

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

July 24, 2018
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. Daigle to lead in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

The roll was called by Ms. LaClasha Alexander

Members and Alternate Members present: Mr. Reggie Skains; Chairman; Dr. Ernest Girouard, Vice Chairman; Mr. Randell Fletcher, Mr. David Daigle, LACD President; Mr. John Compton, Secretary/Treasurer, Mr. Ed Yerger.

Members absent: Southern University Agricultural Center Representative and Dr. Rogers Leonard, LSU AgCenter

A quorum was present.

Others Present: Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF-OSWC/Executive Director SSWCC; Mr. Tim Landreneau, Acting NRCS State Conservationist USDA-NRCS; Dr. Brian LeBlanc, LSU AgCenter; Mr. Naveen Adusumilli, LSU AgCenter; Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC, Mr. Ray Reich, LDAF-OSWC, and 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 June 26, 2018 State Commission minutes. Chairman Skains called for a motion to approve the June 26, 2018 State Commission Meeting minutes.

Motion: Dr. Ernest Girouard made a motion to approve the June 26, 2018 State 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 said that nine districts have earned all of their allocated Farm Bill funds. He said that it is important that all districts continue to report farm bill hours after they have earned all their funds. He said that as of June, districts have earned 65% of their Farm Bill funds. He said that 25 districts have hit their June target or gone

above the target and 3 districts are under target. Mr. Spicer said that there are a few districts that we will contact to ensure they are accurately logging Farm Bill work hours. Mr. Spicer asked if there were any questions and there were none.

District Funding

Chairman Skains said the next item on the agenda is *District Funding*. He asked Mr. Spicer if he had any comments. Mr. Spicer said that the Commissioner has been working to fund the OSWC and the districts with dedicated funds therefore eliminating using state general funds for funding districts and OSWC. He said that they were able to get dedicated funds for OSWC but not for the districts. He said that Commissioner Strain will continue to work towards getting more dedicated and more funds for the districts. He said districts are going to get an increase in their allocated funds in the range of two and half percent this fiscal year. Mr. Spicer asked if anyone had any questions and there were none.

Chairman Skains said that he wanted to report on some of the things that the Commission has been working on regarding funding. He said that he had reviewed some information together from Iowa and planned on presenting some points to the Commission before August. He said that he had received information on Iowa's Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund which was started in 2010. He said that the research showed exactly how they divided the fund among the agencies and programs. Chairman Skains said that we may not break it down in the exact way that Iowa did but it gives us a great example. He said that the plan is to have a similar plan like this to present to the Legislators at the 2019 Regular Session. He said the Iowa funding legislation was amended later and was approved by the voters by 62%. He said he wanted the Commission to notice who was opposed to the Iowa funding effort. Chairman Skains mentioned that the Farm Bureau Federation was against the Iowa funding effort. He said that they thought that it might not be a priority for the people of Iowa and that higher taxes was also a factor. He said that Iowa did have some supporters for this effort which included: Wildlife Society, Iowa Bowhunters, National Wild Turkey Federation, YMCA, Clear Lake Telephone Company, and Great Outdoors Funds. He said that this fund was estimating to generate approximately \$150 million a year.

Chairman Skains said Iowa planned to allocate the \$150 million as follows:

- 23%- Natural resources-state parks, forests, preserves, wildlife areas, and other
- 20%- Soil conservation and water protection- soil conservation and watershed protection
- 14%- Watershed protection-preserve watersheds
- 13%- Resource enhancement and protection program
- 13%- Local conservation partnership
- 10%-Trails
- 7%- Lake Restoration

Chairman Skains said that he wanted the Commission members to be thinking of how we can get to where Iowa has gotten with their funding efforts. He said that there are a couple state agencies that would be perfect partners for what we are trying to accomplish. He said that he hopes to have some things to present to the Commissioner before the September meeting and to select legislators by the end of the year. He said that he knows that there will be some challenges but we don't know exactly where it would be coming from at this time. He said by looking at what other states have done and what they have went through gives us an example of what could come up when we present our funding ideas to the legislature and the public.

Mr. Spicer said that about 15 to 20 years ago, the Commission set aside approximately \$200,000 for districts to implement district projects. He said the districts would find their own match and the Commission would rate the projects and discuss the benefits of each project. He said he would like to see the Commission review this practice. He said the process is already outlined in the Commission's district funding formula. He said that this would open up opportunities for districts to improve their capacity to address local resource issues, improve their funding and enhance their local image as Soil and Water Conservation leaders.

Mr. Spicer said that he wanted to make mention that currently the Department has a hiring freeze. He said that this did affect the office of Soil and Water Conservation and hopes that the freeze won't last too much longer. Chairman Skains asked if there were any other comments and there were none.

NACD South Central Region Meeting/NACD Summer Meeting

Chairman Skains asked Mr. Daigle and Mr. Spicer to comment on the meetings. Mr. Spicer said that the NACD Summer meeting will be taking place in Williamsburg, VA on August 3-9, 2018. He said that this is an ideal location if you are interested in U. S. history. He said that the South Central Region meeting is scheduled for Sept. 4-6, 2018 in San Marcos, Texas.

Mr. Spicer said that we should be getting ready to plan the LACD Mid-Year meeting. Mr. Landreneau said that he would assist Mr. Spicer in setting up the meeting and reserving the meeting rooms. Mr. Daigle suggested they consider having the meeting in mid-August or mid-September.

Mr. Spicer said that he wanted to mention the NACD Awards. He said that the awards are given to individuals and organizations for their outstanding work and leadership in soil and water conservation. He said that the nominations for NACD Friend of Conservation award and the NACD Distinguished Service Award must be submitted by August 31, 2018. He said that the other categories are the NACD President's Award, Olin Sims Conservation Leadership Award, and the Hugh Hammond Bennett Excellence in Conservation award. Mr. Spicer said that the nominating period is not set to end on these awards until November 26th. He said that Mr. Norton has personally asked that everyone think of a great candidate for the Hugh Hammond Bennett Excellence award. He said that this particular award should be added to the LACD Mid-year meeting agenda. Chairman Skains asked if there were any other comments and there were none.

NEW BUSINESS

NRCS State Conservationist Report

Chairman Skains said they would now take up New Business and asked Acting State Conservationist, Mr. Tim Landreneau to give the NRCS report. Mr. Landreneau said that Kevin Norton sends greetings to everyone and looks forward to returning to Louisiana soon. He said that as reported at our last meeting, the Senate and House passed their versions and has been waiting to get these to go to the Conference Committee. He said on Thursday of last week, the House approved to move their version of the Farm Bill to conference and the Senate is expected to vote this week to move their version to conference. Mr. Landreneau said it is anticipated that the conference meeting will begin this week to discuss the two bills. He said that he believes that this will go well through August and maybe into September. He said that the timeline depends on how quickly things move and if the differences between the two bills can be worked out. He said that Mr. Norton has already been given notice not to make any plans for the month of August.

Mr. Landreneau said that last month the Announcement of Program Funding (APF) closed. He said that NRCS had received eighteen proposals and thirteen of them were selected for funding of approximately 1.6 million dollars.

Mr. Landreneau said so far in FY 2019, NRCS has obligated over \$18.8M to 515 contacts on over 103,000 acres, which is approximately 73% of the current year funding allocation for EQIP. He said currently NRCS has 557 applications that are being processed for eligibility and ranking for CSP. He said Louisiana has an allocation of 131,211 acres for enrollment in FY2019 and that funding selections began in July and NRCS has requested additional acres and funding for additional application selections. He said that they are trying to fund as many acres as possible and by doing this would put NRCS at one of their highest years in funding CSP.

Mr. Landreneau said Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) tentative funding selections have been completed for FY2019 and NRCS is in the process of enrolling selected easements. He said with the current funding level in FY2019, NRCS are anticipating enrolling 10 easements on 4,200 acres. He said Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) program is continuing to coordinate with The Conservation Fund for application and enrollment of an Agriculture Land Easement in Vermillion Parish.

Mr. Landreneau said that they continue to work on Emergency Wetland Protection (EWP) projects that happened in relation to the 2016 floods which include areas in Vermillion, Bogalusa, Hammond, Livingston, and East Baton Rouge Parish.

Mr. Landreneau said that on Last Wednesday he got a chance to visit SWCD employees in Grand Isle, LA during the LACDE meeting. He said he was able to give them an NRCS update and answer a few questions. He said that they also voiced some really good concerns. He said that one of things that he made sure to talk about was the Farm Bill Assistance Agreement. Mr. Landreneau said that he told employees to make sure they do not stop charging hours even after they have hit their maximum allocated funds. He said that this helps to show OSWC's match and gives an idea to NRCS if amendments are needed to the agreement.

Mr. Landreneau said that after he left Grand Isle on Wednesday, he headed to Metairie to spend Thursday and Friday there. He said that NRCS has gotten the opportunity to work with student interns from Puerto Rico. He said the opportunity comes from a grant given to NRCS's Pathway program which allows students to intern and possibly become NRCS employees after graduating college. He said that Louisiana was able to work with 5 interns that were located across the state. Mr. Landreneau said that they had a late start due to some storms and the hurricane but they arrived and stayed for 6 weeks. He said that he had heard good reports from the District Conservationists (DCs) that worked with them daily but he thoroughly enjoyed the two days that he got to spend with them. He said that these students had never been in the United States and were a little worried about how they were going to be treated. He said that they appreciated the hospitality that they received and enjoyed the experience. Mr. Landreneau said that the students said that their field offices really made them feel at home and like they were family. He said they presented a PowerPoint presentation on everything that they experienced while working for NRCS and he knows that they will take all of the lessons that they learned here in Louisiana back home to Puerto Rico.

Mr. Landreneau said that he also wanted to mention the upcoming Soil Health Symposium that is scheduled for Thursday, July 26th in Jeanerette, LA. He said that the event is being sponsored by the LSU AdCenter and looks forward to it.

Mr. Landreneau said the July edition of the Louisiana Conservation Update was passed out before the meeting started. He said this edition highlights in the Conservation Update is an article on Working with Louisiana Veterans. He said the article discusses a partnership between NRCS and the Veterans Administration Hospital in Pineville, LA, where NRCS and the VA have worked together to build raised-bed gardens the VA patients utilize for recreation therapy.

Mr. Landreneau concluded his report and asked were there any questions or comments and there were none. Chairman Skeins thanked him for his report.

Correspondence

Chairman Skains said the first correspondences for review are 5 travel requests. He said three travel requests are from Capital SWCD's Mr. Steve Horvath, Mr. John Compton, and Mr. Jack Goober; Crescent SWCD's Ms. Rebecca Livaudais, Mr. Irvin Dares III, Mr. Blaise Pezold, and Ms. Nina Ockman; and Vermillion SWCD's Dr. Ernest Girouard requesting approval to attend the NACD South Central Regional Conference in San Marcos, TX on September 4-6, 2018. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve these out of state travel requests. Chairman Skains asked for a motion to approve these requests.

Motion: Mr. David Daigle made a motion to approve Capital SWCD's Mr. Steve Horvath, Mr. John Compton, and Mr. Jack Gober; Crescent SWCD's Ms. Rebecca Livaudais, Mr. Irvin Dares III, Mr. Blaise Pezold, and Ms. Nina Ockman; and Vermillion SWCD's Dr. Ernest Girouard request to attend the NACD South Central Regional Conference in San Marcos, TX on September 4-6, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Yerger and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the other two travel requests are from East Carroll SWCD's Mr. Donavon Taves and Sabine SWCD's Mr. John Alan Williams requesting to travel to the NACD Summer Meeting in Williamsburg, VA on August 3-9, 2018. He said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve these out of state travel requests. Chairman Skains asked for a motion to approve these requests.

Motion: Mr. David Daigle made a motion to approve East Carroll SWCD's Mr. Donavon Taves and Sabine SWCD's Mr. John Alan Williams request to travel to the NACD Summer Meeting in Williamsburg, VA on August 3-9, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Yerger and passed unanimously.

Chairman Skains said the first news article is "LDAF Commissioner and Governor to Visit Sugarcane Farm". He asked Mr. Spicer if he had any comments on this. Mr. Spicer said that he was pleased that our Commissioner and Governor are spending time together so that Governor understands the needs of Agriculture. Dr. Girouard said that it has been excellent getting them in the room together because they are great at answering any questions or concerns.

Chairman Skains said the next article is "Two Big Steps Forward & the top Five Issues for Conference". He asked Mr. Spicer if he had any comments. Mr. Spicer said that this is a basic summary of the issues. He said that they do come to conclusions that the Commission may not agree but the issues they discuss are correct.

Mr. Spicer said that he wanted to mention a change in the state travel regulations for FY 2018-2019. He said that mileage went from 0.53 cents a mile to 0.54 cents a mile.

Supervisor Resignations/ Appointments and Reappointments

Chairman Skains said there are no supervisor resignations, reappointments, and appointments to act on this month.

OTHER BUSINESS

Chairman Skains asked Dr. Brian Leblanc if he had any comments. Dr. Brian Leblanc said that Dr. Leonard sends his regards and apologizes for missing the meeting. He said that he was assisting in the release of new rice hybrid at the Rice Research Station. He said Dr. Leonard was pleased with the multi-agency training that took place last week. He said that Dr. Leonard wanted to also remind the Commission of the Sugarcane field tour and the Soil Health workshop that is scheduled for next Thursday, July 26, 2018 in Jeanerette, Louisiana. He said he also wanted to let everyone know about the Morehouse Black Farmers Field Day scheduled for July 27th. Dr. Leblanc said the AgCenter administration is still in the process of trying to replace Tara Smith. He said that he wanted to discuss the DEQ efforts to develop a water quality trading program in Louisiana. He said that they not only have to quantify reductions, but they would also have to put a price on the reduction. He said that he provided a consultant with some published research that the AgCenter did on reductions that were taken from a dairy lagoon in Southeast Louisiana. Dr. Leblanc said that the consultant was able to calculate some load reductions and she is trying to form what they call a "desktop model". He said that the AgCenter is providing the consultant with as much information as they have available. Mr. Spicer said that the basin with significant agricultural activities is where we can get the most credits for nutrient reduction but, it is not where most of our industries are located. He said that it will be difficult for an industry to invest money in a watershed in a Tensas Parish watershed and take credit for it in a Baton Rouge area watershed. Dr. Leblanc said that they don't seem to want to transfer cross watersheds but anything could be modify by the proper process.

Mr. Spicer said that he wanted to remind districts that financials for districts with operating budgets of \$75,000 or less are due to OSWC before September 14, 2018. He said that he plans on delivering these personally to the auditor's office by the end of September. He also said that any district with a budget over \$75,000 should be getting prepared for their December 31st deadlines as well. Chairman Skains asked Mr. Breaux if he wanted had any comments.

Mr. Breaux said that Upper Delta SWCD has been working on implementing some water quality projects. He said that they could never get an EPA accepted 319 watershed implementation plan for the area. He said that DEQ lacked the data that they would need to move forward in the project. He said that they were able to view the funding announcement for NRCS's Watershed Development Flood Prevention program to get help to develop a plan. He said with this information and some guidance they were able to get a plan submitted for Upper Delta and it is called the Upper Terrebonne Basin Flood Prevention plan. He said that the most outspoken partner to this project is the Sheriff's Department. Mr. Breaux said that he is not concerned much with the water quality but more so about flood prevention.

Mr. Breaux said that Ag and Forestry along with other partners are coordinating once again this year with the AgCenter on Salvinia weevil distribution. He said that there has been a lot of movement with salvinia but compared to the last 2 or 3 years it has been significantly less in his opinion. Mr. Fletcher asked Mr. Breaux did he think that there was less salvinia to eat or was the need less. Mr. Breaux said that he believes the cold winter days that we had caused less production of salvinia and weevils.

Mr. Breaux said that Sabine and DeSoto SWCDs may have found an answer to a conservation resolution that they submitted to LACD for last year. He said they are trying to get paired up with International Paper in Mansfield, LA to compost their lagoon residuals with a secondary fiber from the milling process. He said that it is a fairly usable product and that they plan to work with NRCS on what protocols might need to be able to use this material. He said that they would like for the AgCenter to also be a part of the demo process in the upcoming months.

NEXT MEETING

Chairman Skains said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 28, 2018 at 1:15 P.M. in the LSU Center for River Studies, 100 Terrace Ave., Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70802.

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. John Compton made a motion to adjourn at 2:18 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