

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

October 22, 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. Steve Horvath 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. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member

Members Absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

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|---|---------------------------------|
| Dr. Michael Deliberto, LSU AgCenter | |
| Mr. Steven Cole, Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist | |
| Ms. Amy McInnis, LDAF General Council | |
| Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director | Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC |
| Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC | Ms. "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC |

Public Comments

Chairman Garber asked for public comment and recognized Mr. Travis London. Mr. London came to discuss the different dangers of carbon capture. He discussed a well implosion that happened in Louisiana as well in a few other states. Chairman Garber asked Mr. London was he more concerned with the carbon in the soil or was he thinking about the carbon dioxide going into the deeper levels of the earth. Mr. London said he is thinking about the carbon going into the deeper levels of the earth surrounding the groundwater. Mr. Breaux explained that the SWCC involves capturing the carbon in the soil's surface naturally through vegetation. He said injection of the industrial carbon is handled through the Department of Energy and Natural Resources (DENR). Mr. London said he would reach out to DENR and thanked the Commission for listening to his concerns and said he appreciated their efforts.

Approval of the October 22, 2024 agenda

Chairman Garber asked that the agenda be amended under "New Business" to add Ms. Amy McInnis, LDAF General Counsel, to discuss the new Open Meeting and ADA accommodation rules that the Commission will need to approve.

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

Approval of September 17, 2024 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the September 17, 2024 SWCC meeting minutes. Mr. Giering stated that Mr. Spicer was listed as absent but did make a motion during last month's meeting. Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the September 17, 2024 as to amend the "Members and Alternate Members present" list to include Mr. Spicer.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering
Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath
Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

Mr. Breaux said the residual amount reported during last month's SWCC meeting was lower than reported. 27 districts will receive \$791 which will close the FY 24 Farm Bill agreement year. OSWC has received figures for the new farm bill agreement and is on the way to preparing each district's memo and updating the Farm Bill system to reflect the new totals.

NEW BUSINESS

New Open Meeting and ADA Accommodation Rules- Ms. Amy McInnis, LDAF General Counsel

Ms. McInnis thanked the Commission for their time and explained the following rules and requested that Chairman Garber sign and approve them on behalf of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission:

Rule #1: Petitions for Declaratory Orders and Rulings: This rule provides for the filing and prompt disposition of petitions for declaratory orders and rulings as to the applicability of any statutory provision or as to the applicability of any rule or order of the Soil and Water Conservation Commission, as required by R.S. 49:977.4 and 49:968(D)

Rule #2: Requests for Adoption, Amendment or Repeal of a Rule: This rule allows any interested person to petition the Soil and Water Conservation Commission to adopt a new rule, or to amend or repeal an existing rule, that it has authority to make. A petition for a rule change shall be addressed to the executive director of the Soil and Water Conservation Commission and shall be mailed or hand delivered to 5825 Florida Blvd., Suite 7000, Baton Rouge, LA 70806

Rule #3: Open Meetings via Electronic Means: Rule that permits the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission to conduct its open meetings so attendees, regardless of disability status, may participate via electronic means, except for the presiding officer (chairman).

Ms. McInnis presented copies of the rules to Chairman Garber. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve these rules.

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

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

Chairman Garber introduced Mr. Cole to the Commission and thanked him for coming. Mr. Cole said he has been on the road since being announced as the LA Acting NRCS State Conservationist and he has been welcomed with open arms. He said that we're in year 2 of continuing resolution extensions and there has not been a new farm bill agreement signed. Payment limitations were removed recently, giving LA producers opportunities to continue receiving reimbursements without restrictions. Mr. Cole said LA producers received a

total of \$70.2 million in funding from EQIP, CSP, and RCPP last year. LA NRCS has received their new FY budget for all programs and is estimated to be around \$109 million. This budget is approximately 38 million dollars more than the prior fiscal year. He said that he's been telling districts boards that, with this knowledge of this increase, if they go back to their meetings with business as usual, they're doing something wrong. During the last fiscal year, LA NRCS would receive incremental increases and Mr. Cole expects 2026-2027 to be some exciting years, and NRCS will have until 2035 to implement these programs. Mr. Cole said Louisiana is expected to receive \$40 million in easement funding. NRCS is estimating to receive approximately \$44 million in easement funding requests.

As of August 1st, LA NRCS had 213 full-time employees on staff. Mr. Cole said NRCS now has 223 full-time employees. NRCS plans to hire an additional 37 people to reach the goal of 260 employees.

Mr. Cole said he is open to having a brainstorming session regarding alternative funding arrangements. Louisiana has discussed planning one but hasn't had one. There were some discussions at the NACD meeting, and he believes the conversation could be a great financial boom for the state.

LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Deliberto, LSU AgCenter

Dr. Deliberto wanted to first discuss the \$4 million of Legislative funding appropriated for equipment to LSU AgCenter. Some of the funding was used to pay \$385,000 for a soil lab on campus that includes processing equipment software. LSU receives approximately \$4.2 million through federal funding provided through the HATCH act of 1887 which allows land-grant universities to receive money specifically designated for conducting agriculture research at the experiment stations across the state. These funds are paired with approximately \$46.2 million of state research appropriated funds across the state.

Dr. Deliberto also wanted to mention some grant opportunities that LSU AgCenter has received recently:

- Dr. Achyut Adhikari received approximately \$78,000 from LDAF to assist specialty crop producers to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act.
- Dr. Qinglin Woo was awarded \$84,000 from LDAF to research starch properties and their association with French fry texture for Louisiana grown sweet potatoes.
- Dr. Kun-Jun Han was awarded approximately \$700,000 from USDA-NRCS for the demonstration of enhanced pasture monitoring using new technologies. It allows the AgCenter to use drone captured images to assess pasture conditions. The AgCenter was 1 out of the 29 projects chosen nationwide through this Grazing Land Conservation Initiatives program.
- Dr. David Mosely from the Dean Lee Research Station received \$250,000 from the United Soybean Board to review BMPs for soybean practices.
- Dr. Kevin Hoffseth received \$120,000 from the United Soybean Board to research infrared and visible spectrum imaging to enhance soybean quality analysis and analytics.
- Dr. Jeff Davis received \$97,000 from the United Soybean Board to develop a resilient soybean integrated pest management program.

Dr. Deliberto says that LSU has approximately \$37 million worth of proposals and has been awarded \$14 million of funding so far. He said LSU AgCenter would spend \$ 5 million a year on research activities over the last few years.

LSU AgCenter is also working to hire more people to handle Precision Agriculture technology. There has been a push to hire research station faculty as well as Extension based faculty. They are also pursuing the Board of Regents to establish a Center for Excellence. The Center of Excellence will give LSU researchers an opportunity to use federal funds and get more leverage to apply for national grant dollars.

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux reported that he met with the Commissioner and his staff to discuss the LDAF executive budget for next fiscal year. Mr. Breaux drafted a justification for Commissioner Strain that would support keeping the current \$300,000 addition that was added to the executive budget this fiscal year.

Mr. Breaux attended his first NASCA meeting in Duluth, MN. There were some great conversations regarding IRA funding and the alternative funding arrangements that Mr. Cole spoke about earlier. The meeting was overall productive with every state sharing where they are with their state cost share programs. Louisiana seems to have a healthier partnership legacy over other states.

Mr. Breaux asked Ms. Gibson to discuss the Mississippi Commissioner's conservation tour to Georgia. Mississippi supervisors visited our state last year to find out about the sugarcane production. This year Ms. Gibson had the opportunity to travel with Ms. Stephanie Garvin, Lower Delta SWCD secretary, as well as a few Mississippi supervisors to Georgia for a conservation tour that included Hope Well Farms in Gainesville, GA, Green Box Mushroom in Gainesville, the UGA College of Agriculture & Environmental Sciences, and Hillside Orchard Farms.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there is 3 appointments this month:

- Ms. Lisa Hulin, Iberia SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Brad Judice, effective October 22, 2024- June 30, 2026.
- Ms. Ali Bowen, Rapides SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. James Decker, effective October 22, 2024- June 30, 2027.
- Mr. Allen Blanchard, St. Martin SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. John Girard, effective October 22, 2024-June 30, 2027

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

- Ms. Lisa Hulin, Iberia SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Brad Judice, effective October 22, 2024- June 30, 2026.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

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

- Ms. Ali Bowen, Rapides SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. James Decker, effective October 22, 2024- June 30, 2027.
- Mr. Allen Blanchard, St. Martin SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. John Girard, effective October 22, 2024-June 30, 2027.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 3 reappointments this month:

- Mr. Leroy Kirby III, Caddo SWCD, appointed position, effective November 17, 2024- November 17, 2027.
- Mr. Anthony Butler, Capital SWCD, appointed position, effective November 23, 2024- November 22, 2027.
- Mr. David Manuel, D'Arbonne SWCD, appointed position, effective November 18, 2024- November 18, 2027.

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

- Mr. Leroy Kirby III, Caddo SWCD, appointed position, effective November 17, 2024- November 17, 2027.
- Mr. Anthony Butler, Capital SWCD, appointed position, effective November 23, 2024- November 22, 2027.
- Mr. David Manuel, D'Arbonne SWCD, appointed position, effective November 18, 2024- November 18, 2027.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Meritorious Award

Chairman Garber said we received one Meritorious award request:

- East Carroll SWCD is nominating Deborah Morris to receive the Significant Achievement Award of \$500.

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 packet for:

- East Carroll SWCD is nominating Deborah Morris to receive the Significant Achievement Award of \$500.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber asked the Commission if they had any comments and recognized Mr. Giering. Mr. Giering said he wanted to remind the members of some information that was given to them by Mr. Breaux a few months ago. The packet given by Mr. Breaux included older NACD grant information that can be researched and reviewed by our districts as a funding source. He suggested that this information be given to Ms. Gerace as well for her review.

Correspondence/Articles:

- Drovers: Research by University of Illinois Shows How Weather Mitigates Nitrogen Runoff
- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation: Cropland water erosion estimates simulated by RUSLE2 and WEPP: Results from two initial studies
- Michigan State University: Thinking about reducing tillage in the spring? Start preparing in the fall
- Farm and Diary: Backyard conservation: Now's the time to grow it
- GPS World: Precision agriculture is transforming farming and the US economy
- Successful Farming: Odds favor a new farm bill by end of year, says Vilsack

OTHER BUSINESS

Chairman Garber asked the Commission if they had any comments and recognized Mr. Skains. Mr. Skains said the NACD meeting he recently attended was a good meeting. He got to tour a reservation where they were able

to see the 40,000 sq ft of hydroponic crops that were growing. They even got to meet the chief and see all the animals and other crops. Mr. Skains also mentioned that he met with the Secretary of the LA Department of Revenue, Mr. Richard Nelson, where they talked about future tax law changes in Louisiana.

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 3, 2024 at the LDAF Veterans Memorial Auditorium - 5825 Florida Blvd, Baton Rouge, LA 70806

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. Steve Horvath made a motion to adjourn at 3:41 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ben Langlinais and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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