

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

October 24, 2023  
1:15 PM

Lincoln Parish Public Safety Complex  
161 Road Camp Road, Ruston, LA 71270

MEETING MINUTES

**CALL TO ORDER**

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

**ROLL CALL**

The roll was called by Mr. Joey Breaux.

**Members and Alternate Members present:**

Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice Chairman, Area V  
Mr. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Area I  
Mr. Ben Langlinais, LACD President, Member  
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate  
Mr. Chris Carter, Area II Alternate  
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member

**Members Absent:**

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative  
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate  
Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman, Area IV

A quorum was present.

**Others Present:**

Mrs. Sarah Trichel, Ass. State Conservationist of Programs  
Dr. Kurt Guidry, LSU AgCenter  
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC  
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC / Director

**Public Comments**

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

**Approval of the October 24, 2023 agenda**

Vice-Chairman Horvath called for a motion to approve the October 24, 2023 SSWCC meeting agenda.

**Motion by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

**Seconded by:** Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

**Approval of the September 13, 2023 minutes**

Vice-Chairman Horvath called for a motion to approve the September 13, 2023 SSWCC meeting minutes.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### **NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement**

September's Farm bill drawdown was \$86,960 with a remaining balance of \$22,999 that will be redistributed to the over earned districts. Mr. Breaux asked the commission members to review the handout in their packets, showing the new, upcoming farm bill figures for this fiscal year along with farm bill of prior years. Funding is based on a 3-year average of the districts farmbill contracts and unfunded applications.

### **Area 1 and 2 SWCC Election Convention**

The State Commission Area I and Area II Election Convention took place earlier this morning.

The voting results of the Area I and II Election convention are:

**Area I State Commission Member** – Mr. Reggie Skains, D'Arbonne SWCD

**Area I State Commission Alternate Member**- Mr. Pat Boudreaux, Sabine SWCD

**Area II State Commission Member**- Mr. Ed Yerger, Madison SWCD

**Area II State Commission Alternate Member**- Mr. Chris Carter, Morehouse SWCD

Vice Chairman Horvath asked if there were any public or Commission comments regarding the election and there were none. He asked for a motion to approve the election results.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Ben Langlinais

Motion passed unanimously.

Resolved, Mr. Reggie Skains, D'Arbonne Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as the Area I Member of the State Commission and Mr. Pat Boudreaux, Sabine Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as Area I Alternate Member of the State Commission with their terms beginning October 27, 2023 and expiring October 27, 2026.

Resolved, Mr. Ed Yerger, Madison Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as the Area II Member of the State Commission and Mr. Chris Carter, Morehouse Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as Area II Alternate Member of the State Commission with their terms beginning October 27, 2023 and expiring October 27, 2026.

### **CPA-SWCD Agreements**

Vice Chairman Horvath said the Commission received a SWCD CPA Agreement:

- Lafourche-Terrebonne and Crescent SWCD are submitting engagement letters from Langley, Williams & Company, LLC. The cost is \$650 each.

Vice Chairman Horvath said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Lafourche Terrebonne and Crescent SWCD's engagement letters from Langley, Williams & Company, LLC.

**Motion by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

**Seconded by:** Mr. Ben Langlinais

Motion passed unanimously.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**NRCS State Conservationist Report**- Mrs. Sarah Trichel, Assistant State Conservationist of Programs

Mrs. Trichel introduced herself and thanked the Commission for the opportunity to present the NRCS report. She said Mr. Kris Davis is the acting LA NRCS conservationist. Mr. Davis will fill this position until October 31<sup>st</sup>, which is when NRCS will decide to either reappoint Mr. Davis for an added term or appoint a new acting state conservationist. She said NRCS recently had a nationwide hiring event for state conservationists and Oregon

was the only state that was unable to fill their vacancy. NRCS plans to hold another hiring event which will produce a list of qualified candidates for as needed basis as well as possible permanent positions.

NRCS received \$53.2 million in financial assistance in FY 23. FY 24 will include:

FY 24 Farm Bill EQIP- \$16.6 million  
FY 24 EQIP IRA- \$22.9 million  
FY 24 Farm Bill CSP- \$18.8 million  
FY 24 CSP IRA- \$ 12.2 million  
FY 24 Total: \$70.5 million

NRCS is in the process of advertising vacant positions such as Soil Conservationists to assist in streamlining their program delivery. They are considering a new process called “Act Now” which will help get funding out to the producers within 45-60 days. She said NRCS does realize that all programs may not be a good fit for Act Now, but they are willing to try the process for appropriate ones. NRCS does expect assistance from its partnership to assist with the funding coming in. Mrs. Trichel stated that she expects Ms. Voorhies to send out some information at the beginning of the year regarding funding opportunities that may be available to districts. November 17, 2023 is the first signup deadline date for EQIP and CSP applications. There will be a 2<sup>nd</sup> signup deadline that will be announced later. NRCS no longer has a hiring cap which will enable them to hire if the funds are available.

#### LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Kurt Guidry, LSU AgCenter

Dr. Guidry said there has been quite a bit of restructuring at LSU this past year. There is also quite a bit of hiring being done due to the rate of retirement and promotions happening. Some of the recent new hires include:

1. Dr. Marcelo Vedovatto- Animal Scientist
2. Dr. Honglin Feng- Entomologist in Insect Physiology & Symbiosis
3. Dr. Eric DeBoer-Turf Grass Management Specialist
4. Dr. Garrett Hopper- Fish Ecologist
5. Dr. Jeffrey Plumlee- Fisheries Specialist
6. Dr. Andre Gama- Plant Pathologist

Dr. Guidry said they also hired a lead scientist as well as an animal scientist that will start in November or December as well as also working to get a new rice pathologist on board to replace Dr. Dustin Harrell who retired. There are also plans to hire an Assistant Director for Urban Extension, a few Regional Directors, a Poultry Extension position in the northwest region, and a Soil Specialist position focusing on specialty crops.

The AgCenter faculty are working on the following research areas and priorities:

1. Soil Health
2. Land and water management
3. Crop genetics
4. Plant breeding and health
5. Invasive species management- LSU was recently approved to create a center for research excellence for the study of invasive species.
6. Precision and digital agriculture
7. Livestock production and management
8. Wildlife management
9. Nutrition health and food safety
10. Biofuel and bio-products

Dr. Lee and the LSU staff have been working increasingly hard at getting more funding. They recently visited Mississippi State University research station to get insight on getting similar funding for Louisiana. The AgCenter is preparing for upcoming commodity meetings which will begin next Monday with the rice research

meeting. These meetings will be opportunities to discuss funding for scientists to continue to conduct research. Recently, LSU was able to receive state funding to improve the campus's infrastructure and statewide research stations. Dr. Salassi is currently in the process of buying 22 tractors for the AgCenter and research stations. The 4-H program received a \$750,000 USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) grant to get high schoolers interested in careers that use drones. Another USDA NIFA grant of \$640,000 was awarded to the 4-H program to enhance youth development programs in urban parishes. Dr. Guidry lastly wanted to mention that Louisiana 4-H/FFA have partnered with Sunshine Quality Solutions to offer the Sunshine Quality Solution Academy to students who are interested in interning at their locations. Dr. Lee believes that these collaborative efforts will enhance the AgCenter's efforts in becoming an informational hub across the state.

#### OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux said that the OSWC will soon house a Director of Meteorology who will have the responsibility of monitoring a statewide or partial Metronet system, collecting weather & soil moisture data to be used in updating the states drought monitor system. He also reported that BTNEP and others were revisiting the topic of biocontrol of Chinese tallow trees.

#### Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Vice Chairman Horvath said there was one district supervisor that did not meet the board meeting attendance requirements in the past year:

- Dorcheat SWCD, Mr. Joe Robinson

The supervisor sent his own letter along with a supporting letter from the district board suggesting the absences were justified and they are requesting the attendance requirements be waived.

Vice Chairman Horvath said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to waive the attendance requirements for:

- Dorcheat SWCD: Mr. Joe Robinson

**Motion by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

**Seconded by:** Mr. Chris Carter

Motion passed unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Horvath said there is 1 SWCD re-appointments this month:

- Mr. Steve Horvath, Capital SWCD, appointed position, effective November 23, 2023- November 23, 2026

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

- Mr. Steve Horvath, Capital SWCD, appointed position, effective November 23, 2023- November 23, 2026

**Motion by:** Mr. Ed Giering

**Seconded by:** Mr. Chris Carter

Motion passed unanimously.

#### Meritorious Award

Vice Chairman Horvath said we received one Meritorious award request:

- East Carroll SWCD is nominating Ms. Deborah Morris, District secretary, to receive a performance award of \$500.00 exceeding for proving to be a faithful, hardworking, and punctual asset to the district office.

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.

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

- East Carroll SWCD is nominating Ms. Deborah Morris, District secretary, to receive a performance award of \$500.00 exceeding for proving to be a faithful, hardworking, and punctual asset to the district office.

**Motion by:** Mr. Ed Giering

**Seconded by:** Mr. Chris Carter

Motion passed unanimously.

#### Open Meeting Law Changes

Vice Chairman Horvath said the next item on the agenda is Open Meeting Law Changes. He asked Mr. Breaux to review the topic. Mr. Breaux stated that the Legislative Auditors emailed this information to everyone regarding meeting law changes. Mr. Breaux has reached out to LDAF legal and is waiting for further advisal on the issue before discussing this topic further with the commission.

#### SWCC Goals

Vice-Chairman Horvath said the next item on the agenda is the SWCC goals. The commission discussed districts having a personnel policy management plan. These plans would be constructed by the district board to fit each individual district's needs.

#### Correspondence/Articles:

- Faced with drought and saltwater intrusion, Louisiana farmers fear for survival of crawfish.
- How farmers are combatting climate
- Irrigated agricultural acreage has grown, shifting eastward, while western irrigated acreage has declined.
- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation- September/October 2023
- U.S. Forest Service Awards \$6,000,000 for Baton Roots' Agroforestry Apprenticeship
- A saltwater wedge climbing the Mississippi River threatens drinking water.
- Agriculture study on cover crops mixtures delivers unexpected results.
- Congress Honors Rice Stewardship Partnership
- Essentials of Regenerative Grazing-Noble Research Institute Announces Second New Course

**OTHER BUSINESS**

Next Meeting

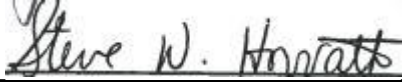
Vice Chairman Horvath said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 5, 2023 at the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806.

Public Comment

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. Ben Langlinais made a motion to adjourn at 3:21 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Chris Martin and passed unanimously.

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