. Ms. Voorhies said that she doesn't have an update now but any application that was already on file that contained any IRA practices is considered eligible for IRA funds. Ms. Voorhies said that she could get an update prepared for next meeting and will hope to have more details on a possible new signup period for the funds.

Mr. Skains asked the Commission how many of their districts are signing cooperative agreements. Mr. Breaux said every district that is a part of the salvinia distribution efforts with LSU signs them as well as feral swine participants. Mr. Breaux said Mr. John Pitre started an initiative about 10 years back that included a push to return to having cooperative agreements signed. Some landowners require a signed cooperative agreement before anything is done on their property. Chairman Garber said this practice began to decrease when the matter of confidentiality became a factor. He asked how districts could review these agreements while being discreet. Mr. Breaux said districts have been advised to discuss cooperators during Executive Session. Chairman Garber asked Ms. Voorhies if it would be possible to include a cooperative agreement during the NRCS signups and Ms. Voorhies agreed. Mr. Langlinalis said also that at one point, conservation plans were tract based and not farm based. When EQIP applications first began, there was only one contract per tract but EQIP plans were later created for producers. Tracts then began to come within contracts, none of which were available to the landowner for his or her review. Ms. Voorhies stated that the landowner may have signed a Land Concurrence form which allows a producer to have access a tract but doesn't disclose the producer's personal information. Chairman Garber said the Commission should work to find a solution to this issue. Ms. Voorhies said that she would do some research to find some resolution to this matter and report back at the next meeting.

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

Dr. Salassi said interviews for Vice President of Agriculture and Dean of Agriculture took place this week. The president hopes to choose candidates soon. Dr. Salassi said he was invited to a few sessions of each interview and there were some impressive candidates including the interim Vice President, Dr. Matt Lee. Chairman Garber said he did receive an invite to listen to the interview.

Dr. Salassi said there are a couple of important events to remember:
March 30, 2023- Soil Health Field Day-Northeast Station, St. Joseph, LA
April 20, 2023- Wheat and Oat Field Day, Macon Ridge station, Winnsboro, LA

Dr. Salassi did mention they received funding to hire a crawfish extension agent and it will be filled with an agent already stationed in the Central region.

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

OSWC Report

Mr. Breaux said Morehouse SWCD has gotten some great funding opportunities in recent months. The Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA) applying for funding from EPA. With assistance from Ms. Kori Blicht, Environmental Scientist at DEQ, Mr. Breaux and Mr. Michael Schooler began reviewing the information on this funding. Mr. Breaux said Mr. Schooler met with Morehouse SWCD to discuss the funding and the board had been very interested. Morehouse's plan would align these funds with their Bayou Bartholomew National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI). GOMA wants to make sure that producers participating in their effort know that their interest is in downstream water quality nutrient improvement. Mr. Breaux mentioned that there are only 2 HUC 12's included in this effort: Bayou Galion and Bayou Coulee, which are both within the Bayou Lafourche Basin. The cover crop focused agreement will be funded at \$1.5 million over a 3-year period.

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

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

- Mr. Irvin "Sandy" Dares, Crescent SWCD, elected position, effective March 31, 2023.

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

- Mr. Irvin "Sandy" Dares, Crescent SWCD, elected position, effective March 31, 2023.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said we have 1 SWCD supervisor appointment this month:

- Mr. Neil Record, Feliciana SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Daniel DeLee, effective March 28, 2023- November 22, 2024.

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

- Mr. Neil Record, Feliciana SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Daniel DeLee, effective March 28, 2023- November 22, 2024.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 6 SWCD supervisor re-appointments this month:

- Ms. Rebeca Livaudais, Crescent SWCD, appointed position, effective June 21, 2023- June 21, 2026.
- Mr. Timothy Wild, Jefferson Davis SWCD, appointed position, effective June 11, 2023- June 11, 2026.
- Ms. Patty Vogt, Plaquemines SWCD, appointed position, effective May 28, 2023-May 28, 2026
- Mr. Patrick Klein, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, appointed position, effective March 26, 2023- March 26, 2026.
- Mr. Richard Netterville, Tensas-Concordia SWCD, appointed position, effective April 24, 2023- April 24, 2026.
- Mr. Andrew Price Gay, Upper Delta SWCD, appointed position, effective May 13, 2023-May 13, 2026

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

- Ms. Rebeca Livaudais, Crescent SWCD, appointed position, effective June 21, 2023- June 21, 2026.
- Mr. Timothy Wild, Jefferson Davis SWCD, appointed position, effective June 11, 2023- June 11, 2026.
- Ms. Patty Vogt, Plaquemines SWCD, appointed position, effective May 28, 2023-May 28, 2026
- Mr. Patrick Klein, Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD, appointed position, effective March 26, 2023- March 26, 2026.
- Mr. Richard Netterville, Tensas-Concordia SWCD, appointed position, effective April 24, 2023- April 24, 2026.
- Mr. Andrew Price Gay, Upper Delta SWCD, appointed position, effective May 13, 2023-May 13, 2026

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

District Supervisor Election-June 10, 2023

Chairman Garber said the election information was emailed out to everyone. Districts should now be completing and posting their election notices and asked Ms. Alexander for comment. Ms. Alexander stated that more than half of the districts have submitted their notices, so they are well on the way. The nomination period will begin on April 1st and all petitions must be post marked before April 30th. Originals are to be mailed to OSWC no later than May 16, 2023.

Meritorious Award:

Chairman Garber said we received one Meritorious award request:

- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD nominating Ms. Cecilia Spiess, District Secretary, to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,092.

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:

- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD nominating Ms. Cecilia Spiess, District Secretary, to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,092.

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath
Seconded by: Mr. Ben Langlinais
Passed unanimously.

Correspondence/Articles:

- New Conservation Funding and CRP Took Priority in Senate Ag Hearing
- Regenerative grazing: Not as time intensive as you think
- Ten Considerations Before Signing a Carbon Contract on Your Ranch
- Federal Offshore revenue sharing now top priority for House as committee advances bill

OTHER BUSINESS

- Chairman Garber mentioned that Area IV will have to have meeting to determine who will fill the vacant Area IV alternate member position. He asked that Mr. Breaux assist him getting Area IV maybe through a zoom meeting to discuss and recommend someone to fill the vacancy. Chairman Garber said he would like to take care of filling the vacancy because there is a strong possibility that he will not be able to attend next month's meeting. Mr. Breaux said he would assist Chairman Garber in getting members gathered and deciding on a recommendation.

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 25, 2023 in the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 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 3:08 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Yerger and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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