

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

April 28, 2026
1:15 PM

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY
VETERANS MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM
5825 FLORIDA BLVD
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70806

MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Skains called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 PM.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Ms. Clay Alexander.

Members and Alternates present:

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

Members Absent:

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Ms. Candis Voorhies, Acting Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives	Ms. Amy McInnis, LDAF General Counsel
Mr. Joey Breau, SWCC Exec. Director	Mr. Doug Daigle, LA Hypoxia Director
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC	Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF-OSWC	Ms. Clay Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

Chairman Skains asked if there were any public comments, and he recognized Mr. Doug Daigle. Mr. Daigle said the LA Hypoxia Working group is aiming to keep and increase their current federal funding. He and other stakeholders were able to submit appropriations requests during an open period last month. The Hypoxia Workgroup received strong support from other states as well as the Upper Mississippi Basin Association. The requests are for 1 year and they are still awaiting response from congress. Chairman Skains thanked Mr. Daigle for his comments.

Approval of March 19, 2026 minutes

Chairman Skains called for a motion to approve the March 19, 2026 SWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

March 2026 Drawdown: \$155,226

Total Farmbill Balance remaining: \$517,347

Legislative Session

Mr. Breaux reviewed a list of updated bills given to Commission members. He mentioned a few including:

- HB 7- by Mike Johnson- Removes expropriation authority for carbon dioxide pipelines and storage facilities, prohibits expropriation by private entities related to carbon dioxide transport and sequestration, and removes unitization authority for carbon dioxide storage facilities.
- HB 79- by Robert Carter- Removes the damage caps for injuries resulting from carbon capture and storage.
- HB 5-by Rodney Schamerhorn- Prohibits the sale of Louisiana running surface water outside of the state.

NEW BUSINESS

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

- NRCS currently manages more than 1,600 active agreements nationwide, representing approximately \$5.7 billion in federal investments supporting conservation delivery across the country.
- In order to conduct a meaningful review of this portfolio, NRCS must temporarily pause issuing new agreements, so the agency does not continue adding to the inventory while a comprehensive assessment is underway.
- This pause will allow the Partnerships Division to conduct a full Due Diligence review of all agreements, including both national-level and state-level agreements, to evaluate performance, relevance, and alignment with NRCS priorities.
- The review will ensure NRCS agreements are fully aligned with Executive Order 14332 and USDA Secretarial Memorandum 1078-021, which call for strengthened oversight, improved internal controls, and enhanced accountability in federal grants and agreements.
- Through this process, NRCS will identify agreements that should be continued, amended, or concluded to ensure they are effectively supporting conservation delivery for farmers, ranchers, and landowners.
- Conducting this comprehensive review now will allow NRCS to establish a more disciplined and transparent agreements portfolio, with clearer expectations for performance, oversight, and outcomes.
- This effort will position NRCS to enter the next fiscal cycle with a streamlined and fully aligned agreements framework, ensuring future agreements maximize conservation impact and responsible stewardship of taxpayer resources.

Mr. Garber suggested that Chairman Skains reach out to Commissioner Strain to discuss the LA State Conservationist vacancy. He recommended that written notification be drafted and sent to NRCS headquarters for review. Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve written notification being sent to NRCS regarding the LA State Conservationist vacancy.

Motion by: Mr. Earl Garber
Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering
Passed unanimously.

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

LSU is closely monitoring several federal developments, including President Trump's FY 2027 Budget proposal. The proposed budget includes Capacity Funding and Research initiatives, which encompass Smith-Lever Act funding that supports extension programs and research at land-grant institutions. It also includes funding authorized under the Hatch Act for agricultural experiment stations. Similar to the FY 2026 Budget proposal, the FY 2027 Budget would reduce Smith-Lever funding by 50 percent and eliminate Hatch Act funding.

In response, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities is conducting a survey, in which LSU is participating, to document the impact of capacity funding on land-grant institutions. LSU AgCenter currently receives approximately \$10.3 million in federal agricultural research and extension capacity funding. LSU is also monitoring the United States Department of Agriculture's planned reorganization and relocation of employees currently based in Washington, D.C. The Economic Research Service (ERS) intends to relocate its employees to Kansas City, while the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) plans to move employees to St. Louis. In addition, the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) is proposing the closure of its headquarters office in Maryland and the redistribution of its ongoing research projects to other locations.

LSU Events:

- April 30, 2026- 2026 Northeast Beef and Forage Field Day- Hill Farm Research Station- Homer, LA

Southern University AgCenter Report- Dr. Crystal Vance, Southern University Ag Center, Alternate Member

Dr. Vance reported that the university recently launched its first wine collection, the "801 Collection," named after the university's address at 801 Harding Boulevard. The initiative originated five years ago through Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center's Viticulture and Enology Program. Southern University is currently working to obtain the necessary permits and certifications to officially market and sell the wine. In addition, the university plans to expand its vineyard acreage and develop a dedicated facility for wine production. Students are currently researching various grape pest deterrents and disease-resistant cultivars, including varieties tolerant to Pierce's Disease, which restricts water flow within the plant tissue and can ultimately kill grapevines. The program currently maintains 18 hybrid grape varieties and 35 muscadine varieties.

The university also hosted its "Vet on Wheels" event on April 22, 2026. The event provided pet owners with access to core vaccinations for their pets while offering Pre-Veterinary Medicine students valuable hands-on clinical experience. During the event, students vaccinated 115 cats and engaged with approximately 125 participants.

Additionally, Southern University and A&M College is currently developing a pilot program funded through the recently approved Mississippi Delta Grant. The pilot initiative will focus on addressing Louisiana coastal issues. The university's Pre-Veterinary Medicine program also entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with University of Maryland Eastern Shore to support and streamline students' transition into veterinary school programs.

LACD Update- Mr. Price Gay, LACD President, Member

Mr. Gay announced that the NACD South Central Regional Meeting has been rescheduled for September 17–18, 2026, in Natchitoches. Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts (LACD) is currently coordinating with the local Convention and Visitors Bureau to finalize meeting logistics.

Districts across the state are celebrating Soil Stewardship Week this week using the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) toolkit. This year's theme, "Soil: Where It All Begins," highlights the critical role soil plays in sustaining all forms of life. Looking ahead, the 2027 LACD Annual Meeting is tentatively planned for Lake Charles. Additional details will be announced once meeting dates have been finalized.

The LACDE Summer Meeting is scheduled for July 29–31, 2026, at South Toledo Bend State Park, and all district employees are encouraged to attend.

On the financial side, LACD recently discovered that the NRCS Executive Director Grant had not been fully utilized. As a result, a significant amount of fringe benefit and indirect cost reimbursements—including expenses related to insurance, retirement, utilities, and salaries—remained unclaimed. A request has since been submitted to recover those funds.

Lastly, there are no new updates regarding LACD's 501(c)(3) status. Mr. Steve Bates continues to work through the process following delays associated with tax season. Mr. Gay noted that LACD intends to wait until the designation is officially approved before pursuing any industry funding opportunities.

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux referred to the list of House bills discussed by the members earlier in the meeting. He highlighted House Bill 1200, introduced by Rhonda Butler, which establishes the Louisiana Rural Infrastructure Revolving Loan Program. The legislation would provide conservation districts and other eligible entities with opportunities to obtain matching funds for various infrastructure and development projects.

Mr. Breaux also discussed the continued concerns surrounding Red Flag Warnings in relation to prescribed burning, which have remained a major topic of discussion in recent weeks. These warnings are typically issued when conditions such as low humidity, prolonged low humidity and sustained winds of 20 miles per hour or greater create an increased risk for wildfires that may be difficult to contain. He noted that minor revisions have been completed and submitted to Commissioner Strain for review.

Last week, the Office of Soil and Water Conservation (OSWC), with assistance from Movee Media, filmed the fourth episode of "Good Lands" in St. Bernard Parish. The episode focused on a local revegetation project. Additionally, Mr. Phillips and Mr. Davenport will travel to Dallas on May 4–5, 2026, to attend the EPA Region 6 Non-Point Source Management Conference. The conference will provide an opportunity to network with regional partners and receive updates on environmental initiatives and activities taking place throughout the region.

Mr. Breaux also shared that the Environmental Health Council of Louisiana is currently planning its annual conference, which will focus on health-related topics this year. The conference is tentatively scheduled for November 2026.

Lastly, OSWC and the Commission have continued discussions regarding the possibility of offering online supervisor training. Recently, OSWC has been collaborating with LDAF Information Technology staff to explore the use of ProProfs, a platform that may assist with the development and delivery of supervisor training courses. Indirect costs generated through agreements administered by OSWC have provided the funding needed to begin the process. The proposed program would allow up to 50 supervisors at a time to complete the training within a specified timeframe. The training would consist of adaptations of existing modules followed by a test at the conclusion of the course. While OSWC has not yet received an invoice, a ProProfs account will be developed as soon as an invoice is received and processed.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Skains said we received 4 waiver requests:

- Mr. Kyle Dill, Caddo SWCD

- Mr. Jason Nolde, Calcasieu SWCD
- Mr. Bartol Taliacich, Plaquemines SWCD
- Mr. Alton Broussard, St. Mary SWCD

None of these supervisors met board meeting attendance requirements in the past year. Mr. Dill, Mr. Nolde, Mr. Taliacich, and Mr. Broussard submitted letters to their district Board of Supervisors and their boards submitted support letters suggesting the absences were justified and they are requesting the attendance requirements be waived.

Chairman Skains said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to waive the attendance requirement for Mr. Kyle Dill, Caddo SWCD, Mr. Jason Nolde, Calcasieu SWCD, Mr. Bartol Taliacich, Plaquemines SWCD and Mr. Alton Broussard, St. Mary SWCD making them eligible for re-election.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer
Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay
 Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said there is 4 resignations this month:

- Ms. Duana Juneau, Rapides SWCD, appointed position, effective March 18, 2026.
- Ms. Ali Bowen, Rapides SWCD, elected position, effective April 27, 2026.
- Ms. Ashley Davis, appointed position, effective April 27, 2026.
- Ms. Stacey Conly, elected position, effective April 27, 2026.

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

- Ms. Duana Juneau, Rapides SWCD, appointed position, effective March 18, 2026.
- Ms. Ali Bowen, Rapides SWCD, elected position, effective April 27, 2026.
- Ms. Ashley Davis, appointed position, effective April 27, 2026.
- Ms. Stacey Conly, elected position, effective April 27, 2026.

Motion by: Mr. Earl Garber
Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer
 Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said there are 4 appointments this month:

- Ms. Ali Bowen, Rapides SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Ms. Duana Juneau, effective April 28, 2026- June 26, 2029.
- Ms. Ashley Davis, Saline SWCD, elected position formerly held by Ms. Stacey Conly, effective April 28, 2026- June 30, 2026.
- Ms. Stacey Conly, Saline SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Ms. Ashley Davis, effective April 28, 2026-August 30, 2026.
- Mr. Joseph Leblanc, Upper Delta SWCD, elected position formerly held by Donald Schexnayder, effective April 28, 2026-June 30, 2028.

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

- Ms. Ali Bowen, Rapides SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Ms. Duana Juneau, effective April 28, 2026- June 26, 2029.
- Ms. Ashley Davis, Saline SWCD, elected position formerly held by Ms. Stacey Conly, effective April 28, 2026- June 30, 2026.
- Ms. Stacey Conly, Saline SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Ms. Ashley Davis, effective April 28, 2026-August 30, 2026.

- Mr. Joseph Leblanc, Upper Delta SWCD, elected position formerly held by Donald Schexnayder, effective April 28, 2026-June 30, 2028.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said there are 4 re-appointments this month:

- Mr. Stanley Dutile, Lafayette SWCD, appointed position, effective June 11, 2026- June 11, 2029.
- Mr. Stacy Allee, Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position, effective May 4, 2026- May 4, 2029.
- Mr. Rob Carter Moberley, Madison SWCD, appointed position, effective September 19, 2026-September 19, 2029.
- Ms. Patty Vogt, Plaquemines SWCD, appointed position, effective May 28, 2026- May 28, 2029.

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

- Mr. Stanley Dutile, Lafayette SWCD, appointed position, effective June 11, 2026- June 11, 2029.
- Mr. Stacy Allee, Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position, effective May 4, 2026- May 4, 2029.
- Mr. Rob Carter Moberley, Madison SWCD, appointed position, effective September 19, 2026-September 19, 2029.
- Ms. Patty Vogt, Plaquemines SWCD, appointed position, effective May 28, 2026- May 28, 2029.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Meritorious Awards

Chairman Skains presented 4 meritorious award requests:

- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Cecilia Spiess (district secretary) to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,622.40.
- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Cecilia Spiess (district secretary) to receive a significant achievement award of \$500.00.
- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Alexi Vinti (NRDA Technician) to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,435.20.
- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Alexi Vinti (NRDA Technician) to receive a significant achievement award of \$500.00.

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 Skains said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the nomination packets for:

- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Cecilia Spiess (district secretary) to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,622.40.

- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Cecilia Spiess (district secretary) to receive a significant achievement award of \$500.00.
- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Alexi Vinti (NRDA Technician) to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,435.20.
- Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD is nominating Ms. Alexi Vinti (NRDA Technician) to receive a significant achievement award of \$500.00.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay

Motion passed unanimously.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Skains reviewed the SWCC Commission Goals and requested an update on the progress being made toward implementation. Mr. Garber reported that, based on earlier updates, the online supervisor training program appears to be moving closer to implementation. Mr. Breaux added that supervisors will still be required to review all training materials and successfully complete the associated test in order to renew their supervisor training certification.

Chairman Skains also congratulated Mr. Price Gay of Upper Delta Soil and Water Conservation District, Mr. Curtis Engemann of Upper Delta SWCD, Mr. Patrick Frischhertz of Lower Delta Soil and Water Conservation District, and Mr. Grant Crochet of Lower Delta SWCD for their recent cameo appearances on This Week in Louisiana Agriculture. (TWILA)

During the segment, Mr. Engemann discussed a challenging summer season in which backwater flooding significantly damaged his crops. Mr. Gay addressed ongoing drainage concerns involving a roadway that restricts the flow between Bayou Grosse Tete and Bayou Maringouin drainage systems. He explained that Upper Delta SWCD is currently working on a project aimed at reducing excess backwater and improving drainage in the affected area.

Mr. Frischhertz reflected on the importance of proper drainage practices, emphasizing lessons passed down to him by his father when he first began farming. Mr. Crochet noted that the proposed projects will provide benefits to both homeowners and agricultural producers by improving drainage capacity and better managing water flow throughout the region.

Correspondence

- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation: Implementing nonpoint source pollution programs: Insights from interviews with agency professionals
- Water Innovation Studio of Louisiana at the Water Institute
- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation: The impact of behaviorally informed communications on uptake of a cover crop cost-share program
- CPRA April Newsletter
- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation: Impact of economically targeted conservation delivery on farming net revenue across a range of commodity prices

Other Business

Next Meeting

Chairman Skains said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled on Tuesday, May 26, 2026 in the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806.

Public Comment

Adjournment

Chairman Skains said if there was no other business or comments from the public or Commission members, He will accept a motion to adjourn.

Motion: At 3:03 P.M. Mr. Ed Yerger made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Brad Spicer and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

Mr. Reggie Skains, Chairman, State Soil and Water Conservation Commission