

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

May 27, 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 1:18 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. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member

Mr. Price Gay, LACD President

Mr. Chris Carter, Area II Alternate Member

Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member

Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter Alternate Member

Members Absent

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative

Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice Chairman, Area V Member

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Doug Daigle, LA Hypoxia Workgroup

Ms. Amy McGinnis, LDAF General Counsel

Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC

Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF-OSWC

Ms. Tabitha Irvin, LDAF Executive Counsel

Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director

Ms. Wendy Gibson- LDAF-OSWC

Ms. "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

Chairman Garber recognized Mr. Doug Daigle. Mr. Daigle discussed HCR 27 by Representative Zeringue which urges and requests enhancement of the state's participation in the Gulf of America Hypoxia Action Plan and Task Force. A few suggestions in the resolution included: adding OSWC as a co-chair to the states' Interagency Nutrient team, adding Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries as member as well as having the state Interagency Nutrient Team provide an annual presentation to the House and Senate Natural Resources committees that summarizes actions take by Louisiana state agencies to specifically help attain the Gulf Hypoxia

Action Plan goals in the specified period of time. This resolution has already passed through the House Natural Resources committee and is awaiting review from the Senate Natural Resources committee. Once the resolution is passed and signed, Mr. Daigle asks that the Commission show some support to the resolution in general or to Governor Landry. Chairman Garber thanked Mr. Daigle for his update and suggested that the Commission take his recommendation for support under advisement and consult with Commissioner Strain, since it relates to one of his divisions.

Approval of April 22, 2025 minutes

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

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

April 2025 Farm Bill Agreement Total Drawdown: \$76,221

Remaining Balance: \$338,350

13 districts have maxed out: Bodcau, Boeuf River, Calcasieu, Crescent, DeSoto, Lower Delta, Madison, Natchitoches, New River, Red River, St. Martin SWCD Tangi-St. Helena, and Tensas-Concordia SWCD. These districts were able to report \$136,148 earned over their allocated farm bill budget. Mr. Breaux also reported that the pause on NRCS-LDAF agreements had been lifted.

Legislative Session Updates

Chairman Garber asked for legislation session updates from the Commission. Mr. Breaux said there were a few bills brought up regarding agriculture. SB 32 sponsored by Sen. Allain discusses limitation of liability related to the utilization of gypsum. EPA has defined acceptable thresholds for certain radioactive elements that may be present in some gypsum. Mr. Breaux said the bill is on the way to being amended to include regard for these thresholds and is expected to move forward. This bill is expected to give Louisiana farmers additional agricultural soil health and remediation opportunities with the use of gypsum.

Another bill to review is SB 244 by Senator Bob Hensgens. This bill discusses water conservation and water use. It also discusses the restructuring of the LDENR into the LA Dept of Conservation & Energy. Chairman Garber asked if we have any updates on the funding being placed back in the districts' budget. Mr. Skains stated that he has been in contact with Rep. Jack McFarland and Sen. Glen Womack. He said he received positive responses and feels that the \$209,000 once removed will be added back to the OSWC budget for districts. Mr. Gay said it is imperative that districts stay in touch with their legislators to show support for Commissioner Strain's original budget. The Commission discussed ideas of possibly getting more funds for Conservation districts. Chairman Garber said that we should reach out to the all the districts and see if supervisors have any ideas to get more funding for districts.

NEW BUSINESS

LSU AgCenter- Dr. Michael Salassi

Dr. Salassi said President Trump recently submitted his budget. The budget includes a \$600 million cut to the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) in USDA which is about a 30% cut to their current budget. NIFA provides leadership and funding for programs that advance agriculture-related sciences. The agency utilizes a few different types of funding including capacity funding and formula-based funding. Both types of funding are non-competitive and usually go to universities and research stations to support agriculture. The LSU AgCenter usually receives around \$40-45 million in competitive grants and approximately \$4 million of capacity non-competitive funding and about \$5 million of capacity extension funds. NIFA has not released any new RFPs due to the federal funding pause that has now been lifted. New RFPs are expected to be released in June.

Dr. Salassi mentioned proposed constitutional amendment #2 that planned to defund the LA Education Quality Trust Fund as well as the LA Board of Regents Support Fund did not pass. The Board of Regents plans to operate as normal this year but there is another bill that with plans to defund both funds. If it passes, it will have to be voted on again next year. The support fund does 2 things for universities across the state:

1. They fund research enhancements with focuses rotating each year. This year's enhancement focus is agricultural sciences.
2. They contribute a portion of the funding for endowed professorships and chairs.

Dr. Salassi wanted to remind the Commission about a few events:

- June 11, 2025- LSU AgCenter South Farm Rice Field Day, Crowley, LA
- June 24, 2025- H Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station Annual Field Day, Crowley, LA
- June 28, 2025- Farm Bureau Commodity Conference
- July 9, 2025- Agricultural Water Management Field Day, Bossier City, LA
- July 16, 2025- Annual Sugarcane Field Day, St. Gabriel, LA

Dr. Salassi also announced that LSU President William Tate resigned to become president at Rutgers University in New Jersey. LSU named Dr. Matt Lee, current Vice President of Agriculture and Dean of the College of Agriculture, as the Interim President. Dr. Lee asked Dr. Salassi to step into his position as interim. Dr. Salassi accepted the role and has in turn asked Dr. Glen Gentry the interim Experiment Station Director. Dr. Salassi expects them to be in the interim positions for approximately a year. LSU will most likely work with a firm over the summer to begin looking for candidates for the LSU President position vacancy.

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux said he wanted to remind everyone about the Louisiana Outdoors Forever program. The program was initially approved during the 2022 Legislative Session and was funded \$10 million during the 2023 Legislative Session. 13 projects were approved during the initial RFP for a total of \$10 million, leveraging in an additional \$27.9 million for a total of \$37.9 million including non-state match. There is currently an RFP out for pre-applications which will run until June 23, 2025. The LOF Technical Advisory Committee plans to review the pre-applications for eligibility 30 days after the deadline. Conservation districts can sponsor or partner with some the LOF applicants.

Mr. Breaux mentioned the upcoming Area 2 meeting which will take place on June 11, 2025 at the Thomas Jason Lingo Community Center in Oak Grove, LA. As mentioned by Dr. Salassi earlier, The Farm Bureau Commodity Conference will run from June 26-29, 2025 with the Commodity meetings happening on June 28, 2025. OSWC has been invited to co-present conservation outcomes regarding the sugarcane harvester modifications that have been enabling crop residue management the Bayou Du Portage watershed 319 project.

Louisiana is hosting the 2025 EPA Regional Non-Point Source training symposium on October 27-29, 2025 in Baton Rouge. They are planning to host conservation tours and are looking for suggestions within 30-45 minutes of the conference hotel.

Recently, The LSU Biocontrol group within the LSU AgCenter hosted two successful weevil harvests on May 17th and May 24th at the Burden Aquaculture Research Center in Baton Rouge. Dr. Rodrigo Diaz and his team have created many options and ideas to optimize landowner's use of salvinia weevils. Mr. Breaux said discussions were had during the recent harvests about the districts' locally led meetings held in late Fall- early Winter and the opportunity there to spread the word about landowner options for overwintering salvinia weevils.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said two waiver requests:

- Mr. Stephen Wade, D'Arbonne SWCD
- Mr. Jay Hardwick, Tensas-Concordia SWCD

Mr. Wade and Mr. Hardwick did not meet board meeting attendance requirements in the past year. They each submitted letters to their district board of supervisors requesting an attendance waiver, and their boards submitted supporting letters suggesting their absences were justified and they are requesting the attendance requirements be waived.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to waive the attendance requirement for Mr. Wade, D'Arbonne SWCD and Mr. Hardwick, Tensas-Concordia SWCD making them eligible for re-election.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Price

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 3 resignations this month:

- Mr. Jeffrey Gardner, Feliciana SWCD, elected position, effective May 13, 2025.
- Mr. Frank Sotile, Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position, effective June 18, 2025.
- Mr. Earl Armstrong, Plaquemines SWCD, elected position, effective May 25, 2025.

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

- Mr. Jeffrey Gardner, Feliciana SWCD, elected position, effective May 13, 2025.
- Mr. Frank Sotile, Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position, effective June 18, 2025.
- Mr. Earl Armstrong, Plaquemines SWCD, elected position, effective May 25, 2025.

Motion by: Mr. Price Gay

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 3 appointments this month:

- Mr. Jeffrey Gardner, Feliciana SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Ross Neil Record, effective May 27, 2025- November 22, 2027.
- Mr. Josh Himel, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position formerly held by Grant Crochet, effective May 27, 2025- June 30, 2026
- Mr. Earl Armstrong, Plaquemines SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Lawrence Rousselle, effective May 28, 2025- May 28, 2028.

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

- Mr. Jeffrey Gardner, Feliciana SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Ross Neil Record, effective May 27, 2025- November 22, 2027.
- Mr. Josh Himel, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position formerly held by Grant Crochet, effective May 27, 2025- June 30, 2026
- Mr. Earl Armstrong, Plaquemines SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Lawrence Rousselle, effective May 28, 2025- May 28, 2028.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber said he was able to hand out a copy of the "Commission Goals" list to supervisors at the Area 3 meeting recently with hopes that they would review and give suggestions. He said that we also had a great

conversation earlier about identifying current and future funding sources for districts. He asked if any of the Commission members had any comments and there were none.

Correspondence

- Minnesota Department of Agriculture: Conservation Efforts Pay Off in Higher Profits for Minnesota Farmers
- CPRA: CPRA Chairman Dove Celebrates Federal Legislation to Increase Coastal Revenue by Thirty Percent
- LSU AgCenter: Hurricane Preparedness Week reminds everyone to plan ahead
- Lexology: Overview- Why are we Interested in the cost of water?
- LWI Marks Milestone with Completion, Availability of Watershed Models
- Drovers: Researchers Seek Environmental Solutions Through Cover Cropping

Other Business

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 24, 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 2:45 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