

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

July 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, 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. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Member

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

Members Absent:

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

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

Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director

Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC

Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF-OSWC

Ms. Macy Vizier, LDAF-OSWC

Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC

Ms. Clay Alexander, LDAF-OSWC

Public Comments

Chairman Skains asked for public comments and there was none.

Approval of June 23, 2026 minutes

Chairman Skains called for a motion to approve the June 23, 2026 SWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Price Gay

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

June 2026 Drawdown: \$80,748

Total Farm Bill Balance remaining: \$283,501

CPA-SWCD Agreements

Chairman Skains said the Commission received 1 SWCD CPA Agreement this month:

- Lafayette SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist, CPA. The fee will be no more than \$2,100.

Chairman Skains said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Lafayette SWCD's engagement letter from Maraist & Maraist, CPA

Motion by: Mr. Price Gay

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

Out of State Travel

Chairman Skains said the Commission received 1 out of state travel request:

- Northeast SWCD is asking permission for District Secretary, Katie Taylor and PSS, Stephanie Ainsworth, to attend the 2026 NCDEA Mid-Year Training in Gulf Shores Park, AL on September 1-2, 2026.

Chairman Skain said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve Northeast's out of state travel request for District Secretary, Katie Taylor and PSS, Stephanie Ainsworth, to attend the 2026 NCDEA Mid-Year Training in Gulf Shores Park, AL on September 1-2, 2026.

Motion by: Mr. Earl Garber

Seconded by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

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

- On June 17th, USDA announced re-organization plans for NRCS.
- The congressional notification period was 30 days and has now ended. Each NRCS employee will receive a notification of intent that will outline options such as voluntary acceptance, critical vacancy opportunities, and information about relocation, grade, pay retention.
- USDA will announce state reorganization information during the week of August 3rd. NRCS LA plans to have reorganization plans ready to present by August 6th.
- Critical vacancy announcements will be opening nationwide by August 28th.
- Final notifications of directive reannouncements will occur by September 30th.

Ms. Voorhies stated that the reorganization will affect national headquarter positions more than state agency positions. The intent is to maintain field office staff to maintain Farmer First and conservation delivery programs.

Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFO) available:

- Regional Conservation Partnership Program opened June 23rd and will close August 24th on Grants.gov. There is a total budget of \$310 million available for RCPP Classic and RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFAs). 10% of this budget will be set aside for tribal entities. Award minimum is \$250,000 and maximum is 10 million. 75% of project funding must be financial assistance dollars which are paid directly to producers for conservation delivery. The rest (25%) can be used for implementation of technical assistance. (i.e. outreach and project management) NRCS intends to allocate funding towards critical conservation area or state/multistate funding source. There are 8 critical conservation areas and Louisiana has 2 of those: Longleaf pine range and the Mississippi River Basin. Webinars have already happened for Classic Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA), and one was for easements. Recordings of the webinars can be found on "TheUSDANRCS" YouTube page.
- Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program was announced on July 23rd and will close on September 21st. The total funding available for the program is \$35 million. The award minimum is \$75,000 and the maximum is \$3 million per project. The project consists of 3 coordinated components: Feral swine removal by APHIS, Restoration efforts supported by NRCS, and assistance to producers for feral swine control provided through grants with non-federal partners. 25% of the total project cost must be delivered through partner match. All projects must include some form of cash match.

Ms. Voorhies mentioned that LA NRCS wants to be 100% obligated across all programs by August 28th. Currently they are approximately 72% obligated.

Ms. Trichel was invited to the CURRENT Authority meeting on August 5th where she gave an NRCS update. The CURRENT Authority manages upland flood control, river navigation, and inland water resources.

An Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program project has been approved that will assist in recovery efforts from Winter Storm Fern in Richland Parish. They are awaiting more information from Ouachita and East Carroll parishes, but the project will remove debris from a channel near Rayville, LA.

The Coastal Wetlands, Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) team has been working to develop costs and benefits for Priority Project Lists (PPL) 36 Projects. Over the summer, CWPPRA teams will conduct field investigations to evaluate project areas, identify project feature locations, determine habitat conditions, and collect Wetland Value Assessment data for each candidate project. Project selection will occur at the December 2026 Technical Committee meeting and January 2027 Task Force Meeting.

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

Regarding research security, significant discussion continues around protecting university research and information from foreign adversaries. Under Senate Bill 399—the "Research and Education Protection Act of 2026"—the Louisiana Higher Education Research Security Council was created to promote secure academic research across state institutions while mitigating risks of foreign espionage and interference. LSU has conducted numerous training sessions on these security protocols and will continue providing updates as new guidelines are issued.

LSU continues to monitor the new breed of insects that have come to Louisiana. They are focused on the pasture mealybug which seems to be expanding across all sugarcane parishes. Dr. Blake Wilson, Entomology professor, has been assisting in general research and finding the right insecticide to treat the insect.

Dr. Salassi reported on FY26 research activity, noting a significant increase in proposal submissions of up to approximately \$199 million, compared to \$145 million in FY25. Despite the higher volume of submissions, LSU was awarded approximately \$25 million in FY26, down from \$35 million the previous year. The decrease in awarded funding and subsequent review slowdowns were attributed to Request for Proposal (RFP) delays stemming from updated qualification criteria introduced under the presidential administration. Additionally, total LSU AgCenter Research expenditures for FY26 reached approximately \$81 million, compared to \$84 million in FY25.

Dr. Salassi highlighted a recent Request for Proposals (RFP) from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) for the Research Facilities Act Program. The program provides up to \$30 million in funding for the construction, modernization, or renovation of critical agricultural science infrastructure, offering experiment stations a 1:1 federal matching grant for facility projects as well as smaller planning grants. LSU has submitted a \$200,000 planning grant proposal to initiate the conversion of a vacant building into a dedicated aquaculture station.

Southern University Ag Center Report- Dr. Crystal Vance

Dr. Vance presented updates on Southern University's ongoing research projects and upcoming campus events:

- **Faculty Research Updates:** Dr. Jodi Morton is conducting research on fennel supplementation in breeding female swine. Dr. C.P. Bagley is leading a rotational grazing study across three Louisiana beef cattle farms, focusing on pasture productivity, soil health, and sustainable grazing management.
- **Faculty Recruitment:** Southern University is currently recruiting for an Assistant/Associate Professor of Agricultural Economics/Business. Interested candidates can submit applications through the university's careers portal.
- **Upcoming Events:** The university plans to host a career fair in November. Employer and vendor registration is set at \$100 per booth.

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

- LACD Coastal Resource Committee Meeting took place on June 25-26, 2026 in Hackberry, LA. The event was quite successful. Participants got to hear different presenters and partake in a tour around Black Lake.
- NACD Summer Meeting, Grand Rapids, MI- July 17-22, 2026- Received some national updates including CEO, Mr. Jeremy Peters stepping down on September 30, 2026. He has agreed to assist in the transitioning process for the new candidate filling the role. NACD has also adapted a budget and have decided to increase dues to \$1,000. Mr. Gay emphasized the importance of these dues in assisting the association and encourages the districts to do what they can to contribute. There was also have discussions on all the new data centers and how it will affect our natural resources.
- LACD has entered a partnership with the LSU AgCenter and the American Biochar Institute- The 5-year, \$5 million farm trial will give up to 46 producers an opportunity to adopt irrigation water management practices that will increase efficiency, conserve water resources, and strengthen drought resistance. The project combines producer-led demonstrations, implementation of irrigation technologies, soil health improvements, digital decision tools, and extension and outreach opportunities that will extend to other irrigated systems.
- LACDE Meeting- August 30, 2026- Many, LA
- LACD Summer Meeting- September 3, 2026 in Alexandria, LA
- The NACD South Central Region- September 17-18, 2026 in Natchitoches, LA. Supervisors are encouraged to invite cooperators.
- 2027 LACD Annual Meeting- January 11-13, 2027- Golden Nugget resort in Lake Charles, LA

OSWC Update- Mr. Joey Breaux, SWCC Exec. Director

Mr. Breaux shared the following updates:

- LDAF Market Bulletin: The latest edition features a cover story on a recent *Good Lands* video detailing a revegetation project in St. Bernard Parish. Board members are encouraged to collect physical copies to share with their boards.
- Farm Bureau Congressional Recess Visit: Louisiana Farm Bureau hosted a successful visit in Caddo Parish, where former Caddo SWCD supervisor Marty Wooldridge hosted U.S. Speaker of the House Mike Johnson at his farm. Local producers met with Speaker Johnson to discuss pressing agricultural issues, including rising production costs, labor shortages, trade concerns, and the need for updated farm policy.
- PL-566 Project Ranking Guidance: Following up on Mr. Davenport's report from the previous meeting, new program guidance requires a state-level board to prioritize projects seeking environmental assessment funds under the PL-566 program. Mr. Davenport developed a scoring sheet and ranking guidelines for this process. Mr. Breaux recommended that commissioner members review the provided ranking materials in preparation for a formal vote at the next meeting.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Skains said there is 2 resignations this month:

- Mr. David Lowe, Dorcheat SWCD, appointed position, effective July 31, 2026.
- Ms. Ashley Davis, Saline SWCD, elected position, effective July 15, 2026.

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

- Mr. David Lowe, Dorcheat SWCD, appointed position, effective July 31, 2026.
- Ms. Ashley Davis, Saline SWCD, elected position, effective July 15, 2026.

Motion by: Mr. Brad Spicer

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said there are 3 appointments this month:

- Ms. Enid Thompson, Caddo SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Allen Evans, effective July 28, 2026- June 30, 2027.
- Ms. Ashley Greene, Dorcheat SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Joe Robinson, effective July 28, 2026- June 30, 2029.
- Mr. Joseph Arceneaux, Gulf Coast SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Jim P. Dupont, effective July 28, 2026- June 30, 2029.

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

- Ms. Enid Thompson, Caddo SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Allen Evans, effective July 28, 2026- June 30, 2027.
- Ms. Ashley Greene, Dorcheat SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Joe Robinson, effective July 28, 2026- June 30, 2029.
- Mr. Joseph Arceneaux, Gulf Coast SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Jim P. Dupont, effective July 28, 2026- June 30, 2029.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said there are 1 re-appointment this month:

- Mr. Tim Collins, Saline SWCD, appointed position, effective August 30, 2026- August 30, 2029.

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

- Mr. Tim Collins, Saline SWCD, appointed position, effective August 30, 2026- August 30, 2029.

Motion by: Mr. Earl Garber

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Yerger

Motion passed unanimously.

Meritorious Awards

Chairman Skains said there was 1 meritorious award request this month:

- Northeast SWCD is nominating Ms. Stephanie Ainsworth (PSS) to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,000.00.

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:

- Northeast SWCD is nominating Ms. Stephanie Ainsworth (PSS) to receive an exceptional performance award of \$1,000.00.

Motion by: Mr. Earl Garber

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Skains called on Mr. Breau for updates regarding training development. Mr. Breau reported that the first online training module draft was completed and distributed to a small test group; minor revisions are currently being addressed, but progress remains on track. Ms. Alexander demonstrated the module for the Commission members while Chairman Garber guided members through the content and its concluding quiz.

Correspondence

- USDA Announces \$35 Million to Combat Feral Swine on American Agricultural Lands
- Local farm wins case against St. Landry Parish after request to stop agricultural practices
- Farm Doc Daily: Rethinking Phosphorus and Potassium, Part 1: Soil Testing
- Arkansas poultry companies reach \$44 million settlement with Oklahoma
- EPA Proposes Commonsense NEPA Reforms to Get America Building Again
- Launching the Greater Des Moines Watershed Program

Other Business

Next Meeting

Chairman Skains said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled on Tuesday, August 25, 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 2:56 P.M. Mr. Brad Spicer made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Giering and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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