

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

December 3, 2024  
1:15 PM

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY  
VETERANS AUDITORIUM  
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. Reggie Skains gave the invocation and Chairman Garber led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Members and Alternate Members present:**

Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman, Area IV Member  
Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice Chairman, Area V Member  
Mr. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Area I Member  
Mr. Ben Langlinais, LACD President  
Mr. Price Gay, LACD 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President  
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member  
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter Alternate Member  
Mr. Chris Carter, Area II Alternate  
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member

**Members Absent:**

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative

A quorum was present.

**Others Present:**

Mr. Doug Daigle, LA Hypoxia Workgroup	
Mr. Steven Cole, Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist	
Ms. Candis Voorhies, Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives	
Ms. Jennifer Gorham, Executive Assistant to LA NRCS State Conservationist	
Mr. J. Paul Johns Jr., Dugdemona SWCD	Mr. Charles Fontenot, Gulf Coast SWCD
Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director	Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC	Ms. Caitlin Joubert, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC	

**Public Comments**

Chairman Garber asked for public comment and recognized Mr. Doug Daigle, LA Hypoxia Workgroup Coordinator. The LA Hypoxia Work group's focus is to promote and support the Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan with Louisiana being 1 of 11 signatory states on the plan. Mr. Daigle said he always reminds folks that the Action Plan is a cooperative plan with voluntary actions. There aren't any mandates with this plan, but he believes it is important for Louisiana to do its part as well as support the other states in their efforts. Under the Action Plan, each state was asked to develop a nutrient reduction strategy. Louisiana's initial 5-year strategy was published in 2014 with plans to regroup and update the strategy as necessary. The original group included representatives from CPRA and DEQ among others and recently updated the original strategy. The updated

strategy was released for public comment about a month ago with a 30-day comment period. Mr. Daigle believes that the updated strategy is insufficient, and others have proposed coming back in 2029 to update the existing strategy. The current strategy proposal is approximately 100 pages with about 17 pages of references. He believes it's an overload of information that can be minimized, clarified, and improved.

Charman Garber thanked Mr. Daigle for the update and asked the SWCC members if there were any questions for Mr. Daigle.

#### **Approval of the December 3, 2024 agenda**

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the December 3, 2024 SWCC agenda.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

#### **Approval of October 22, 2024 minutes**

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the October 22, 2024 SWCC meeting minutes.

**Motion by:** Mr. Ed Giering

**Seconded by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

#### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

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

Mr. Breaux said the October 2024 Farm Bill drawdown was \$178,770. This was the first draw of the new agreement which is usually a large draw. Districts are currently entering November hours, and these hours will be reported during the January meeting.

##### **Area 3 and 4 SWCC Election Convention- December 3, 2024**

Chairman Garber said the State Commission Area III and IV Election Convention took place earlier this morning.

The voting results of the Area III and IV Election Convention are:

**Area III State Commission Member-** Ed Giering, Natchitoches SWCD

**Area III State Commission Alternate-** Jason Nolde, Calcasieu SWCD

**Area IV State Commission Member-** Earl Garber, Acadia SWCD

**Area IV State Commission Alternate-** Ron Duhon, Lafayette SWCD

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

**Motion by:** Mr. Steve Horvath

**Seconded by:** Mr. Chris Carter

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. Jason Nolde, Calcasieu Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as Area III Alternate member of the State Commission with their terms beginning December 7, 2024 and expiring December 7, 2027

Resolved, Mr. Earl Garber, Acadia Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as the Area IV Member of the State Commission and Mr. Ron Duhon, Lafayette Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as Area

IV Alternate member of the State Commission with their terms beginning December 7, 2024 and expiring December 7, 2027.

Chairman Garber said there was some great discussions had after the election took place. Board members voiced their concerns about the Commission's role and having direction as to what needs to be taken care of at the Area level. They also discussed LACD and asked them to begin to develop some long-range plans. Board members stated that there are quite a few new members on district boards who need communication and discussion of differentiating the entities of the Louisiana conservation partnership. Mr. Breaux said that it isn't easy to attend all area-wide monthly board meetings. He said the OSWC would be happy to assist with Commission members trying to communicate with districts in their Areas, in person or via email.

#### Out of State travel

Chairman Garber said we have one out of state travel request:

- Crescent SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Rebecca Livaudais, Ms. Erica Johnson, Ms. Nina Ockman, Mr. Blaise Pezold, and Mr. Danny Milojevic to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 7-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the travel request for:

- Crescent SWCD is asking permission for Ms. Rebecca Livaudais, Ms. Erica Johnson, Ms. Nina Ockman, Mr. Blaise Pezold, and Mr. Danny Milojevic to attend the NACD Annual Meeting on February 7-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City, UT.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

#### NEW BUSINESS

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Mr. Steven Cole, Acting NRCS State Conservationist

Mr. Cole thanked and introduced Ms. Candis Voorhies, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Initiatives, and Ms. Jennifer Gorham, Executive Assistant. He said there hasn't been much change since his last report. He wanted to reiterate that this year's budget is 30-35% more than last year. LA NRCS has received their new FY budget for all programs and is estimated to be around \$109 million. Mr. Cole said he met with the senior leadership team recently to develop FY 25 budget, and they made some great strides. He said he wants LA NRCS staff and district staff to start thinking about the future and everything that's ahead. He has not heard anything further regarding Farm Bill funding but feels that agriculture won't have to deal with a decrease in funding. He reported that his detail ends on Friday and that he will be returning to Minnesota. Mr. Cole said that he will appoint someone on his staff to become the Acting State Conservationist and NRCS has reposted the advertisement for the LA State Conservationist. Ms. Amanda Mathis was named Arkansas's NRCS State Conservationist and will begin on December 29, 2024.

LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter

Dr. Salassi mentioned that LSU received approximately \$4 million worth of research equipment this year through State Appropriations. Any State Appropriation funds must be used before the end of the state fiscal year in which they are received. Last year, LSU was able to receive \$11 million through state funding for their research stations. This funding did not have any time limits. Louisiana was approved for \$1.3 million dollars to enhance broadband use. LSU submitted a proposal for a \$20 million that would put sensors on farms to collect soil moisture, weather, and support research for extension centers.

Dr. Salassi said LSU AgCenter recently hired Dr. Saulo Castro, Soybean/Sugarcane Agronomist at the Dean Lee Research Station in September. He recently got approved for some funding through the Sugarcane Board.

Dr. Dorin Boldor, Professor in the Biological and Agricultural Engineering Department, was recently approved for a \$143,000 grant from the Water Institute of the Gulf to develop automated tools for water quality assessments along the coast. He would build robotic devices to take water quality measurements along the coast.

Over the past few months, Commodity boards have met to discuss different research proposals submitted and which ones they would fund. The Rice Research Board met and decided to approve \$1.3 million in research projects as well as another \$340,000 worth of infrastructure improvements at the rice research stations. Louisiana Soybean and Grain Promotion Board met a few weeks ago and approved \$1.6 million worth of funding to the AgCenter for different projects as well.

#### OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux said Ms. Caitlin Joubert, OSWC's Outreach Coordinator, has been working with conservation districts and individual supervisors with land uses regarding conservation initiatives, priorities and successes. These efforts have culminated in development of the "Good Lands" video series which includes 3 episodes so far. The first episode was rice specific and included Mr. Glenn Simon from Acadia SWCD and Mr. Jeff Durand from St. Martin SWCD. The second one included discussion of silvopasture, prescribed burning and prescribed grazing with Mr. David Daigle. The most recent video highlights an innovative sugarcane harvesting technique that was recently approved as an EPA 319 cost share practice for landowners in a priority watershed. OSWC is working to reduce sedimentation in this watershed believed to be emanating from cropland in Lake False Point. The SWCC members viewed this episode of "Good Lands" that featuring Mr. Buddy Oubre discussing the impact of his Residue Management Modification. Mr. Breaux said he has been working with Mr. Ken Gravois to get some brine release agriculture site recovery plans approved to present to DEQ. These plans include sites in lower West Iberville over into East St. James Parish. Mr. Breaux also wanted to remind Commission members about the National Watershed Coalition webinar that is scheduled for January 15, 2025. Mr. Breaux reported that he had a meeting with Commissioner Strain and his executive staff regarding the upcoming LDAF Executive Budget request, which includes the district budget. Commissioner Strain submitted his executive budget to state legislation that included \$2 million for the district budget. With this, we don't have to ask for an amendment that has been done previously but we do have to be prepared to support the Commissioner's budget.

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

Chairman Garber said there is 2 resignations this month:

- Mr. Gary Greene, Dorcheat SWCD, elected position, effective October 24, 2024
- Mr. Ross Neil Record, Feliciana SWCD, appointed position, effective November 19, 2024.

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

- Mr. Gary Greene, Dorcheat SWCD, elected position, effective October 24, 2024
- Mr. Ross Neil Record, Feliciana SWCD, appointed position, effective November 19, 2024.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Ben Langlinais

Motion passed unanimously.

#### SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber mentioned discussions regarding long range goals for the Commission as well as LACD at the election this morning. He let the group know that the Commission has a set of goals and has already accomplished one of the goals to "Improve District's Direct State Funding" and is still being worked on. The group also discussed goals for LACD which is in process. Chairman Garber asked the Commission members what goals should be prioritized next. Chairman Garber said that maybe the Commission should focus on improving policy and procedures for employee management. He asked Mr. Breaux for his thoughts on the next priorities. Mr. Breaux said that district boards review PPMs at their regular board meetings. District boards sometimes lose sight of the fact that they are governmental units and political subdivisions of the state. Regarding personnel, there has never been a SWCC requirement that boards develop personal management

plans, but we did recently review the SWCD personnel management policy template. Mr. Spicer discussed resending the job description templates to districts which can give them a template to create their own specific job description for their district. Mr. Breaux suggested adding “#4: Commission and District Board Communication Plan” under Supervisor and Personnel Management. One of the key points discussed this morning was getting communication from Commission members to their Areas. Mr. Breaux said he believes that district boards can sometime forget to reach out to their SWCC representative as well. Currently, there are not any guidelines for Commission members attending meetings. Chairman Garber suggested Commission representatives attend at least one board meeting for each district they represent during their 3-year term at minimum. Mr. Breaux said Commission representatives can also use simple forms of communication such as emailing and telephoning their area districts to stay close and be informed of what is happening in that area.

Correspondence/Articles:

- Invasive plants drive homogenization of soil microbial communities across US, new study finds
- Drovers: Restoring Oklahoma’s Tallgrass Prairie, One Step at a Time
- Students learn conservation skills at Marshall County Conservation Day
- USA Rice: Rain Won’t Stop the Yellow Rails & Rice Festival
- Youth Conservation Corps: A growing legacy in San Juan County
- Water economics Review Calls for Valuing Hydrological Cycle as Common Good
- Can Agrivoltaics help solar energy and agriculture coexist
- Drovers: How One Oklahoma Farmer Used Conservation to Stop Fighting Mother Nature
- Drovers: Making the Most of Land stewardship Incentives

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 8, 2025 in the Bayou Levee Room at the Crowne Plaza Hotel- 4728 Constitution Ave, Baton Rouge, LA 70808.

Public Comment

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 3:43 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Reggie Skains and passed unanimously.

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