

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

August 26, 2025
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.

ROLL CALL

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

Members and Alternates present:

Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman, Area IV Member	Mr. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Area I Member
Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice Chairman, Area V Member	Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member
Mr. Price Gay, LACD President, Member	Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member	Dr. Michael Deliberto, LSU AgCenter Alternate Member
Dr. Crystal Vance-Rogers, Southern University Ag Center, Member	

Members Absent:

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Ms. Sarah Trichel, Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist	Ms. Amy McInnis, LDAF General Counsel
Ms. Kimberly Watt, D'Arbonne SWCD	Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC	Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF-OSWC	Ms. Clay Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

Chairman Garber asked if there were any public comments, and there were none.

Approval of July 22, 2025 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the July 22, 2025 SWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the August 26, 2025 SWCC meeting agenda

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay

Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

Mr. Breaux reported that the July 2025 Farm Bill Agreement Total Drawdown was \$28,446 with a remaining balance of \$215,857.

18 districts have maxed out their Farm Bill agreement earnings: Bodcau, Boeuf River, Calcasieu, Crescent, DeSoto, Dorcheat, East Carroll, Lafourche-Terrebonne, Lower Delta, Morehouse, Natchitoches, New River, Red River, St. Martin SWCD, Tangi-St. Helena, and Tensas-Concordia SWCD. These districts were able to report a total of \$247,287 earned over their allocated farm bill agreement budgets.

FY 26 State Operating Budget

Chairman Garber said members should have the "Proposed FY 2025-2026 SWCD Budget" sheet in their Commission meeting packet. He asked Mr. Breaux to make comments on the allocation process. Mr. Breaux said he was advised that the SWCD budget would be approximately \$200 short of the \$2 million originally requested in the LDAF executive budget. The SWCD budget given was nearly \$200,000 over asking amount bringing the budget to nearly \$2.2 million. Expenses being deducted included approximately \$75,000 for district insurance, \$6,000 for payroll fees, and other costs for district contingencies. Every district starts with the base allocation as step 1, and in step 2, districts with multiple field offices will receive 70% of the base allocation for each additional office. In recent years the SWCC hadn't been able to fulfill 70% of the base allocation for those 6 districts due to budget constraints. Multi-parish districts with only one field office are allocated an additional 5% of the base allocation per each additional parish or portion of a parish within the district. Chairman Garber was able to configure the formula to have districts with a base allocation of \$32,500 which is a \$7,500 increase. Districts with additional offices (Boeuf River, Calcasieu, D'Arbonne, Dugdemona, Lower Delta, and Tensas-Concordia) were able to get 70% of the base allocation which equals \$22,750. Multi-parish districts (Boeuf River, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River, Calcasieu, Capital, Crescent, D'Arbonne, Dugdemona, Feliciana, Gulf Coast, Lafourche-Terrebonne, Lower Delta, New River, Northeast, Tangi-St. Helena, Tensas-Concordia, and Upper Delta) were able to receive an additional \$350-\$6,500 according to the number of additional parishes or portions of parishes. Chairman Garber said he reviewed some draft allocation scenarios and decided that most of the funding needed to go in the base allocation portion just as it did when districts received the additional \$300,000 last FY. Mr. Giering said he had the pleasure of assisting with adding the \$300,000 last year and believes that OSWC and Chairman Garber had done a great job at refiguring this FY SWCD allocation. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the proposed allocations.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath.

Motion pass unanimously.

Mr. Skains suggested that the Commission review the workload analysis figures before the next allocation is approved. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to review the workload analysis figures before the next FY allocation is approved.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

CPA-SWCD Agreements

Chairman Garber said the Commission received 12 SWCD-CPA Agreements:

- Boeuf River SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Cochran, Clark & Thomason. The fee is not to exceed \$1,400.
- Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Minda B. Raybourn. The fee is not to exceed \$1,300.
- Catahoula SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Langley, Williams, & Company, LLC. The fee will not exceed \$1,350.
- Grant SWCD is submitted an engagement letter from Rozier McKay & Willis. The fee will not exceed \$2,400
- Lower Delta SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from EisnerAmper, LLP. The fee will not exceed \$6,750.
- Madison SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Langley, Williams, & Company, LLC. The fee will not exceed \$1,200.
- Morehouse SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Cochran, Clark & Thomason. The fee will not exceed \$1,400.
- Natchitoches SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Dees Gardner, CPA, LLC. The fee will not exceed \$5,500.
- Northeast SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Marcus, Robinson, and Hassell. The fee will be \$1,500.
- St. Landry SWCD is submitting 2 engagement letters from Langley, Williams, & Company, LLC. The first engagement is to review and prepare financial statements and won't exceed \$3,700. The 2nd engagement is to apply agreed-upon procedures to meet the intended purpose of the Louisiana Legislative Auditors review requirement, and the fee is \$1,300.
- Vermillion SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Langlinais, Broussard & Kohlenberg, CPA. The fee is \$3,500.

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

- Boeuf River SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Cochran, Clark & Thomason. The fee is not to exceed \$1,400.
- Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Minda B. Raybourn. The fee is not to exceed \$1,300.
- Catahoula SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Langley, Williams, & Company, LLC. The fee will not exceed \$1,350.
- Grant SWCD is submitted an engagement letter from Rozier McKay & Willis. The fee will not exceed \$2,400
- Lower Delta SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from EisnerAmper, LLP. The fee will not exceed \$6,750.
- Madison SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Langley, Williams, & Company, LLC. The fee will not exceed \$1,200.
- Morehouse SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Cochran, Clark & Thomason. The fee will not exceed \$1,400.

- Natchitoches SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Dees Gardner, CPA, LLC. The fee will not exceed \$5,500.
- Northeast SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Marcus, Robinson, and Hassell. The fee will be \$1,500.
- St. Landry SWCD is submitting 2 engagement letters from Langley, Williams, & Company, LLC. The first engagement is to review and prepare financial statements and won't exceed \$3,700. The 2nd engagement is to apply agreed-upon procedures to meet the intended purpose of the Louisiana Legislative Auditors review requirement, and the fee is \$1,300.
- Vermillion SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Langlinais, Broussard & Kohlenberg, CPA. The fee is \$3,500.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Out of State Travel

Chairman Garber said the Commission received 9 out of state travel requests:

- Allen SWCD is asking permission for Marlin Lemoine and Charlie Istre to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Catahoula SWCD is asking permission for Carolyn Fannin, Rhonda Murphy, H.C. Peck III, Judy Francis, and Misty Robinson to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Crescent SWCD is asking permission for Blaise Pezold, Erica Johnson, Daniel Milojevic, and Don Knuppel to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- D'Arbonne SWCD is asking permission for Reggie Skains to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- DeSoto SWCD is asking permission for Christina Ebarb to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Dugdemona SWCD is asking permission for Debra Hubbard to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Iberia SWCD is asking permission for Ben Langlinais to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Natchitoches SWCD is asking permission for Denise Moore and Wendy Hinds to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Sabine SWCD is asking permission for Biranna Cartinez, Rodney McKay, and John P. Boudreaux to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the following out of state travel requests:

- Allen SWCD is asking permission for Marlin Lemoine and Charlie Istre to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Catahoula SWCD is asking permission for Carolyn Fannin, Rhonda Murphy, H.C. Peck III, Judy Francis, and Misty Robinson to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Crescent SWCD is asking permission for Blaise Pezold, Erica Johnson, Daniel Milojevic, and Don Knuppel to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- D'Arbonne SWCD is asking permission for Reggie Skains to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- DeSoto SWCD is asking permission for Christina Ebarb to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.

- Dugdemona SWCD is asking permission for Debra Hubbard to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Iberia SWCD is asking permission for Ben Langlinais to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Natchitoches SWCD is asking permission for Denise Moore and Wendy Hinds to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.
- Sabine SWCD is asking permission for Biranna Cartinez, Rodney McKay, and John P. Boudreaux to attend the NACD South Central Region Meeting on September 21-23, 2025 in Hot Springs, AR.

Motion by: Mr. Price Gay

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

LACD Mid-year Meeting-September 4, 2025

Mr. Gay said the Mid-Year meeting is next week at the NRCS office in Alexandria, LA. The meeting will begin at 9:30am with opening remarks from LACD, NRCS, and SWCC. Mr. Steve Bates, LACD Secretary-Treasurer, will give an update on LACD's financials. Committees will meet to discuss possible resolution topics to present at LACD. After lunch is completed, each committee representative will discuss their committee ideas to the rest of the group. Chairman Garber said he is looking forward to hearing the different ideas and updates from NRCS and LACD.

NEW BUSINESS

NRCS State Conservationist Report-Ms. Sarah Trichel, Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist

Ms. Trichel said unfortunately she will not be able to attend the LACD Mid-Year meeting in Alexandria, LA due to a scheduled Leadership Conference in West Virginia. A lot of NRCS staffers will be attendance so she feels confident that any NRCS related questions could be answered. She also stated that NRCS limited their travel, and she was not approved to travel to the NACD South Central meeting in Arkansas.

Ms. Trichel said EQIP and CSP funds are approximately 92% obligated as of today leaving approximately 12 contracts to complete. LA NRCS has submitted for an additional \$8 million for EQIP and CSP programs and are awaiting a response. There have been a few questions regarding the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot program. The One Big Beautiful Bill lists funding for this program but there have been no specifics released. LA NRCS is starting to prepare for the rollout and the differences.

Ms. Trichel mentioned that during the last Commission meeting, Her and Ms. Voorhies revealed that there was a new quality assurance step added for reviewing the agreements (PSS, LARU, Farm Bill, and Watershed). She said they were able to get pre-committed funding for the agreements. OSWC is working with Ms. Voorhies to get the figures worked out and executed before the September 30th deadline.

LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Deliberto, LSU AgCenter

The LSU AgCenter received a one-time payment of \$4.5 million for research and extension support mainly in lab and facility upgrades. They do not expect to receive these funds next fiscal year but will welcome them if they are available to the program.

Dr. Deliberto said the president's budget zeroed out the research and extension compacity funding. However, Congress was able to restore some of those funds in a revised budget and LSU hopes to have a chance in getting some of those funds. The Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) grant program has started processing applications. AFRI grants are part of a broader initiative to develop climate-smart agriculture and sustainable food systems. In 2023, LSU received a \$10 million AFRI grant to improve the sustainability of the Louisiana rice industry. On August 7th, the White House released an executive order asking agencies to review their grants. The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) requested this initiative to verify that funds were being used properly. The Snap Nutrition Education program has been defunded and will be terminated as of September 30,

2025 as stated in the One Big Beautiful Bill. This program provided education on healthy eating, cooking, physical activity, and how to maximize SNAP benefits.

Dr. Deliberto mentioned that the AgCenter has made a few new hires in July and August:

1. Dr. Christine Coker- Director, Hammond Research Station
2. Dr. Steven Eppolito- Weed Scientist, Dean Lee Research Station
3. Anna Orfanou- Agronomist, Macon Ridge Research Station
4. Dr. Dimitrios Pavlou- Irrigation Agronomist, Macon Ridge Research Station
5. Dr. Brijesh Angira- Rice Breeding Faculty, H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station

The LSU of Agriculture conferred 434 degrees during the Spring, Summer, and Fall Semesters. (340 undergraduate degrees, 6 College of Honor recipients, 7 university medalists. The College of Agriculture estimates approximately 400 new freshmen on campus this fall.

A few upcoming field days:

- September 12 and 26, 2025- Grazing School, Iberia Research Station- Homer, LA (will take place on October 10th, 24th and November 7th)
- September 11, 2025- Dean Lee Research and Extension Center's Beef and Forage Field Day- Dean Lee Research Station- Alexandria, LA
- September 17, 2025- Lafourche, Assumption, and Terrebonne Livestock and Forage Field Day- Raceland Ag Complex- Raceland, LA
- September 18, 2025- Northeast Beef and Forage Field Day- Gold Mine Plantation- Mangham, LA
- October 1, 2025- Southeast Research Station's Dairy & Beef Field Day

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux said the Reveg program has been quite busy with project implementation. Mr. Phillips has been training some new staff and assisting with planting projects. All FY 25 projects have been implemented and monitoring is in process. The 319 Workplan for FY 25 recently got approved. In the past few months, OSWC submitted a waiver requesting some of the implementation funds be applied toward watershed implementation plan development. This helps OSWC and EPA with getting projects underway quicker. The state's non-point management plan includes a list that shows watersheds that are eligible for Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) development. OSWC noticed the Mermentau Basin as an option and plans to draft a WIP for it. Mr. Davenport is working on a lot of PL-566 projects including on the Southern University campus. Mr. Breaux and Mr. Davenport went to view the proposed project area and are excited about its possibilities.

Mr. Breaux said LDAF has had to deal with budget cuts. With those cuts, OSWC staff lost home assignment of their department vehicles.

Prescribed burning training is ramping up right now and there have already been many requests for marshland prescribed burn classes. Mr. Breaux said there are plans to revise the Agricultural Land Prescribed Burn re-certification video. Applicants must take the Agricultural Land Prescribed Burn test to be certified. After 5 years, they are required to watch a video and submit a new affidavit for re-certification. Agricultural Marshland candidates must repeat the testing process every 5 years.

Crescent SWCD has discussed interest in creating an heirloom conservation and garden seed restoration project. Mr. Blaise Pezold, Chairman of Crescent SWCD, is doing research to find grant opportunities for this effort. Calcasieu SWCD is hosting a series of Water Festivals on September 9-12 in Beauregard and Vernon Parishes. Natchitoches SWCD is partnering with Briarwood Nature Preserve on a Louisiana Outdoors Forever grant. Additional Details are not known but hopefully the grant is approved and is successful.

NACD Summer Meeting update/South Central Meeting

Mr. Gay said the NACD Summer Meeting was great . NRCS Chief, Aubrey Bettencourt attended the meeting and had a great open forum. Chief Bettencourt also attended the Natural Resources committee meeting where more great conversations took place. Mr. Gay said he was able to emphasize the need to fill the vacant LA State Conservationist position. She said vacancies won't be reviewed until October which is when the hiring freeze will be lifted.

Mr. Gay also mentioned that he is looking forward to the upcoming NACD South Central Meeting that will take place on September 21-23, 2025. Louisiana will be well represented at the meeting.

The Annual LACD Meeting will take place on January 7-9, 2026.

Area V Election Convention- October 28, 2025

Chairman Garber discussed the draft memo presented to Commission members. The memo states the tentative Area V Election Convention will take place on Tuesday, October 28, 2025 at 11AM in the LDAF Veteran's Auditorium in Baton Rouge. Area V boards are asked to submit two members to act as the delegate member and alternate member. One of the two names must be in attendance in Baton Rouge to cast a vote for their Area V SWCC member and alternate. Each board is asked to submit their delegate member and alternate member names by October 16, 2025. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the draft memo to be sent to Area V districts.

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay

Motion passed unanimously.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there is 1 resignation this month:

- Ms. Duana Juneau, Rapides SWCD, elected position, effective August 13, 2025.

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

- Ms. Duana Juneau, Rapides SWCD, elected position, effective August 13, 2025.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there is 1 appointment this month:

- Mr. Frank Sotile III, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Stacy Allee, effective July 22, 2025- June 30, 2028.

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

- Mr. Frank Sotile III, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Stacy Allee, effective July 22, 2025- June 30, 2028.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Chris Martin

Motion passed unanimously.

Rules Revision LAC Title 7: Part XLI, Chapter 1, §101-Supervisor Elections

Mr. Breaux said the SWCD supervisor election rules have been discussed recently with plans to modernize them. The current district election guidelines are accommodating for our smaller, rural districts but not the larger districts with multiple parishes. Mr. Breaux is working with Ms. Amy McGinnis, LDAF General Counsel, in revising the current election rules. Some of the draft changes that have been discussed included:

1. Changing "Committee" to "Commission"
2. Changing "SCS" to "NRCS"
3. Change the number of districts to 44
4. Change references that state the State Commission pays for the District Supervisor election.
5. Discussions of putting highly populated district supervisor elections on their normal general ballot during general elections.

The biggest goal is to clarify the process for district supervisors regarding the district elections so that supervisors understand their responsibility in the district election process. Another change being considered is the 30-day period for the election preparation. District boards need more time to organize and prepare. Mr. Breaux said he is recommending that the 30-day period be changed to 45 or 60 days. Another revision in current election rules section would be removing "Registrar of Voters" from the process. They have advised that they will no longer be assisting districts in certifying the voters or conducting the elections. Districts only option now is to certify voters using the "Geaux Vote" app.

Chairman Garber reviewed the next steps of revising the district election rules:

1. Review the current district election rules with LDAF Counsel and revise as needed.
2. Review the district election rule revisions against the current statutes to see if anything conflicts. Revise statutes if necessary.
3. Review the rule revisions and statute revisions with the Commission prior to the Annual LACD meeting.
4. Present the revisions at the LACD meeting
5. Get a sponsor so that the revisions to can be presented during the Legislative Session

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to the Commission to approve moving forward with reviewing supervisor election rules.

Motion by: Mr. Price Gay

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber asked the Commission members did they have any discussion and there were no comments.

Correspondence

- Louisiana Aquaculture Network Monthly Zoom
- Uncertainty-aware water risk models could improve flood and drought preparedness
- Sen. John Breaux: The Mid-Barataria Diversion is based in Science. It should not be canceled.
- Research project shows how aquaculture, agriculture, and restoration can work together
- Assessing the need to grow natural resources professionals' competencies beyond conservation
- California Water History in a Minute-Subsidence August 7, 2025
- Combining soil conservation with phosphorus drawdown can confront legacy phosphorus accumulation and transfer
- Farm Doc Daily: Adoption of Conservation Practices and Farm Goals
- Morning Ag Communications: The Conservation Plan: A Solid Foundation of NRCS Work
- Column: A new 'Louisiana Purchase' of water?

Other Business

Next Meeting

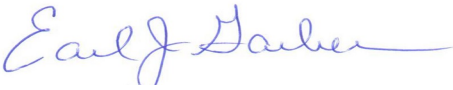
Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 30, 2025 in the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806.

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: At 2:58 P.M. Mr. Brad Spicer made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Price Gay and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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