

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

March 19, 2026
1:15 PM

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY
MANAGEMENT & FINANCE CONFERENCE ROOM*
5825 FLORIDA BLVD
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70806

MEETING MINUTES

*The posted agenda indicated the meeting location as the Veterans Auditorium at 5825 Florida Blvd. However, due to last minute emergency conditions in the auditorium, it was necessary to change the meeting place to the Management and Finance Conference Room at the same address, with appropriate signage posted indicating the room change.

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. Marlin Lemoine, Area III Alternate Member	Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate Member
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter Member	Dr. Crystal Vance, Southern University Ag Center, Alternate Member

Members Absent:

Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member

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 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 Skains asked if there were any public comments and there were none.

Approval of February 24, 2026 minutes

Chairman Skains called for a motion to approve the February 24, 2026 SWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Earl Garber

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains called for a motion to approve the March 19, 2026 Agenda. Mr. Gay made recommendations to add: LACD Report and Southern University Ag Center Report permanently to the agenda. Chairman Skains said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the recommended changes.

Motion by: Mr. Price Gay

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

Mr. Breaux reported that the February 2026 Farm Bill Agreement Total Drawdown was \$150,637 with a remaining balance of \$672,573.

NEW BUSINESS

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

- Current FY 26 NRCS Financial Assistance Allocation: \$47.7 million (EQIP and CSP)
- CSP Allocation : \$17.3 million with approximately 858 applications
- EQIP Allocation: \$ 30.4 million with approximately 2,135 applications
- The assessment, ranking, initial cost estimate deadline for EQIP and CSP is April 3rd. (Currently about 5% complete)
- RCPP Open Pine signup ended in January. There are currently 85 applications on file. The full \$7.9 million for this 5-year project has been allocated. The RCPP deadline for assessment, ranking, and initial cost estimate is May 15th.
- Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP): Applications from Richland, East Carroll, Franklin, and West Carroll Parishes have been coming in due to Winter Storm Fern. The Water Resources team is waiting to receive all the complete request packages before teams are dispersed to assist the applicants.
- Grant Parish Police Jury has agreed to a watershed plan for the Grant Parish irrigation project.
- As reported at the previous SWCC meeting, the Regenerative Conservation Pilot (RCP) Program is requiring producers conduct soil testing during the first and final years of their contract. Soil testing must be done by a QI (Qualified Individual). These individuals have been trained to carry out the proper soil testing techniques. NRCS is considering forming a training class for individuals to become QIs as well as a QI vendor list. NRCS will not recommend a specific vendor, but the list would be available to all producers.
- The FY 26 Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) will be released soon.
- Secretary Rollins announced USDA's "One Farmer, One File" Initiative. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) in collaboration with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Risk Management Agency (RMA) will work with agricultural producers on a wide range of programs and services to reduce the administrative burden of farmers. This initiative should be fully operative by 2028.

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

The Legislative Session has begun, and LSU decided not to request additional recurring funds but anticipates receiving some one-time funding. Dr. Salassi noted that without an increase in recurring funding, the university will be unable to secure the resources needed to hire essential staff. During last FY, LSU received \$4.5 million in one-time funding for laboratory renovations, and those projects are currently underway.

Several LSU faculty groups are actively developing grant proposals. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has announced a \$100 million funding opportunity to combat New World screwworm and prevent its spread northward. LSU has submitted six proposals totaling approximately \$9 million and is hopeful that at least one will be selected.

Additionally, six LSU teams are preparing proposals for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) – Strengthening Agricultural Systems (SAS) program under the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). The long-term goal of the SAS initiative is to transform U.S. food and agricultural production while enhancing farmer prosperity. This same program previously awarded LSU a \$10 million grant for rice research.

Another group is developing a proposal for the Feed the Future Innovation Labs, a U.S. Department of State initiative aimed at advancing global food security. The program supports research that either (1) advances agricultural science to increase productivity, mitigate threats, and strengthen food systems to reduce hunger and malnutrition, or (2) increases demand for and access to nutritious, safe foods while improving market pathways for public and private sector stakeholders.

President Wade Rouse and Chancellor Jim Dalton are collaborating to establish five committees to evaluate how various parts of the university can better coordinate their efforts. One proposal under consideration would list the five research facilities as a single institution for administrative purposes, while maintaining separate state appropriations budgets for each facility.

LSU Events:

- April 16, 2026- 2026 Wheat and Oat Field- Macon Ridge Station, Winnsboro, LA

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux reported that since the last Commission meeting, there has been strong consensus to revise the prescribed burn guidelines for marsh and agricultural lands. He explained that certification training materials for marshland burners and timber burners is similar in that emphasis is placed on firing techniques and fuel loads. In contrast, agricultural prescribed burners typically work on smaller acreage with lighter fuel loads and more manageable fires. Concerns have recently been raised by residential homeowners and local fire departments regarding burning during red flag warnings. Mr. Breaux noted that red flag warnings have become prominent in recent years. He is currently working to schedule a meeting to discuss potential revisions to the guidelines. Mr. Gay added that sharing updated guidelines with mills would be beneficial, as they play a key role in communicating information to producers.

Mr. Breaux announced that the Coastal Connections event, sponsored by Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), will be held on March 30, 2026, at the CPRA complex. The event will provide networking opportunities with agencies and companies involved in coastal and water management. He also noted that the 2026 high-water inspection tour conducted by the Mississippi River Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will conclude with a meeting in Baton Rouge on March 27, 2026. This annual tour includes public meetings aboard the M.V. Mississippi, allowing community members to engage on issues related to navigation, flood control, and infrastructure.

Mr. Breaux discussed bio-oil, which has recently gained attention among producers and businesses statewide. He explained that the process involves converting agricultural waste, such as rice hulls or bagasse, biochar from which a by-product liquid substance, bio-oil. There are discussions in the industrial sector to inject this bio-oil into orphan wells. He noted that opinions on this topic are mixed, and no legislation has been introduced at this time.

Mr. Breaux also reported that Locally Led meetings are being scheduled by districts across the state. He recently received notice that the Feliciana Soil and Water Conservation District will hold its locally-led meeting next week. Commission members are encouraged to contact their local districts for additional information on upcoming meetings.

Finally, Mr. Breaux shared that the Sabine Soil and Water Conservation District recently hosted a water festival. Many staff members from the Office of Soil and Water Conservation attended to assist with setup and lead educational activities. He emphasized that these events serve as valuable outreach opportunities to educate communities on water-related conservation topics.

LACD Update

Chairman Skains asked Mr. Gay to provide the LACD update. Mr. Gay reported that the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Annual Meeting was highly successful, noting that Louisiana played a significant role through strong presentations and overall representation.

Mr. Gay stated that the Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts (LACD) held its quarterly board meeting on March 12 to discuss various matters. He reported that investment funds previously moved by Mr. Spicer had not yet been reinvested, but plans are in place to proceed. Mr. Steve Bates, LACD Secretary-Treasurer, will work with the committee to develop an investment policy. Once finalized, LACD intends to evaluate and select an appropriate investment firm. Mr. Anthony Butler and Ms. Courtney Gerace have been working on revisions to the LACD bylaws and articles. There wasn't a quorum at this board meeting so the revisions will be discussed at the next meeting. The board plans to present and discuss the updates with the full membership at the next meeting. Mr. Gay added that, upon approval of the revised bylaws and articles, LACD intends to move forward with establishing a 501(c)(3) organization.

Mr. Gay also announced that the Spring Fly-In will take place next week in Washington, DC. He, Mrs. Gerace, and Mr. Breaux plan to attend and are scheduled to meet with Mr. Jimmy Emmons, Assistant Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and with all offices of the LA Congressional delegation. Planned discussion topics include feral hog issues and the LA State Conservationist position, which has been selected but not yet publicly announced. Mr. Gay also intends to address staffing shortages within NRCS resulting from the recent federal shutdown.

Mr. Gay reported that LACD will host the upcoming NACD South Central Regional Meeting on September 15–16, 2026, at the Chateau Saint Denis Hotel.

Ms. Stephanie Garvin, the new LACDE President, is encouraging supervisors to strongly support employee attendance at the annual summer LACDE meeting. This year's meeting will be held at South Toledo Bend State Park, with dates and additional details to be announced. District expenses are expected to include two meals and mileage. Ms. Garvin also plans to provide training focused on strengthening local outreach efforts.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Skains said there is 1 resignation this month:

- Mr. Donald Schexnayder, Upper Delta SWCD, elected position, effective March 10, 2026.

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

- Mr. Donald Schexnayder, Upper Delta SWCD, elected position, effective March 10, 2026.

Motion by: Mr. Earl Garber
Seconded by: Mr. Price Gay
Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said there are 2 appointments this month:

- Mr. Steve Branch, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. James R. Knight, effective March 19, 2026- June 30,2026.
- Mr. Donald Schexnayder, Upper Delta SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Robert Morris, effective March 19, 2026-May 24, 2027.

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

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

- Mr. James Knight, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, appointed position, effective May 25, 2026-May 25, 2029.
- Mr. H.C. Peck III, Catahoula SWCD, appointed position, effective March 29, 2026- March 29, 2029.
- Mr. Richard Fontenot, Evangeline SWCD, appointed position, effective March 26, 2026- March 26, 2029.
- Mr. Joshua Fletcher, Grant SWCD, appointed position, effective March 28, 2026-March 28, 2029.
- Mr. Jeffery Durand, St. Martin SWCD, appointed position, effective March 26, 2026-March 26, 2029.

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

- Mr. James Knight, Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD, appointed position, effective May 25, 2026-May 25, 2029
- Mr. H.C. Peck III, Catahoula SWCD, appointed position, effective March 29, 2026- March 29, 2029
- Mr. Richard Fontenot, Evangeline SWCD, appointed position, effective March 26, 2026- March 26, 2029
- Mr. Joshua Fletcher, Grant SWCD, appointed position, effective March 28, 2026-March 28, 2029
- Mr. Jeffery Durand, St. Martin SWCD, appointed position, effective March 26, 2026-March 26, 2029

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Mr. Marlin Lemoine

Motion passed unanimously.

Meritorious Awards

Chairman Skains presented 1 meritorious award request:

- Madison SWCD is nominating Ms. Denotra Jones 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:

- Madison SWCD is nominating Ms. Denotra Jones to receive a significant achievement award of \$500.00.

Motion by: Mr. Earl Garber

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

District Supervisor Election

Chairman Skains reminded Commission members that the nominating period for 2026 District Supervisors' election will begin on April 1, 2026 and will end on April 30, 2026. District supervisors are asked to send the original, notarized nominating petitions to OSWC making sure that they are postmarked prior to May 1, 2026. District election notices are due to OSWC by March 27, 2026.

Legislative Session

Mr. Breaux mentioned that the legislative session will begin on March 9, 2026. Some of the drafted bills include:

- HB 250- by Christopher Turner- Removes the requirement for immediate family members of certain public servants to disclose certain information and removes the requirement for certain public servants to disclose certain information about their immediate family members.
- HB 602- by Dennis Bamburg-Increases the maximum annual amount of severance tax revenues that may be remitted to parishes in which the associated severance occurs. Regarding sulphur, lignite or timber extraction.
- HB 847-by Rhonda Butler-Provides for the election, duties, and requirements of district supervisors of the soil and water conservation commission.
- HB 861-by Mike Johnson-Provides relative to the status of inactive boards and commissions in Louisiana.
- SB 4- by Mike Fesi, Sr.-Provides relative to water fluoridation.
- SB 41-by Robert Allain – Expands the number of days required for public bodies to publish minutes for open meetings from twenty days to forty-five days.
- SB 47- Presented by Beth Mizell- Requires certain email and telephone contact information for individual members of a board and commission.
- SB 214-by Bob Hensgens- Provides for emergency preparedness as relates to water levels
- SB 388- by Valerie Hodges- Protects state agencies from contacts with foreign adversaries and foreign terrorist organizations and authorizes the governor to use emergency powers to assist state agencies to cancel any such contract for cause.
- SR 7- by Bob Hensgens- Approves the annual state integrated coastal protection plan for Fiscal Year 2027, as adopted by the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority Board.
- HB 1- by Jack McFarland- Provides for the ordinary operating expenses of state government for Fiscal Year 2026-2027
- HB 5- by Mike Johnson- Authorizes individual parishes to determine whether or not Class VI carbon dioxide injection wells, carbon dioxide sequestration, and pipelines transporting carbon dioxide may be permitted within their parish by action of the parish governing authority or by local option election.
- HB 6- by Mike Johnson- Authorizes the governing authority of Rapides Parish to determine whether carbon dioxide sequestration and pipelines transporting carbon dioxide may be permitted within the parish.
- 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 80- by Robert Carter- Establishes strict liability for damages caused from carbon storage and transportation.
- HB180- by Charles Owens- Provides relative to expropriation by private entities.
- HB 192- by Charles Owens- Prohibits expropriation of property by foreign adversaries or agents of a foreign adversary.
- HB 327- by Danny McCormick- Declares that carbon dioxide sequestration is illegal without a property owner's consent.
- SB 61-Presented by William "Bill" Wheat Jr.- Authorizes parish governing authorities and citizens to determine whether class VI injection wells, carbon dioxide sequestration, or carbon dioxide pipelines may be permitted within a parish.
- SB 62-Presented by William "Bil" Wheat Jr.- Provides relative to construction of pipelines on certain water bodies.
- SB 63- Presented by William "Bill" Wheat Jr.-Prohibits construction of pipelines on certain wildlife management areas.

SWCC Goals

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

Correspondence

- Insights from farmer advocates on the role of informal peer-to-peer learning in promoting conservation
- NACD Applauds USDA's "One Farmer, One File" Initiative to Streamline Conservation Delivery
- Regenerative potato production: Fry in the sky or grounded in reality?
- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation: Water quality considerations for using surface water bodies as an alternative irrigation water source in the Mississippi Alluvial Plain, Mississippi, USA
- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation: Can occasional tillage enhance no-till performance?
- Forestry Notes: Good Neighbor Authority in Action: Lessons From Leaders
- USDA: Soil Health Testing
- USDA: Regenerative Pilot Program
- Louisiana Wildlife Federation Announces 2025 Conservation Achievement Award Winners

Other Business

Next Meeting

Chairman Skains said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled on Tuesday, April 28, 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 3:14 P.M. Mr. Brad Spicer made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Horvath and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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