

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

January 7, 2026
8:30 AM

HOLIDAY INN DOWNTOWN-ALEXANDRIA
NEW ORLEANS ROOM
701 4TH STREET
ALEXANDRIA, LOUISIANA 71301

MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Garber called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 8:30 AM.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Mr. Joey Breaux.

Members and Alternates present:

Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman, Area IV Member Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice Chairman, Area V Member

Mr. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. Price Gay, LACD President, Member
Area I Member

Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member

Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter Member

Members Absent:

Dr. Crystal Vance, Southern University Ag Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member
Center, Alternate Member

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Ms. Sarah Trichel, Acting LA NRCS State Mr. Ben Langlinais, Iberia SWCD
Conservationist

Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC

Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

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

Approval of December 2, 2025 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the December 2, 2025 SWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains
Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay
Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the January 7, 2026 Agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains
Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering
Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

Mr. Breaux reported that the November 2025 Farm Bill Agreement Total Drawdown was \$85,227 with a remaining balance of \$1,123,773.

Districts are currently entering December Farm bill figures and will be entering January's figures next month.

Out of State Travel

Chairman Garber said we had 4 out of state travel request this month:

- Acadia SWCD is asking permission for Phyllis Cart to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 14-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- Iberia SWCD is asking permission for Adrienne Landry to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 14-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- LaSalle SWCD is asking permission Tonda Masters and all LaSalle SWCD Board members to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 14-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- Lower Delta SWCD is asking permission for Stephanie Garvin and Grant Crochet to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 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:

- Acadia SWCD is asking permission for Phyllis Cart to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 14-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- Iberia SWCD is asking permission for Adrienne Landry to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 14-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- LaSalle SWCD is asking permission Tonda Masters and all LaSalle SWCD Board members to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 14-19, 2026 in San Antonio, TX.
- Lower Delta SWCD is asking permission for Stephanie Garvin and Grant Crochet to attend the 2026 NACD Annual meeting on February 2026 in San Antonio, TX.

Motion by: Mr. Price Gay
Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath.
Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

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

Ms. Trichel announced that producers successfully received their annual Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) payments by December 31. Some producers chose to defer their payments to FY 2026, and those transactions are currently being processed.

Secretary Rollins recently discussed the new Regenerative Agriculture Pilot Program (RPP), which is designed to address whole-farm resource concerns by supporting voluntary conservation planning. Louisiana has received a few

preliminary talking points but is still awaiting full program details. The RPP is expected to utilize approximately 25% of Louisiana's NRCS EQIP budget.

The first signup deadlines for the RCPP, RPP, EQIP, CSP, and ACEP programs are set for January 15, 2026. Ms. Trichel emphasized that NRCS accepts financial assistance applications year-round.

NRCS is currently working to revise its ranking system. The goal is to maintain a locally led approach while incorporating a more scientifically based method for ranking submitted applications. The agency hopes to streamline ranking pools to enable a more focused statewide system with clear priorities and categories.

Ms. Trichel also shared that NRCS Chief Bettencourt has released the agency's updated priorities, which include:

- Supporting NRCS employees in implementing on-the-ground conservation efforts
- Providing producers with enhanced technical and financial assistance
- Improving and expanding existing field-based tools

Additionally, NRCS will issue a Notice of Funding Opportunity emphasizing conservation planning.

In terms of staffing, NRCS is gradually resuming hiring. The agency currently operates under a 4:1 ratio, meaning that for every four employees who leave, one new employee may be hired. Under new guidance from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), NRCS is required to establish a hiring committee to review all personnel actions, including internal promotions.

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

Dr. Salassi said LSU has hired a few new staff members:

- Dr. Wade Rousse- LSU President
- Dr. James Dalton- Executive Vice President & Chancellor

LSU is also working with different committees to evaluate each of the campuses. They are trying to make decisions that would benefit the institution's financial status. To add to these efforts, The University of New Orleans will be renamed LSU New Orleans as of July 1, 2026.

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux reported that review of draft revisions to the Soil and Water state statutes is ongoing, noting that the draft 3:1206 indicates that a nominating petition must be submitted to the Secretary of State's office for each supervisor candidate. The following paragraph, however, states that the Commission has the authority to waive the election process if districts do not receive more petitions than the number of available elected positions.

Based on this interpretation, it was agreed to revise the draft to clarify that the Commission retains authority over the process unless a district receives more nominating petitions than available elected positions. Discussions were also held with regarding whether these revisions would affect the existing supervisors subject to dual office holding provision. It was determined that the proposed revisions to RS 3:1207 would not affect those supervisors holding dual offices in accordance with the dual office folding provision.

At the December Commission meeting, it was mentioned that all elected SWCD supervisor positions should expire simultaneously every four years, rather than under the current three-year staggered terms to align with the LDAF Commissioner's term. The appointed SWCD supervisor positions would remain 3-year terms. The Commission agreed with the draft revisions as discussed. Mr. Breaux then introduced Mr. Jerry Davenport to provide additional OSWC updates.

Mr. Davenport reported that OSWC has received approval to advertise the Agricultural Environmental Specialist position previously held by Ms. Marinna Curtis. This position will focus on water resources in collaboration with Mr. Davenport and will be based in North Louisiana.

Mr. Davenport also noted that the Agricultural Waste Transfer Program has been expanding significantly. During the current fiscal year, the program has received more applications than in all previous years combined. Districts have been encouraged to work with producers to further improve the program's effectiveness. He also reminded the Commission that the program now accepts all types of agricultural waste, not solely chicken litter as in the past.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there is 2 resignations this month:

- Mr. Hezzie Crain, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, appointed position, effective December 31, 2025.
- Mr. Jim Paul Dupont, Gulf Coast SWCD, elected position, effective December 31, 2025.

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

- Mr. Hezzie Crain, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, appointed position, effective December 31, 2025.
- Mr. Jim Paul Dupont, Gulf Coast SWCD, elected position, effective December 31, 2025.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 5 re-appointments this month:

- Ms. Annette Blount, Bodcau SWCD, appointed position, effective March 22, 2026- March 22, 2029.
- Mr. Allen Gooden, DeSoto SWCD, appointed position, effective March 23, 2026- March 23, 2029
- Mr. Patrick Churchman, Natchitoches SWCD, appointed position, effective June 26, 2026- June 26, 2029
- Mr. Dean Smith, New River SWCD, Appointed position, effective February 28, 2026- February 28, 2029
- Mr. Richard Netterville, Tensas-Concordia SWCD, Appointed position, effective April 24, 2026-April 24, 2029

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

- Ms. Annette Blount, Bodcau SWCD, appointed position, effective March 22, 2026- March 22, 2029.
- Mr. Allen Gooden, DeSoto SWCD, appointed position, effective March 23, 2026- March 23, 2029
- Mr. Patrick Churchman, Natchitoches SWCD, appointed position, effective June 26, 2026- June 26, 2029
- Mr. Dean Smith, New River SWCD, appointed position, effective February 28, 2026
- Mr. Richard Netterville, Tensas-Concordia SWCD, Appointed position, effective April 24, 2026-April 24, 2029

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

Meritorious Awards

Chairman Garber presented 2 Exceptional Performance award requests:

- Calcasieu SWCD is nominating Ms. Rose Sharbeno to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,000.00.
- Calcasieu SWCD is nominating Ms. Kathleen Soto to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,000.00

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 packets for:

- Calcasieu SWCD is nominating Ms. Rose Sharbeno to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,000.00.
- Calcasieu SWCD is nominating Ms. Kathleen Soto to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,000.00

Motion by: Mr. Price Gay

Seconded by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Giering made comments that he appreciated the comments associated with the great ratings and would love to see more districts utilize that area of their forms. He recommended that the Commission approve changing the PPM allowing performance awards to state “ The completed job performance review must include written comments, at least one, to substantiate an exceptional performance ranking for each evaluation criteria on the performance review document.”

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber asked the Commission members if they had any discussion and there were no comments.

Chairman Garber asked LACD President, Mr. Price Gay to make a few comments regarding the LACD meeting that is about to begin. Mr. Gay said Ms. Gerace, LACD Executive Director, did a great job preparing for this convention. He believes that they have made great strides and thanks everyone for all the accomplishments they've achieved.

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Wesley Gibson, NACD South Central Representative, if he had any comments. Mr. Gibson said one of the main goals he had when he started working for NACD was to increase communication. Ms. Sharbeno and Ms. Soto have always shown interest in applying for assistance and grants and that it is great that Calcasieu is rewarding them for their efforts. Mr. Gibson said Louisiana has shown great interest in getting assistance for their conservation districts. He said he is looking forward to seeing everyone at the Annual NACD meeting in February. There will be several breakouts and discussions including funding given through the One Big Beautiful Bill. NACD plans to continue to advocate on the different Farm Bill issues so that producers get the conservation assistance needed.

Correspondence

- Louisiana is overrun with these invasive trees. Could foreign insects help deal with them?
- Modeling tools for ecosystem service tradeoffs and synergies in agricultural landscapes
- Safeguarding America's soil: The critical role of conservation plans in federal easement programs
- WOTUS and Swampbuster Compliance for Agricultural Producers
- Swamp School: WOTUS and Swampbuster Compliance for Agricultural Producers
- Sweet Science: Advances in Sugarcane Farming

Other Business

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled on Tuesday, February 24, 2026 in the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806.

Public Comment

Mr. Langlinais stated that the Commission and LACD should be preparing to discuss proposed WOTUS rule ideas with NACD at the upcoming Spring Fly In happening in March.

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 10:16 A.M. Mr. Ed Yerger made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Horvath and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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