

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

December 2, 2025
1:15 PM

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY
VETERANS MEMORIAL 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. Steve Horvath, Vice Chairman, Area V Member
Mr. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Area I Member	Mr. Price Gay, LACD President, Member
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member	Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter Member	Mr. Chris Carter, Area II Alternate Member

Members Absent:

Dr. Crystal Vance, Southern University Ag Center, Alternate Member

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Ms. Sarah Trichel, Acting LA NRCS State Conservationist	Ms. Candis Voorhies, Acting Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives
Mr. Ben Langlinais, Iberia SWCD	Ms. Kim Watt, D'Arbonne SWCD
Ms. Amy McInnis, LDAF General Counsel	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 if there were any public comments, and there were none.

Approval of October 28, 2025 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the October 28, 2025 SWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

Mr. Breaux reported that OSWC was able to re-open the Farm Bill reporting portal from November 17-21, 2025 to give districts an additional opportunity to submit completed tasks for the month of September, after which a total of \$58,560.00 in unutilized funding remained. These remaining funds were re-allocated to 15 SWCDs that exceeded their original earning allocations and reallocations.

New FY Farm Bill allocation letters have been sent out, and districts are currently entering Farm Bill hours worked in the month of December.

Out of State Travel

Chairman Garber said we had 8 out of state travel request this month:

- Allen SWCD is asking permission for Marlin Lemoine, Charlie Istre, Jeffrey Manuel, Keith Guillory, and Loretta Saltzman to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 15-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- Calcasieu SWCD is asking permission for Rose Sharbeno, Kathleen Soto, Carol Bliss, Jason Nolde, Preston Broxson, Michael Lavergne, David Daigle, and John Meaney to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 15-20, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- D'Arbonne SWCD is asking permission for Reggie Skains and Kimberly Watt to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 14-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- DeSoto SWCD is asking permission for Christina Ebarb to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 15-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- Morehouse SWCD is asking permission for Erin James to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 14-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- Sabine SWCD is asking permission for John P. Boudreaux to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 15-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- Tensas-Concordia SWCD is asking permission for Zacki Cummings to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 15-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- Upper Delta SWCD is asking permission for Price Gay to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 15-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.

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

- Allen SWCD is asking permission for Marlin Lemoine, Charlie Istre, Jeffrey Manuel, Keith Guillory, and Loretta Saltzman to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 15-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- Calcasieu SWCD is asking permission for Rose Sharbeno, Kathleen Soto, Carol Bliss, Jason Nolde, Preston Broxson, Michael Lavergne, David Daigle, and John Meaney to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 15-20, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
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- Upper Delta SWCD is asking permission for Price Gay to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 15-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Marlin

Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

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

Ms. Trichel said she was pleased to be back in the office following the 43-day government shutdown and thanked the districts for their support throughout the process. She reported that LA NRCS has been allocated approximately \$47 million for EQIP and CSP for the current year, with a national sign-up period expected to be announced in mid-January. LA NRCS is also partnering with Arkansas on another Open Pines project, with signups closing on January 30. The Feral Swine Eradication Pilot program received additional funding through the One Big Beautiful Bill, and NRCS is coordinating with APHIS and other partners to compile information before issuing an official announcement. At this time, there have been no official FY 26 Notices of Funding Opportunity released at either the state or national level. LA NRCS is developing a priorities list to share with potential partners.

Chairman Garber asked about the removal of payment limitations on EQIP and CSP payments. Ms. Trichel explained that these payment limitations expired with the Farm Bill at the end of last fiscal year and have not been in effect since, with no extensions granted. She clarified the distinction between payment limitations and contractual limitations. Historically, CSP and EQIP have had annual payment limitations ranging from \$200,000 to \$450,000, but again these are not currently valid. NRCS does, however, maintain a contract limitation of \$450,000. These payment limitations also previously applied to disaster payments.

Mr. Skains inquired about the NRCS hiring freeze. Ms. Trichel stated that the hiring freeze was lifted on October 15, 2025. An executive order introduced new contingencies and guidance related to hiring, and LA NRCS is reviewing this information with the Office of Management and Budget to proceed with filling positions. Chief Bettencourt has identified the LA State Conservationist position as critical and intends to move forward with permanently filling the vacancy.

LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter Member

Dr. Salassi said LSU will host an Invasive Pest Management workshop tomorrow (Dec. 3rd) at the State Evacuation Shelter in Alexandria, LA. The workshop will include topics ranging from the state of specific crops and livestock in the past year to new pests that may be a problem to Louisiana Agriculture. LSU has been working with Congresswoman Letlow for the past few years to get some federal funding. The LA Board of Regents approved LSU to form the Invasive Species Research Center, but LSU is also hoping to assist in forming a regional Invasive Species Research Center as well. A federal agriculture appropriations bill was passed recently that included \$1 million to assist in invasive species research in Louisiana and other neighboring states.

Dr. Salassi mentioned that the LSU AgCenter will be presenting a workshop at this year's NACD annual meeting on Wednesday, February 18, 2026. The workshop will provide an update on the AgCenter's Feral Swine toxicant research program. The AgCenter will discuss their patented sodium nitrate-based bait development, mechanism of action, and deployment methods for reducing injury to non-targeted animals.

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux reported that conservation districts have recently been doing excellent work conducting water festivals. These festivals began in the 1990s but had experienced a gradual decline due to funding challenges. With the help of partnerships, districts are now making significant progress and planning successful events. Water festivals

provide a great opportunity for the public to learn more about agriculture, natural resources conservation and the role of conservation districts. Recently, Gulf Coast SWCD and Jefferson Davis SWCD hosted water festivals that were very successful. Mr. Horvath shared details about the watershed festival hosted by Capital SWCD last year. He noted that at least 450 students attended, and many asked whether the district would host another festival. There was strong interest in continuing these festivals for future generations. He emphasized that school systems should be the first point of contact when planning a water festival.

Mr. Breaux also noted that OSWC has begun receiving smoke complaints from West Ascension and Assumption parishes during late evening hours. LSU county agencies are working to discourage evening burning. Due to the government shutdown in October, districts experienced delays in completing annual plans and reports, which are typically due in mid-November. This information will be used to develop Grassroots reports that support efforts to secure needed funding for conservation districts.

Ms. Joubert has been working with the LDAF Market Bulletin on the "SWCD Spotlight" series. The next district to be featured will be Iberia SWCD. Everyone is encouraged to read these spotlights to stay informed about SWCD activities across the state.

The Environment and Health Council of Louisiana held its annual conference last month in Thibodaux, Louisiana. The conference focused on seafood in Louisiana and included a presentation from Commissioner Strain.

The Coastal Revegetation Program has welcomed an entirely new team and continues to make strong progress. All projects have been implemented, and site evaluations are currently underway. Mr. Breaux concluded the OSWC report.

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Gay to give an LACD update. He also recognized the past LACD president, Mr. Ben Langlinais in attendance. Mr. Gay reported that Ms. Gerace is hard at working getting everything together. He mentioned some difficulty with changing locations. He said that Mr. Phillips assisted with planning and everything is falling into place as the date approaches. He said he is also preparing for the Spring Fly-In scheduled on March 25th.

Chairman Garber asked about the information for the January SWCC Meeting. Mr. Breaux said nothing has been completely finalized for the meeting but the plan to meet the 1st day of LACD remains. More details will be released after the LACD board meets prior to the Annual meeting.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there is 2 resignations this month:

- Mr. Jeramy Slade, Catahoula SWCD, appointed position, effective November 19, 2025
- Mr. H.C. Peck III, Catahoula SWCD, elected position, effective November 19, 2025.

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

- Mr. Jeramy Slade, Catahoula SWCD, appointed position, effective November 19, 2025
- Mr. H.C. Peck III, Catahoula SWCD, elected position, effective November 19, 2025.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer
Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering
Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 3 appointments this month:

- Mr. H.C. Peck III, Catahoula SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Jeramy Slade, effective December 2, 2025- March 29, 2026

- Mr. Gene Edwards, Catahoula SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. H.C. Peck III, effective December 2, 2025- June 30, 2026
- Mr. David Lamay, Dorcheat SWCD, elected position formerly held by Ms. Mitzi Thomas, effective December 2, 2025- June 30, 2028

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

- Mr. H.C. Peck III, Catahoula SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Jeramy Slade, effective December 2, 2025- March 29, 2026
- Mr. Gene Edwards, Catahoula SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. H.C. Peck III, effective December 2, 2025- June 30, 2026
- Mr. David Lamay, Dorcheat SWCD, elected position formerly held by Ms. Mitzi Thomas, effective December 2, 2025- June 30, 2028

Motion by: Mr. Price Gay

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

During a recent review of next year's reappointment list, a typographical error was discovered on the paperwork for Mr. Larry Fontenot of the Evangeline SWCD . His term states that it is to expire 03/24/26 when it should be 03/24/27. A letter will be sent to Mr. Fontenot and Evangeline SWCD regarding this error.

Meritorious Award

Chairman Garber presented an Exceptional Performance award request:

- LaSalle SWCD is nominating Ms. Tonda Masters to receive an Exceptional Performance award of \$1,201.00.

The Exceptional Performance 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:

- LaSalle SWCD's nomination of Ms. Tonda Masters to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,201.00.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Proposed Legislation and Proposed Rule Changes Regarding Election of District Supervisors

Chairman Garber begin discussing the proposed rule changes to Title 7: Agriculture and Animals. He reviewed the section about expiring supervisors having to get the names of 25 qualified voters. The Registrar of Voters used to assist with the verification process, but they have stopped. Mr. Breaux said districts would receive guidance with their nominating petitions that would state that candidates are to visit the Secretary of State website or app to verify

the qualified voters prior to submitting it to the SWCC. The members discussed other suggested grammatical changes to the rule.

Chairman Garber discussed 'Proposed Legislative Changes to R.S. 3:1206 and 1207'. In the changes, elected supervisors would change from 3 to 4-year terms to run concurrently with the gubernatorial election. Mr. Skains asked if this change would affect supervisors that are in political office. Mr. Breaux said that as far as he is aware, the existing dual office holding provision for district supervisors and SWCC members will still apply.

Mr. Giering discussed a portion of the changes that states that a supervisor would not qualify for re-appointment or re-election unless he attended 66 2/3% of the scheduled meetings. He suggested that include the time frame. Ms. McGinnis said we will revise the statement to state " A supervisor shall not qualify for reappointment or reelection unless he shall have attended at least 66 2/3% of the scheduled district meetings within a 12-month calendar year." Chairman Garber said if there were no other comments, he would call for a motion to approve these documents with the recommended changes.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering
Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay
Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Spicer requested that we revise the motion to include research for supervisor candidates who are current elected officials and are attempting to become an elected supervisor for an SWCD. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would revise the motion to include researching the effect of the dual office holder provision by virtual of the suggested changes.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer
Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering
Motion passed unanimously.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber wanted the Commission members to give some guidance Mr. Gay, LACD President, the LACD Legislative Committee and membership regarding the next steps to getting additional district funding. Districts have been able receive additional funding over the past few years. The main goal is to find some dedicated funding for districts. Chairman Garber believes that we should support Commissioner Strain and request that he keep the budget as is. Mr. Skains said that it would be a great idea to prepare a one-pager to show what was done with the additional funds.

Correspondence

- Expansion of huge industrial waste pile ignites Louisiana environmental debate
- Louisiana Illuminator: Louisiana wetlands advocates fear new federal rules will peel back protections further
- Farm Progress: Make Compost from rice hulls, reduce your fertilizer
- Trust in Farmers: A Pillar for the U.S. Dairy Industry's Stability
- Swamp School: WOTUS and Swampbuster Compliance for Agricultural Producers
- Drovers: Contract Grazing: A Flexible Option for Row Crop and Beef Producers
- Texas Water Foundation: What is Prop 4? Constitutional Amendment for Dedicated Water

Other Business

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is tentatively scheduled on Wednesday, January 7, 2026 at the Holiday Inn Downtown Hotel, 701 4th Street, Alexandria, LA 71301.

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 3:21 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