

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

September 17, 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. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member  
Mr. Price Gay, LACD 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President  
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member  
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate Member

**Members Absent:**

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative  
Mr. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Area I Member  
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member

A quorum was present.

**Others Present:**

Mr. Doug Daigle, LA Hypoxia Workgroup  
Ms. Candis Voorhies, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives  
Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director  
Ms. "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

**Public Comments**

Chairman Garber asked for public comment and recognized Mr. Doug Daigle. Mr. Daigle said he wished to update the SWCC on the new leadership of the LA Hypoxia taskforce. Mr. Daigle said the leadership of the group is now under CPRA and was previously led by the Governor's Office of Coastal Activities. Mr. Daigle requests the support of the SWCC in these discussions to hopefully change the leadership role and have a more open dialogue about the role.

**Approval of the September 17, 2024 agenda**

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the September 17, 2024 SWCC agenda.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of the August 29, 2024 minutes**

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the August 29, 2024 SWCC meeting minutes.

**Motion by:** Mr. Steve Horvath

**Seconded by:** Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

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

- August's Farm Bill drawdown- \$27,148.00
- 3 additional Districts have fully expended their allocated Farm Bill funds, totaling \$617,542 earned beyond their allocations.
- NRCS Farm Bill agreement balance- \$79,266.00

Districts with remaining balances have been contacted and asked to alert OSWC on how much they plan to use of their remaining balances. The unused balances will be re-distributed to districts who have over earned.

Chairman Garber said he wanted to mention that he and Mr. Breaux got the opportunity to meet with Mr. Steven Cole, NRCS Acting District Conservationist during a meeting with Commissioner Strain. Mr. Cole comes from Minnesota and has 35 years of experience with the NRCS. The group met with Commissioner Strain to discuss the general conservation needs of Louisiana.

#### **SWCD Funding**

Mr. Breaux said OSWC has completed and submitted payment documents for July, August, and September District allocation payments. With the \$300,000 increase, each district received a slight increase keeping in mind the increased insurance and payroll processing fee costs. The district's budget was a topic of discussion during a recent meeting with Commissioner Strain and Mr. Cole, Acting NRCS State Conservationist. Mr. Breaux suggested to the Commissioner that he start budget discussions with the Legislators using our current budget with the additional \$300,000 at a minimum. Mr. Breaux said LACD has strong talking points to convince the legislators of conservation needs and believes the current budget amount should be used in the FY 2026 budget request. Chairman Garber said he believes it is a great idea to start off negotiations where we are and still work toward increasing the budget further.

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

Chairman Garber said everyone should have a draft copy of the memo that will be sent out to Area 3 and 4 chairmen regarding the upcoming Area 3 and 4 SWCC Election Convention in December. This election will determine who represents Area 3 and 4 on the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. Chairman Garber advised that the current Area 3 member is Mr. Ed Giering, and the alternate member is Mr. Jason Nolde. Area 4 members are Mr. Earl Garber, and the alternate member is Mr. Ron Duhon. The election will take place prior to the December SWCC meeting. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the draft memo to be sent out to Area 3 and 4 chairmen informing them of the upcoming election in December.

**Motion by:** Mr. Steve Horvath

**Seconded by:** Mr. Price Gay

Passed unanimously.

#### **CPA-SWCD Agreements**

Chairman Garber said the Commission received 1 SWCD-CPA Agreement:

- Avoyelles SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Langley, Williams & Company, LLC. The fee is \$1,350.

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

- Avoyelles SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Langley, Williams & Company, LLC. The fee is \$1,350.

**Motion by:** Mr. Price Gay

**Seconded by:** Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**NRCS State Conservationist Report-** Ms. Candis Voorhies, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives

- Ms. Voorhies said NRCS has obligated nearly all their program funding; they were able to obligate \$71.4 million dollars in EQIP and CSP funding and have completed new cooperative funding agreements with partners.
- LA NRCS currently has 213 full-time employees and is working hard to keep this level of staffing. There has been no movement on FY 24 notice of funding opportunity, so they are preparing for FY 25 notice of funding announcement. She planned to use previous wording but received word from OMB that they are going to do a deeper evaluation nationally for FY 25. Ms. Voorhies said that she would alert everyone when she receives further details.
- RCPP signups closed on July 2<sup>nd</sup> and a deadline for headquarters to make selections has not been set.
- New FY 25 NRCS/LDAF/OSWC agreements including Farm bill, Program Support Specialist (PSS), Louisiana Resource Unit Technician (LARU) formerly Targeted Tech), Watershed Planners and the Feral Swine amendment are all in process with hopes of completion this week.
- FY 25 WRE signups are active and will be batched monthly with the first deadline being September 30, 2024.

## **LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Salassi**

Dr. Salassi said the LSU Ag Center plans to focus on soil hydrology, precision irrigation, precision, and weed management through their newly acquired agreement through NRCS. The Ag Center is also planning to submit a proposal to the Governor to place sensors across the state on individual farms that would produce information such as soil moisture and crop growing conditions. The information would be available to the producers as well as give LSU some research material. Mr. Spicer asked if LSU has plans on how they would distribute the sites and Dr. Salassi replied that it would depend on how much funding they received. The funding comes from remaining federal funds originally sent to Louisiana to expand broadband across the state. There are 11 other groups submitting proposals to the Governor to receive funding from this source as well.

LSU faculty has been doing an excellent job in bringing federal funding for research. They were able to raise \$10.6 million in July and August. Dr. Jeb Fields from the Hammond research station submitted a proposal to the USDA Specialty Crops Research initiative on soilless media applications and horticulture. The proposal was ranked #1 in the country and received \$3.9 million in funding. Dr. M.P. Hayes, who is a water quality researcher, submitted a proposal to the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. They have an Equipment Grant Program that enables universities to purchase expensive scientific equipment. This year LSU received \$120,000 to buy a piece of equipment that analyses organic matter in water.

## **Dr. Salassi reminded Commission members of some upcoming events:**

September 19, 2024- Northeast Beef and Forage Field Day- Goldmine Plantation

September 26, 2024- Model Farm Field Day- Kaplan, LA

### OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux said the state's emergency declaration for Hurricane Francine was just approved. This means OSWC will be getting calls from environmental consultants wanting to modify existing Best Management Practice Plans (BMPs) for tree debris and wrack or create new ones. Recently, Act 288, presented by Sen. Allain passed requiring non-certified prescribed burners to provide pre-burn notification including the location, date, and time of their prescribed burn to LDAF Office of Forestry prior to the initiation of the burn. This week, LDAF was also able to create a non-certified prescribed burn request form that can be submitted online. The Environment and Health Council of Louisiana is hosting its annual conference on November 21, 2024 at Pennington Biomedical Research center in Baton Rouge. This year's theme is "Cancer in Louisiana: Trends, Treatments, and Prevention". The event is shaping up to have great speakers and will serve lunch to participants.

Mr. Breaux also discussed the Poultry Litter Cost-Share Opportunity that was emailed to districts. Recipients had the following requirements and rules to follow:

- Litter transport incentive cannot be approved in nutrient impaired watersheds.
- Litter **must** be transported out of the originating watershed (HUC8)
- Land application must be within a reasonable time period. (45-60 days)
- Litter must be staged on headlands and away from waterways, ditches or highly erodible areas.
- Land application must be excluded from areas within 100 feet of all drainageways and residences, and at least 300 feet from wells, springs, streams, and ponds.

Payments to eligible landowners:

- \$0.15 per ton per loaded mile up to 100 statute miles from point of origin
- \$0.12 per ton per loaded mile beyond 100 miles from point of origin
- not to exceed \$33/ton or a total of 250 statute miles from point of origin
- reimbursable to the approved recipient producer/landowner upon payment
- SWCD may claim \$1/ton administration fee.
- Entity / Farm Cap \$20,00.00/program

Mr. Breaux said a company is on the way to pelletizing bagasse as a combustible biofuel. This idea was originally introduced by American Biocarbon about 5-6 years ago. The idea lost favor in the European market due to BTU values being inconsistent due to the ash content. The company currently presenting the idea plans to wash the bagasse before pelletizing it so they can get a consistent BTU value.

### Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there is 1 appointment this month:

- Ms. Amelia Kent, Feliciana SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Scott Bickham, effective September 17, 2024- June 30, 2026.

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

- Ms. Amelia Kent, Feliciana SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Scott Bickham, effective September 17, 2024- June 30, 2026.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

### SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber asked the Commission if they had any comments and there were none. Mr. Breaux said the Commission members are welcome to reach out to him if they have any questions or ideas for the goals list.

#### Correspondence/Articles:

- Louisiana Master Farmer Program: 2024 Outstanding Master Farmer Award
- LACD Auxiliary Poster Contest
- Drovers: Managing Financial Risks of Conservation
- Near the end of the Mississippi River, salt water threatens again. Are they ready this time?
- First of its kind grant could reduce flooding, rebuild wetlands in this vulnerable part of Louisiana
- Lexology: Possible Reprieve on Federal PFAS Reporting Under TSCA: US EPA Issues Direct Final Rule Extending RSCA PFAS Reporting Deadlines
- Press Release: Earth Optics, Pattern Ag Merge to Digitize Soil Health for Climate and Agriculture
- Drovers: Eight Recommendations to Consider When Looking at Cover Crops
- Lexology: EPA Delays TSCA PFAS Reporting Deadlines
- Groundwater can be accurately monitored with satellites using remote sensing platform, new study finds
- Scientists make soil fertility breakthrough that could transform the agriculture industry: It is of great significance

#### OTHER BUSINESS

Chairman Garber said everyone should have a copy of PPM #4 in their packet. In June 2004, Commission members made a motion that districts could not use district funds to pay any portion of an active district supervisors' premium for insurance coverage under the Louisiana State Group Benefits health insurance plan. We recently received notification that a retired soil and water employee with insurance covered by the district is interested in being appointed as a district supervisor. Mr. Breau recommended that the PPM be revised to include the exception for district supervisors who are retired district employees who were granted district coverage of their health insurance premiums upon retirement from the district, and prior to becoming elected or appointed to the district board. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve revising PPM #4 to reflect the exception.

**Motion by:** Mr. Ed Yerger

**Seconded by:** Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

#### Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 22, 2024 at the LDAF Veterans Memorial Auditorium - 5825 Florida Blvd, Baton Rouge, LA 70806

#### Public Comment

Chairman Garber asked if anyone had any further comments. Mr. Gay wanted to report that progress is being made for the upcoming annual meeting scheduled for January 8-10, 2025. He said LACD is also waiting on an update for their RCPP grant submission. They received notice that information regarding the grant won't be released until November. LACD is also working with Pig Brig to get training and field days scheduled around the state. The primary goal for Pig Brig is to increase education around feral hog behavior and trapping through districts without creating an extra workload. Mr. Gay reported that Ms. Stacy Conley and Ms. Patty Brown from Sabine SWCD are applying to National Conservation Foundation (NCF) Next Generation Leadership Institute. Applications for this program are still open and will close at the end of the month. He also wanted to mention the upcoming South-Central meeting in Oklahoma. He said the agenda looks like it will be entertaining to its attendees.

#### 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. Ed Yerger made a motion to adjourn at 3:16 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Price Gay and passed unanimously.

*Earl J. Garber*

/s/

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