

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

August 27, 2019
1:15 PM

VETERAN'S AUDITORIUM
5825 FLORIDA BLVD.
BATON ROUGE, LA 70806

PROCEEDINGS/MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Skains called the regular monthly Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M and gave the invocation and Mr. David Daigle lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander.

Members and Alternate Members present:

Mr. Reggie Skains- Chairman
Dr. Ernest Girouard-Vice Chairman
Mr. Ed Yerger
Mr. Larry Sayes
Dr. Tommy Vitrano
Mr. David Daigle- LACD President
Dr. Rogers Leonard, LSU AgCenter

Members absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center
Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Randolph Joseph, Assistant NRCS State Conservationist of Field Operations
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF-OSWC/Executive Director SSWCC
Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Wendy Gibson, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chairman Skains asked if there were any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Chairman Skains asked for comments from the public or Commission members about the July 30, 2019 State Soil and Water Conservation Commission minutes and there were none. Chairman Skains called for a motion to approve the May 29, 2019 State Commission Meeting minutes.

Motion: Dr. Ernest Girouard made a motion to approve July 30, 2019 State Soil and Water Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Yerger and passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Chairman Skains said they would now take up Unfinished Business and asked Mr. Spicer to review the agenda items with the State Commission.

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

Mr. Spicer reported that OSWC has approximately \$280,000 balance in the Farm Bill Agreement to use for August and September. He said this balance includes funds for the Targeted Watershed Technicians. He said the districts are well on the way to earning all the remaining funds.

District Funding

Chairman Skains said the next item on the agenda is *District Funding*. He asked Mr. Spicer if he had an update on district allocations. Mr. Spicer said we approved the district state allocation in the July SSWCC meeting. He said all districts are allocated a \$25,000 base allocation. He said any districts that have additional offices would receive an extra \$17,500 and districts that have additional parishes or partial parishes receive \$1,250. He said the base allocated uses approximately 80% of a district's state allocated funds. Mr. Spicer said state funding for the soil and water conservation districts has decreased between 2008 and 2016. He said prior to 2010, the base allocation used approximately 50% of a district's state appropriated funds. He said the rest of the funds are distributed to districts based on each district's percentages of the state's potential conservation workload. He said the workload formula has 12-14 elements. He said the districts' allocation letters have been sent out to the districts.

LACD Annual Mid-Year Meeting-September 19, 2019

Chairman Skains said the next item on the agenda is *LACD Annual Mid-Year Meeting-September 19, 2019*. He asked Mr. Daigle if he had any comments on this. Mr. Daigle said we are approximately 3 weeks away from the meeting. He said this meeting is to discuss and plan for the 2020 LACD Meeting which will be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Baton Rouge, LA from January 8-10, 2020.

Mr. Spicer said he and Mr. Daigle discussed the idea of having someone give a presentation at the LACD Annual meeting on the Mississippi River and the Morganza and other flood control structures in Louisiana. He said it would be very informative to have someone from the Corps of Engineers (COE) as well as Commissioner Strain speak about the imports of the flood waters. He said farmers and especially those that have cattle operations in the Morganza Spillway must have advance notice should the* COE have to open the spillway.

Area 5 State Election Convention

Chairman Skains said the next item on the agenda is *Area 5 State Election Convention*. He asked if Mr. Spicer or Dr. Vitrano if they had any comments on the draft election letter contained in their Commission folders. Mr. Spicer said this letter is ready to be sent out to all Area 5 districts. He said it is vital that each district select a delegate and an alternate and submit their names to the State Commission/ OSWC by Friday, October 11, 2019. He said the proposed Area 5 Election Convention will be held on Tuesday, October 22, 2019. He said the Commission must establish a date, time, and place to have the Area 5 election. Chairman Skains asked would 11:00am on October 22, 2019 be a good time to have the convention in the LDAF Veterans' Auditorium and everyone agreed. Chairman Skains called for a motion to approve the Area 5 Election Convention be on Tuesday, October 22, 2019 at 11:00am in the LDAF Veterans' Memorial Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA.

Motion: Dr. Tommy Vitrano made a motion to approve the Area 5 Election Convention be held on Tuesday, October 22, 2019 at 11:00am in the LDAF Veterans' Memorial Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA. The motion was seconded by Mr. Larry Sayes and passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

NRCS State Conservationist Report

Chairman Skains said they would now take up New Business and asked NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations, Mr. Randolph Joseph to give the NRCS report. Mr. Joseph said that Mr. Kevin Norton has been officially approved to become the Associate Chief for NRCS. He said the Louisiana State Conservationist position was re-advertised on August 20th and is set to close on September 4th. He said the first set of applicants who applied will have to repeat the process but are still eligible. He said the person chosen to fill Mr. Kevin Norton's position as Louisiana State Conservationist will have big shoes to fill.

Mr. Joseph said that NRCS is approaching the end of the federal fiscal year and are working hard to close out program funding obligations for EQIP, CSP, and ACEP-WRE. He said EQIP is currently 89% obligated with 618 contracts on 128K acres, with an additional 6% in approved status. He said the current allocation amount for EQIP is approximately \$27.8 million. He said CSP currently has 86 applications selected for funding on over 51K acres, which is based on the current allocation amount of \$7.6 million. Mr. Joseph said an additional \$16 million has been requested to fund additional eligible applications. He said the Grassland Conservation Initiative (GCI) currently has 421 applications selected for funding at an estimated cost of \$5.5 million. He said this initiative got funds from the CSP agreement. He said NRCS is hoping for success in this program so that the GSI can receive funds along with the next group of allocation letters which are set to be sent out soon. Dr. Girouard said that it is an intense process for DCs to get conservation plans done for the GSI process. Mr. Joseph said the WRE program is in process of enrolling 35 new easements on over 7,000 acres for an estimated cost of \$17.5 million, which includes easement purchases and restoration work. He said since we are currently running on an extended Farm Bill agreement, NRCS is prohibited from announcing programs for 2020.

Mr. Joseph said the watershed program, PL-566, continues progress on two efforts; one in Grant Parish (Irrigation Watershed Plan) and the other one in Upper Delta SWCD (Upper Terrebonne Basin Flood Prevention Plan). He said they have submitted two proposals for FY 19 funding: Walnut Bayou Flood Prevention Plan for Madison SWCD and Lower Vermillion River Basin Hydrologic Restoration and Flood Prevention in Vermillion SWCD. He said there is an agreement under development with the town of Plain Dealing in Bossier Parish to develop a rehab plan for three flood control structures in the Upper West Fork Cypress Bayou Watershed. He said there are currently two debris removal EWP projects that are ongoing in Livingston Parish. Mr. Joseph said they are working on two Floodplain Easement projects, one in the city of Gonzales and the other in Pointe Coupee parish. He said there are four nutrient reduction watershed projects currently in the development and implementation stages which include two dairy projects in St. Helena, Tangipahoa, and Washington Parishes. He said the other two projects are the Bayou Folse Watershed in Lafourche Parish and the winter water holding project in Cameron and Vermillion Parishes. He said they are also in the process of implementing the LA-39 Coast Wide Vegetative Planting and Nutrient Control projects. He said CS-49 Cameron FW Introduction is scheduled to begin construction in October 2019.

Mr. Joseph said they have made a tentative selection for a Soil Conservation Technician in the New Roads field office. He said NRCS anticipates filling four vacant district conservationists' positions in September/October along with a few other state and area level support positions.

Mr. Joseph said in this month's issue of *Louisiana Conservation Update*, the cover story is about Mr. Mead Hardwick and Mr. Marshall Hardwick. He said they are sons to Dr. Jay Hardwick, Tensas-Concordia SWCD supervisor. He said they discuss having a comprehensive conservation plan in place with a focus on practical application of conservation methods. He said the Hardwick sons' along with their parents are Certified Louisiana Master Farmers. He said the practices they have implemented under the Master Farmer program has given them knowledge on new and upcoming technology that is cost effective and time efficient.

Mr. Joseph said that concluded his report and Chairman Skains thanked him.

Supervisor Election Results/Resignations/Reappointments/Appointments

Chairman Skains said they would now take up supervisor resignations, reappointments, and appointments.

Chairman Skains said there is one appointment request this month from Caddo SWCD requesting Mr. Jacob Rumbaugh fill the vacant elected position formerly held by Mr. Newt Lynn. He said his term will begin August 27, 2019 and expire June 30, 2022. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve this appointment.

Motion: Dr. Ernest Girouard made a motion to approve the appointment of Mr. Jacob Rumbaugh, Caddo SWCD, to fill the vacant elected position formerly held by Mr. Newt Lynn. Term to begin August 27, 2019 and expire June 30, 2022. The motion was seconded by Mr. David Daigle and passed unanimously.

Correspondence

Chairman Skains said the first correspondence item is an engagement letter from Lower Delta SWCD requesting approval from the Commission to enter into a contract with J. Aaron Cooper, CPA LLC to conduct the district's FYE June 30, 2019 audit at the cost of \$575. Chairman Skains asked for any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none. He said if there were no comments, then he would call for motion to approve Lower Delta SWCD entering into a contract with J. Aaron Cooper, CPA LLC to conduct the district's FYE June 30, 2019 audit at the cost of \$575.

Motion: Mr. Ed Yerger made a motion to approve the Lower Delta SWCD entering into a contract with J. Aaron Cooper, CPA LLC to conduct the district's FYE June 30, 2019 audit at the cost of \$575. The motion was seconded by Dr. Tommy Vitrano and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the second correspondence item is an engagement letter from Crescent SWCD requesting approval from the Commission to enter into a contract with J. Aaron Cooper, CPA LLC to conduct the district's FYE June 30, 2019 audit at the cost of \$575. Chairman Skains asked for any comments from the public or Commission members and there were none. He said if there were no comments, then he would call for motion to approve Crescent SWCD entering into a contract with J. Aaron Cooper, CPA LLC to conduct the district's FYE June 30, 2019 audit at the cost of \$575.

Motion: Mr. David Daigle made a motion to approve the Crescent SWCD entering into a contract with J. Aaron Cooper, CPA LLC to conduct the district's FYE June 30, 2019 audit at the cost of \$575. The motion was seconded by Dr. Ernest Girouard and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the next correspondence is an email sent from Mr. David Daigle to Mr. Brad Spicer. He asked Mr. Daigle and Mr. Spicer if they had any comments. Mr. Daigle said the email was sent to Mr. Spicer to make him aware of Dr. Hardwick and his sons' accomplishment of becoming Soil Health Champions through NACD. He said Ms. Beth Mason of NACD wrote to Ms. Suzanne Rush of Tensas Concordia SWCD to thank her for assisting Dr. Hardwick and his sons in their outreach efforts to be in the NACD Soil Health Champions Network. He said if you choose to become a Soil Health Champion, you are opening up your farm for field days and demonstrations to teach soil health practices. He said that we currently have four Soil Health Champions in Louisiana and only a little over a 150 across the nation.

Chairman Skains said the next item is a letter from Mr. Tim Palmer, NACD President. He asked Mr. Breaux if he had any comments. Mr. Breaux said this was sent to him from Mr. Keith Owen, NACD South Central Region Representative. He said that NACD President Palmer wanted the districts and NRCS to know that NACD was thankful for their support and for their partnership with the feral swine project. He said NACD was pleased to see that Congress addressed the feral swine problems by providing \$75 million dollars to the Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and NRCS.

Chairman Skains said the next item is a letter from Associate Chief Kevin Norton. He said it is a touching letter that Associate Chief Norton wrote to show his appreciation for everyone he worked during his tenure in

Louisiana. He said his family appreciated the Louisiana conservation family just as much as he did. He said Associate Chief Norton plans to retire in Woodworth, Louisiana which means he plans to be back in Louisiana after he retires.

Chairman Skains said the next item is an article from *The Sabine Index Newspaper*. He said the article comes from Ms. Anita Manshack with the Sabine SWCD. He asked Mr. Spicer did he have any comments. Mr. Spicer said this spotlights LACD President Elect Mr. John Alan Williams of Sabine SWCD. He said that Mr. Williams attended and participated at the NACD South Central Region in Oklahoma in July and the photograph shows that Mr. Williams keeps good company such as the new NRCS Associate Chief, Mr. Kevin Norton.

Chairman Skains said the next article is *Next Generation Leadership Institute Applications Due September*. He asked DR. Girouard if he had any comments. Dr. Girouard said NACD is selecting one individual from each of the NACD seven regions. He said the deadline for the application is quickly approaching. He said the individual they select will have to be committed to attend sessions that are three to five days long not count the participant's traveling time. He said the tuition for the program is \$1,200. He said it would be a good idea to ask state and local agencies in Louisiana for assistance with this tuition cost as well as support for other costs. He said the effort to get a Louisiana candidate may be difficult this year but we should discuss it at the upcoming LACD mid-year meeting to receive feedback. He said he believes that this would help Louisiana's Conservation District program and this individual could represent Louisiana at NACD and NRCS functions.

Chairman Skains said the next article is titled *LDAF Launches Unwanted Pesticide Pick-Up Program*. He asked Mr. Spicer if he had any comments. Mr. Spicer said the city of Baton Rouge has an annual pick program. He said the LDAF hadn't had a pesticide collection program like this since 1996. He said during that year, LDAF collected 200 tons of unused pesticides. He said the LSU AgCenter field agents will assist LDAF in compiling a statewide inventory of pesticide products to be disposed through the pick-up program. Dr. Leonard said the AgCenter is tentatively planning to do a pilot test in Northeast Louisiana. He said LDAF has retained a contractor for the program and plans to announce drop-off locations and dates in late September.

Chairman Skains said the next correspondence is from Department of Environmental Quality. He asked Mr. Spicer if he had any comments. Mr. Spicer said these were the public comments for the new point to non-point source program. He said this shows some of the progress that has taken place and that DEQ, CPRA, and LDAF will be meeting to review the comments.

Chairman Skains said the next correspondence is *Louisiana Commodities and Conservation Newsletter*. He asked Dr. Rogers Leonard did he have any comments. Dr. Leonard said this is one of few newsletters being sent out on different topics. He said this particular newsletter covers topics such as the Family Farmer Relief Act of 2019, farm real estate values, and crop insurance.

OTHER BUSINESS

Chairman Skains said they would now take up Other Business. He asked Dr. Rogers Leonard if he had any comments. Dr. Leonard said that he wanted to remind us of two events coming up in September:

1. Northeast Louisiana Beef/Forage Field Day - September 19, 2019 in Mangham, Louisiana
2. Best Management Practice Tour for the Patrick Taylor Project - September 17, 2019 at the Ducote farm in Napoleonville, LA

NEXT MEETING

Chairman Skains said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 19, 2019 at 1:15 P.M. in the USDA Building B Training Room, 3727 Government Street, Alexandria, Louisiana 71302 in conjunction with the LACD Mid-Year meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

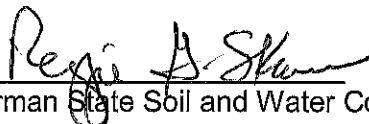
Chairman Skains asked if there were any other comments from the public or Commission members and there were none.

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: Mr. Ed Yerger made a motion to adjourn at 2:22 P.M. The motion was seconded by Dr. Tommy Vitrano and passed unanimously.

/s/ Reggie Skains



Reggie Skains, Chairman State Soil and Water Conservation Commission