

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

September 13, 2023
1:15 PM

NRCS State Office Building B Training Room
3727 Government Street, Alexandria, LA 71302

MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Garber called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. Mr. Steve Horvath gave the invocation and Mr. Kacir led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

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

Members and Alternate Members present:

Mr. Earl Garber, Chairman, Area IV
Mr. Steve Horvath, Vice Chairman, Area V
Mr. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Area I
Mr. Ben Langlinais, LACD President, Member
Mr. Price Gay, LACD 1st Vice President, Alternate
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member
Mr. Ron Duhon, Area IV Alternate

Members Absent:

Southern University Agricultural Center Representative
Dr. Michael Salassi, LSU AgCenter, Alternate

A quorum was present.

Others Present:

Mr. Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC / Director
Ms. Caitlin Joubert, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Kenny Bohnsack, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Phyllis Cart, Acadia SWCD
Ms. Stephanie Garvin, Lower Delta SWCD

Dr. Kurt Guidry, LSU AgCenter
Mr. Theron Phillips, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Jerry Davenport, LDAF-OSWC
Mr. Dustin Aguillard, LDAF-OSWC
Ms. Jo Sadowsky, Capital SWCD
Ms. Reba Leonards, Upper Delta SWCD

Public Comments

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

Approval of the September 13, 2023 agenda

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the September 13, 2023 SSWCC meeting agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Ed Giering

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the August 22, 2023 minutes

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the August 22, 2023 SSWCC meeting minutes.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Ben Langlinais

Motion passed unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement

Mr. Breaux said August's Farm Bill drawdown was \$41,835 leaving a balance of \$112,744. Notifications have been sent to districts with significant balances requesting their drawdown projections for the last month of the program year. Unused farm bill funds will be re-distributed to the over earned districts. Chairman Garber wanted to thank Mr. Kacir for listening to the concerns of conservation districts and working to increase farm bill agreement funding. Mr. Kacir said he believes in supporting his partners and would assist in any way possible.

LACD Mid-Year Meeting-September 13, 2023

Chairman Garber asked Mr. Langlinais for comments. Mr. Langlinais said that he was encouraged by the discussions during the meeting. He also agreed with Mr. Kacir's sentiments of support of the District/NRCS partnership. He said it is also important that we motivate districts to continue to do outreach so that they can form more partnerships and create new opportunities. Mr. Skains suggested that the Commission and LACD look at the upcoming elections and invite the newly elected legislators to LACD, giving these officials an early opportunity to learn about Louisiana conservation needs. Mr. Giering said that he also wanted to thank Mr. Kacir for all that he did in his tenure but most importantly the act of funding the LACD Executive Director position. Chairman Garber asked the Commission and others present to give him a round of applause.

NACD Annual Meeting- February 10-14, 2024

Chairman Garber announced that the 2024 NACD Annual meeting is scheduled for February 10-14, 2024 in San Diego, CA at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina. Registration is now open with the early bird registration deadline ending on December 22, 2023. Please go to NACD's website for more details.

Area 1 and 2 SWCC Election Convention

Chairman Garber said the selection for the SWCC Area I and Area II delegate and alternate is scheduled for October 24, 2023 at the Lincoln Parish Public Safety Complex, 161 Road Camp Road, Ruston, LA 71270. The convention will convene at 11:00 a.m. Districts should select their election convention delegates and alternates and forward their names to Ms. Alexander no later than October 9, 2023. The elected SWCC delegates and alternates for Area I and Area II will begin their three-year term on October 27, 2023. The October SWCC meeting will take place after the election convention and lunch.

CPA-SWCD Agreements

Chairman Garber said the Commission received a SWCD CPA Agreement:

- Calcasieu SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Windham & Reed, LLC. The cost will not exceed \$3,500.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve these engagement requests:

- Calcasieu SWCD is submitting an engagement letter from Windham & Reed, LLC. The cost will not exceed \$3,500.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

NRCS State Conservationist Report- Mr. Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist

Mr. Kacir said that it has been a pleasure to work in Louisiana and learn more about the state's conservation efforts. He appreciates Louisiana for working with him and allowing him to share his thoughts and ideas.

He said one of his priorities since starting the position here in Louisiana has been staffing. NRCS did open more opportunities for Louisiana to fill positions. Since January 2021, staffing has increased by approximately 40 positions. Currently, there are 10 positions remaining open and there will be an additional advertisement for 15-16 technicians. He said districts are often a starting point for many NRCS employees to gain knowledge and training for landowner assistance. He said the LARU structure adoption had been delayed several times, but NRCS has successfully filled their 13 LARU District Conservationist positions. NRCS is working towards filling the vacant resource conservationist positions and wants to make sure that they provide leadership in the offices and assistance to conservation districts.

Mr. Kacir said the Targeted Technician agreement is currently under review. The concern is that approximately \$850,000 could be returned after the agreement is completed. Many districts are not able to fulfill the 25% match requested by the agreement. Chairman Garber asked would it be possible for the funds to be reallocated and Mr. Kacir said that he would have to consult with Ms. Candis Voorhies for the answer. Mr. Giering asked if any districts could apply to get a targeted technician if the need is there. Mr. Kacir said the limiting factor is currently office space. NRCS has the funding for the employee salary, but not the space.

Mr. Kacir said NRCS has obligated nearly all their EQIP funds for the fiscal year. NRCS was able to receive an extra \$2 million which was used to fund all the historically underserved applications for cropland and pastureland and all seasonal high tunnel applications. NRCS also obligated an extra \$2.5 million IRA EQIP funds and \$4.5 million in IRA CSP funds. They also have a new agreement with the Farmer Veteran Coalition to assist veterans with the Farm Bill sign up process. Mr. Kacir is also interested in getting more outreach on the ground to assist producers who may not know the necessary information to get available funding. Mr. Kacir also said he has not gotten any information regarding his replacement or the vacancy announcement. Mr. Breaux handed out a letter on behalf of the Commission members to Mr. Kacir congratulating him on his retirement and thanking him for his efforts in Louisiana.

LSU AgCenter Report- Dr. Kurt Guidry, LSU AgCenter

Dr. Guidry said that the LSU Ag Center has been undergoing some staff changes throughout the past year. He mentioned the new Associate Vice President of Agriculture, Dr. Matt Lee, who was serving as interim but became permanent recently. One of his first tasks was to restructure the agriculture section to include the Director of Experiment Stations and a Director of Extension Services, which had previously been removed. Dr. Salassi was selected as the Director of Experiment Stations and Dr. Tara Smith is the Director of Extension Services.

LSU has been successful in getting increased funding during this last fiscal year. During FY 21-22, LSU accumulated 30 million in funding and during FY 22-23, LSU accumulated 45 million in funding which is a substantial increase from last fiscal year. LSU also increased their proposal submissions by 60 percent which gave them better chances of getting the funding they were requesting. Dr. Lee has made a promise aiming to make LSU AgCenter and Research one of the top 5 institutes in the country. Since the beginning of this fiscal year, the LSU AgCenter has been given grants worth \$1.7 million awarded. These grants will request LSU review food trade issues and supply chain issues. LSU's Biological and Engineering department is also receiving a \$730 million grant to look at a nano particle platform. Dr. Blake Wilson, Entomologist, has also received a \$300,000 grant to research apple snails, crawfish, and rice production. Dr. Guidry said that LSU has also been given approximately \$11 million in state funding to replace equipment and update infrastructure of

the research stations. Recently, LSU was recently issued a patent for the Feral Hog bait and are now in process of requesting an experimental use permit and a 2-year study.

A few events that Dr. Guidry mentioned are:

September 14, 2023- Beef and Forage Field Day- Dean Lee Research Station- Alexandria, LA

September 21, 2023- Northeast Beef and Forage Field Day

September 15, 2023- First of six sessions of LSU Grazing School-Alexandria, LA

October 21, 2023- Acadiana Cattle Producers Fall Field Day- Iberia Research Station, Jeanerette, LA

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux said he wanted to report on the Interagency Resilience Coordination Team coordinated by the Governor's Office. Commissioner Strain appointed Mr. Breaux to this committee which has recently been discussing options for small farmers. During the last legislative session, the Resilience Coordinator was made into a permanent position within the Governor's Office and Mr. Charles Sutcliffe has been assigned its director. Mr. Sutcliffe has been in talks with the Big River Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance (BREDA) who represent many of the produce farmers supplying southeast LA farmers markets. Mr. Breaux invited Mr. Charles Sutcliffe to have a conversation and brainstorm conservation and resilience ideas for small producers. The meeting is scheduled to take place next week.

Mr. Breaux mentioned that the poultry litter distribution cost-share application period recently ended. Most applications are coming from the Catahoula area and some applications are for transport of Mississippi-sourced litter. Mr. Breaux plans to use the Mississippi applications as justification for the request submitted to region 6 EPA to include separated dairy waste solids as transportable items reimbursed at the same rates as poultry litter. Another request made to the EPA was to allow Pontchartrain Basin producers to cost share poultry litter brought in from Mississippi if it originates within river basins that contribute flow to Lake Pontchartrain. In addition to that request, Mr. Breaux has asked that other agricultural waste such as wood chips and bagasse be included.

Another great opportunity underway is the Lake St. Joseph hypoxia reduction project. The project includes 2 HUC 12 areas and was funded with assistance from Senator Bill Cassidy. Tensas-Concordia SWCD will oversee the project and OSWC will be available for any assistance needed.

Mr. Breaux also wanted to recognize Ms. Stephanie Garvin of Lower Delta SWCD. She was tasked with hosting a tour for the Mississippi Association of Conservation Districts. He said Ms. Garvin is making the task look easy and he appreciates her stepping up and taking the lead on this task.

Mr. Breaux ended his presentation by handing out the district state allocation list for the Commission's review. The members discussed ideas on increasing state funding and thanked Mr. Breaux for the list to continue further conversations.

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said there are 1 SWCD supervisor resignation this month:

- Mr. Wesley Coffman, Calcasieu SWCD, elected position, effective July 13, 2023.

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

- Mr. Wesley Coffman, Calcasieu SWCD, elected position, effective July 13, 2023.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains

Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said we have 1 SWCD supervisor appointment this month:

- Ms. Carol Bliss, Calcasieu SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Wesley Coffman, effective September 13, 2023-June 30, 2025.

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

- Ms. Carol Bliss, Calcasieu SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Wesley Coffman, effective September 13, 2023-June 30, 2025.

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 4 SWCD re-appointments this month:

- Mr. Michael Volentine, Caddo SWCD, appointed position, effective September 19, 2023- September 19, 2026
- Mr. Willis Nelson, East Carroll SWCD, appointed position, effective October 25, 2023-October 25, 2026.
- Mr. Chris Martin, Feliciana SWCD, appointed position, September 19, 2023-September 19, 2026.
- Mr. Rob Carter Moberley, Madison SWCD, appointed position, September 19, 2023-September 19, 2026

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

- Mr. Michael Volentine, Caddo SWCD, appointed position, effective September 19, 2023- September 19, 2026
- Mr. Willis Nelson, East Carroll SWCD, appointed position, effective October 25, 2023-October 25, 2026.
- Mr. Chris Martin, Feliciana SWCD, appointed position, September 19, 2023-September 19, 2026.
- Mr. Rob Carter Moberley, Madison SWCD, appointed position, September 19, 2023-September 19, 2026

Motion by: Mr. Steve Horvath

Seconded by: Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

PFAS Notifications

Mr. Breaux discussed the latest news regarding PFAS notifications to farms within a specified perimeter of military installations known to have used materials containing this compound. Mr. Kacir said that he heard it also may have come from firefighting foam used on military bases and maybe liners on pesticide containers. Mr. Breaux said he reached out to districts that were named in some correspondence that he had received and has heard no feedback from districts. There has been no indication as to where PFAS may go but there is a high risk regarding the subject. We ask that everyone be informed regarding the latest status of PFAS.

Meritorious Award

Chairman Garber said we received one Meritorious award request:

- Madison SWCD is nominating Ms. Patches McDaniel, District to receive an exceptional performance of \$500.00 award for exceeding district requirements and being a faithful, hardworking, and punctual employee to her district.

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 Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the nomination packets for:

- Madison SWCD is nominating Ms. Patches McDaniel, District to receive an exceptional performance of \$500.00 award for exceeding district requirements and being a faithful, hardworking, and punctual employee to her district.

Motion by: Mr. Ben Langlinais
Seconded by: Mr. Steve Horvath
Motion passed unanimously.

Cooperative Endeavor Agreement- Upper Delta SWCD

Mr. Breaux said Upper Delta SWCD submitted an agreement from the Office of Community Development for review from the Commission. The district does have questions regarding the district budget portion of the agreement but otherwise agrees and is ready to sign it. Mr. Breaux said this agreement is a blueprint of what they would like to see coming from all districts. This agreement opportunity developed from the process of planning their PL-566 project with a broad spectrum of partners. Ms. Garvin advised that the district is currently waiting for a breakdown on how the funds will work. Mr. Breaux advised that the Commission could approve the agreement pending the board's review and approval of that final element. Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the agreement between Upper Delta SWCD and the Office of Community Development pending the board's review and approval.

Motion by: Mr. Reggie Skains
Seconded by: Mr. Ben Langlinais
Motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence/Articles:

- Grow More Conservation Outreach Workshop: October 24, 2023 in Rayne, LA
- USDA-ARS: Turning Discards into a Winning Hand
- Considerations In Using Soybeans for Forage
- Entergy Solutions offers cash incentives to farmers to relieve high energy costs amid historic heat wave.
- Cattle are the wrong culprits of climate change.

SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber said due to time restraints, the commission will discuss goals at our next commission meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 24, 2023 at the Lincoln Parish Public Safety Complex, 161 Road Camp Road, Ruston, LA 71270.

Public Comment

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: Mr. Ed Giering made a motion to adjourn at 3:19 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Reggie Skains and passed unanimously.

/s/ 

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