OFFICE OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION

STATE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

March 27, 2018

1:15PM

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 said the invocation and Mr. David Daigle lead in 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. Randell Fletcher, Mr. David Daigle, LACD President; and Mr. Ed Yerger.

Members absent: Mr. John Compton, Secretary/Treasurer; Dr. Rogers Leonard, LSU AgCenter; and Southern University Agricultural Center Representative

A quorum was present.

Others Present: Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF-OSWC/Executive Director SSWCC; Mr. Claude Ross, Acting NRCS State Conservationist USDA-NRCS; Mr. Tim Landreneau, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Easements; Mr. John “Alan” Williams; LACD Vice President and Commission Alternate; Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC, Mr. Ray Reich, LDAF-OSWC, and Ms. LaClasha “Clay” Alexander- LDAF-OSWC

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

Chairman Skains asked for any comments from the public or Commission members about the February 27, 2018 State Commission minutes. Chairman Skains called for a motion to approve the February 27, 2018 State Commission Meeting minutes.

**Motion:**  Mr. Fletcher made a motion to approve the February 27, 2018 State Commission Meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Mr. 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 said that at the last meeting, he mentioned that some of the districts were behind in earning their farm bill funds. He said that as of January, they have earned 36% of the Farm Bill funds. He said that he had spoken to a few specific districts that are further behind in earning their farm bill funds and most of them indicated they were behind due to their lack of staff. Mr. Spicer asked if there were any questions and there were none.

Legislative Regular Session/State Funding

Chairman Skains said that he had spoken with some of the legislators. He said that there has been a bill filed that would allow for metering and changing a fee for using water from the Sparta aquifer. He said that the proposed bill was to be removed as of March 19th. He asked Mr. Spicer if he had any other information he wanted to provide. Mr. Spicer said that he had reviewed about 75 bills with 40 of those bills dealing with water in some form. He said that HB 430 mentioned by Chairman Skains will likely receive a lot of attention. Mr. Spicer asked Mr. Breaux for an update on the bills that address LACD resolutions.  Mr. Breaux said that House Bill 49 by Rep. Gisclair takes into consideration two LACD Coastal Resources Committee resolutions from the 2018 LACD meeting.  He said HB 49 would require that compensatory mitigation should not be required for a coastal wetland restoration project that itself intends to restore or enhance coastal wetland functions and values. He said HB 49 also provides that construction or implementation of coastal protection projects aligned with the coastal protection and restoration master plan would still require compensatory mitigation, unless the project activities could be demonstrated to have an overriding public interest that would render the mitigation impractical.

NACD Fly-In

Chairman Skains asked Mr. Daigle and Mr. Spicer to discuss their experience at the NACD Fly-In. Mr. Spicer said that he believed that it was an overall good trip. He said that they received great response from the Congressmen and their staffs. He said that prior to meeting with our delegation, NACD had a breakfast meeting to discuss key Farm Bill issues that should be discussed when meeting with our congressmen. Mr. Daigle said that he believed as Mr. Spicer said that they were well received . He said that he enjoyed Senator Kennedy and Senator Cassidy’s meetings as well as the meeting with Congressman Abraham. He said that he was excited that a number of the congressional staff were aware of the two resolutions that were passed at the LACD annual meeting this past January. Chairman Skains asked Mr. Alan Williams to comment on his experience. Mr. Williams said that he enjoyed the entire trip. He said that it was very educational and that he learned a lot about the work that goes into our soil and water conservation programs. Chairman Skains said that these trips are very important because they inform others on what is being done. He said that these meetings should occur two or three times a year instead of just once a year. He said that he had heard from the staff at NACD and they were very pleased with everything that was presented from Louisiana.

Mr. Spicer said that he wanted to mention a letter from the Association of Clean Water Administrators (ACWA) dealing with support of the new Farm Bill. He said that DEQ sent it to have it reviewed by the Commission before they sign on to the letter. He said that any suggestions can be brought to him after the meeting. Mr. Spicer said he appreciated DEQ providing the opportunity to review the letter.

Dr. Girouard said the “Waters of US” rule had been placed hold. He said that in the budget that just got approved contained a requirement that to repeal the “Waters of the US” section would require appealing the entire act.

**NEW BUSINESS**

NRCS State Conservationist Report

Chairman Skains said they would now take up New Business and asked Acting State Conservationist, Mr. Claude Ross to give the NRCS report. He said he has known Mr. Ross and that he is pleased that he would take leave from his position in Texas to assist Louisiana while Kevin is on detail in Washington, D.C. Mr. Ross said that as previously reported by Mr. Norton, he is on Capitol Hill with the House Ag Committee working on the Farm Bill. He said that he spoke with Mr. Norton on the phone and that he didn’t give any indication on the momentum that the bill would move through congress. He said that while Mr. Norton is out, he is honored to be working with such high performing staff and pleased to support conservation efforts of NRCS. He said that he plans to get out in the field with staff members to take a look at field operations.

Mr. Ross said that he wanted to turn our attention to the *Conservation Update.* He said that the spotlight article is on Ms. Jennifer Mott who is a St. Landry parish farmer. He said that she is a small farmer who has been working with NRCS field staff to get Technical Assistance to implement Conservation programs. He said that he also wanted to mention the Upcoming events:

Florida Parishes Forestry Forum- April 6th

Forestry BMP Workshop- April 6th

Pollinator Field Day- April 7th

Land Leasing for Minerals Workshop- April 9th

Louisiana Beekeepers Association Spring Field Day- April 14th

Wheat and Oat Field Day- April 18th

Coastal Prairie Burn Workshop- April 20th

6th Annual Beef and Forage Field Day- April 26th

Louisiana GLCI Louisiana Farms Bus Tour- May 9th - 11th

Mr. Ross said that there has not been much change since Mr. Norton’s last report. He said that they have been working on efforts to improve NRCS’s customer service. He said in this effort at the national level within USDA, the Farm Productions and Conservation (FPAC) agency was created. He said this brings the NRCS, Farm Service Agency (FSA), and Risk Management together. Mr. Ross said they were brought together because they share the same common customer base of ranchers and farmers.

Mr. Ross said that since the last meeting there has been a proposal placed on grants.gov. He said this proposal allows all of NRCS partners to submit applications for agreements for next year. He said that Mr. Norton mentioned to us at last meeting that we must increase the competition for NRCS grants and agreements. He said that this gives NRCS an opportunity to review proposals from non-traditional partners in a competitive process. He said the due date for the applications is May 18th. He said the funding bill that was recently passed did not adversely impact NRCS and that we received enough to work through this fiscal year. He said that it was good thing to see that the farm bill was untouched. He said that they are still working on staffing in NRCS offices and that they have been no real changes since last month. He said that they have advertised a District Conservationist position in Lake Charles, LA. He said there are a few vacancies across the state and they are seeking assistance from partners to fill the positions.

Mr. Ross concluded his report and thanked everyone for the opportunity to serve Louisiana and the Commission.

Correspondence

Chairman Skains said the first correspondence item is a letter from the LaSalle SWCD requesting approval from the Commission to allow them to enter into a contract with the CPA firm, The Vercher Group, to conduct the district’s FYE June 30, 2018 audit at the cost of $595. 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 a motion to approve the LaSalle SWCD entering into a contract with the CPA firm, The Vercher Group, to conduct the district’s FYE June 30, 2018 audit at the cost of $595.

**Motion:**  Mr. Daigle made a motion to approve the LaSalle SWCD entering into a contract with the CPA firm, The Vercher Group, to conduct the district’s FYE June 30, 2018 audit at the cost of $595. The motion was seconded by Mr. Fletcher and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the next item is an article on “Strain Statement on Ag Day.” Mr. Spicer said Commissioner Strain said this is a day to increase the public’s awareness of Agriculture.

Chairman Skains said the next article is “USDA Designates Natural Disaster Areas”. Mr. Spicer said that the parishes included in the primary disaster areas are: Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Caldwell, Catahoula, Claiborne, DeSoto, East Carroll, Franklin, Grant, Jackson, LaSalle, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Natchitoches, Ouachita, Red River, Richland, Sabine, Tensas, Union, Webster, West Carroll, and Winn.

Chairman Skains said the next article is “Louisiana Agriculture Hall of Distinction Holds Induction Ceremony Thursday Night”. Mr. Spicer said that this article recognized Mrs. Margie Jenkins who will be the first woman to be inducted to the Louisiana Agriculture Hall of Distinction. He said that it also mentions that Mr. Pete Lanaux who served on the Crescent SWCD board of supervisors for 35 years being inducted as well.

Chairman Skains said the next article is “LSU AgCenter to present AgMagic in Baton Rouge, New Orleans this spring”. Mr. Spicer said that AgMagic will take place at the Parker Coliseum on LSU campus from April 16th to April 22nd. He said that admission is free and that it is a great venue for the kids to learn about Louisiana Agriculture and its importance.

Chairman Skains said the next article is “NACD Fly-In Unites Conservation Leaders on Capitol Hill”. Chairman Skains said that based on Mr. Daigle and Mr. Spicer earlier comments that it was a very informative meeting and that everyone enjoyed the meeting.

Chairman Skains said the next article is “Record crop gives sugarcane growers options”. He said that this article gives hope to sugarcane growers because crop has been labeled a “special” crop due to its high tonnage and high sugar content.

Chairman Skains said that the next article is “Water shortages could affect five billion people by 2050, UN report warns”. Mr. Spicer said that this article discusses a study showing that water shortages will likely occur due to many factors including climate change, poor soil management, increased demand for food and fiber, and polluted soil, water, and air.

Chairman Skains said the next article is “Soil Health Practices for Mitigating Natural Disasters”. He said that the article talks about investing in mitigation activities before the next disaster so that we can reduce the impacts with advanced planning.

Chairman Skains said the next article is “Principles for High Functioning Soils”. Mr. Spicer said that this article mentioned some great management principles for soil health which included minimizing disturbance, maximizing soil cover, maximizing biodiversity, and maximizing presence of living roots. Mr. Daigle said that he is pleased to announce that NACD passed a resolution to add another principle which is integrating livestock. He said he knows from his own experience that properly managed livestock will improve soil health.

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments and Reappointments

Chairman Skains said they would now take up resignations, appointments, or reappointments of supervisors. He said there were four reappointments this month.

Chairman Skains said Catahoula SWCD is requesting Mr. Howard Hardie be reappointed to fill his vacant appointed term. The term will begin March 28, 2018 and expire on March 28, 2021. Chairman Skains asked for comments from the public or Commission members and there were none; he asked for a motion to approve the reappointment of Mr. Howard Hardie to his appointed position on the Catahoula SWCD board of supervisors effective March 28, 2018 and expires March 28, 2021.

**Motion:** Mr. Fletcher made a motion to approve the reappointment of Mr. Howard Hardie to his appointed position on the Catahoula SWCD board of supervisors effective March 28, 2018 and expires on March 28, 2021. The motion was seconded Mr. Ed Yerger and the motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said Evangeline SWCD is requesting Mr. Walter Tortorich be reappointed to fill his vacant appointed term. The term will begin March 26, 2018 and expire on March 26, 2021. Chairman Skains asked for comments from the public or Commission members and there were none; he asked for a motion to approve the reappointment of Mr. Walter Tortorich to his appointed position on the Evangeline SWCD board of supervisors effective March 26, 2018 and expires March 26, 2021.

**Motion:** Dr. Girouard made a motion to approve the reappointment of Mr. Walter Tortorich to his appointed position on the Evangeline SWCD board of supervisors effective March 26, 2018 and expires on March 26, 2021. The motion was seconded Mr. Daigle and the motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the St. Landry SWCD is requesting Mr. Keith Latiolais be reappointed to fill his vacant appointed term. The term will begin March 27, 2018 and will expire on March 27, 2021. Chairman Skains asked for comments from the public or Commission members and there were none; he asked for a motion to approve the reappointment of Mr. Keith Latiolais to his appointed position on the St. Landry SWCD board of supervisors effective March 26, 2018 and expires on March 26, 2021.

**Motion:** Mr. Daigle made a motion to approve the reappointment of Mr. Keith Latiolais to his appointed position on the St. Landry SWCD board of supervisors effective March 26, 2018 and expires on March 26, 2021. The motion was seconded Dr. Girouard and the motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the St. Martin SWCD is requesting Ms. Judy Robin be reappointed to fill her vacant appointed term. The term will begin March 26, 2018 and will expire on March 26, 2021. Chairman Skains asked for comments from the public or Commission members and there were none; he asked for a motion to approve the reappointment of Ms. Judy Robin to his appointed position on the St. Martin SWCD board of supervisors effective March 26, 2018 and expires on March 26, 2021.

**Motion:** Dr. Girouard made a motion to approve the reappointment of Ms. Judy Robin to her appointed position on the St. Martin SWCD board of supervisors effective March 26, 2018 and expires on March 26, 2021. The motion was seconded Mr. Daigle and the motion passed unanimously.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

Chairman Skains asked the public and the Commission members if they had any comments. Dr. Girouard said that at January’s LACD meeting, Dr. Mark Davis made a presentation about rewriting new regulations for Louisiana’s water. He said Dr. Davis made a comment which was “If you can’t measure it, you can’t address it”. He said that Louisiana is not measuring the water like other states. He said that Mississippi has an effort where they have to increase the metering of agriculture water by a certain amount and then increase by five percent every year. Dr. Girouard said that he proposed to Dr. Davis that some agricultural group set up an effort to increase the measurement of water use by metering. He said that we would then meet with a peer group and let them keep the data on file. He said that this would be useful in the years to come because we would be able to pull the data and show the reduction efforts going on with water use. He said that Dr. Davis got excited with this idea and he asked that Dr. Girouard contact him with more details. Dr. Girouard said that he could not present anything because he had missed last meeting and wanted to bring it up to the Commission. He said farmers would be more intrigued to measure the water they are using if they knew the information would be given to a peer group. He said that if any of the Commission members had any comments or suggestions that he would share them with Dr. Davis. He said that Dr. Davis wants agriculture use of water to be reported so that in the future we can show Louisiana’s history. Dr. Girouard said that Arkansas is leading the charge and has a plan to reduce agriculture water use by 40% in 10 years. Chairman Skains asked Dr. Girouard and Mr. Spicer if they can gather some data from Mississippi and Arkansas and see how their efforts are working out. Chairman Skains thank Dr. Girouard for bringing this to the Commission’s attention. He asked were there any comments.

Mr. Breaux mentioned that the Morehouse and Acadia SWCD boards have each signed MOU's with NACD to participate in the one year technical assistance project.  He said Morehouse intends to hire two technicians to accommodate the pumping plant irrigation efficiency efforts there and Acadia will hire two technicians to provide rice land and prairie land technical assistance.  He said one of the technicians hired by Acadia will be domiciled in the Opelousas Field Office working under the direction of the St. Landry SWCD.

**NEXT MEETING**

Chairman Skains said the next State Commission Meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, April 17, 2018 at 12:45 P.M. at the LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens, 4560 Essen Lane, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He said that the meeting will be held in conjunction with the Area V annual 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 2:09 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. David Daigle and passed unanimously.

/s/ Reggie Skains*\_\_\_\_\_\_*

Reggie Skains, Chairman

State Soil and Water Conservation Commission