

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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

March 26, 2024  
1:15 PM

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY  
VETERANS AUDITORIUM  
5825 FLORIDA BOULEVARD  
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

MEETING MINUTES

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Garber called the regular monthly Soil & Water Conservation Commission Meeting to order at 1:15 P.M. Mr. Reggie Skains gave the invocation and Chairman Garber 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. Reggie Skains, Secretary-Treasurer, Area I  
Mr. Ed Yerger, Area II Member  
Mr. Ed Giering, Area III Member  
Mr. Chris Martin, Area V Alternate Member  
Mr. Ben Langlinais, LACD President, Member  
Mr. Brad Spicer, LDAF Alternate

**Members Absent:**

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

A quorum was present.

**Others Present:**

Ms. Candis Voorhies, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives  
Mr. Joey Breaux, LDAF-OSWC / Director      Ms. LaClasha "Clay" Alexander, LDAF/OSWC

**Public Comments**

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

**Approval of the March 26, 2024 agenda**

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to approve the agenda. Ms. Alexander stated that the original agenda emailed out to the Commission did not have "SWCC Goals" listed under New Business per usual. She asked that the agenda be amended to include "SWCC Goals" after the Meritorious Award under New Business. Chairman Garber said if there were no other comments, he would call for a motion to approve the agenda as amended.

**Motion by:** Mr. Ed Giering

**Seconded by:** Mr. Ben Langlinais

Motion passed unanimously.

**Approval of the February 27, 2024 minutes**

Chairman Garber called for a motion to approve the February 27, 2024 SSWCC meeting minutes.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer  
**Seconded by:** Mr. Reggie Skains  
Motion passed unanimously.

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

#### **NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement**

February's Farm Bill drawdown- \$ 107,979

Remaining balance- \$436,943

#### **Legislative Regular Session/State Funding**

Mr. Breaux reviewed a letter that will be sent to Representative Jack McFarland, House Appropriations Chariman, from Commissioner Strain requesting a \$400,000 increase for Soil and Water Conservation districts which will aid in conservation delivery and local leveraging of additional resources.

He also discussed the newly revised one-page Grassroots Investment Report that has been sent to conservation districts on behalf of Mr. Ben Langlinais, LACD President. He said the Investment report will be used to highlight each individual districts' conservation program as well as explain that a budget increase is needed to support competitive wages necessary to roles in conservation delivery. Districts were asked to submit their Investment Reports to Ms. Courtney Gerace, LACD Executive Director, through email to courtneysgerace@gmail.com by May 10, 2024.

Mr. Breaux also discussed the following early proposed bills:

- HB 238- Rep. Michael Echols- Provides relative to agriculture land protection against foreign adversaries.
- SB 117- Rep. Katrina Jackson Andrews- Creates the Agricultural Meteorology Program.
- SB 275- Rep. Eddie Lambert- Provides for air monitoring
- HB 169- Rep. Robert Carter- Provides relative to liability and damages resulting from carbon sequestration.
- HB 179- Rep. Mark Wright- Requires agencies to repeal two rules for every new one proposed.
- HB 305- Rep. Joseph Orgeron- Provides relative to the disposition of funds derived from alternative energy production in the coastal area.
- HB 389- Rep. Shane Mack- Places a moratorium on carbon dioxide sequestration below Lake Maurepas and Maurepas Swamp Wildlife Management Area
- HB 474- Rep. Kimberly Coates- Prohibits the use of natural wetlands as tertiary treatment in wastewater assimilation projects.
- HB 642- Rep. Joseph Orgeron- Updates standards for surveying and mapping
- SB 81- Sen. Robert Allain- Provides for prescribed burning by non-certified prescribed burn managers.
- SB 64- Sen. Mike Reese- Provides for changes to the Water Sector Program

#### **NACD Spring Fly-In Update**

Chairman Garber said Louisiana was well represented at the NACD Fly-In with Mr. Breaux, Mr. Langlinais, Mr. Skains, Mrs. Courtney Gerace, and Ms. Mellowdee Tibbs, Acting NRCS Conservationist being in attendance. Mr. Breaux appreciated everyone being prepared with figures and facts to provide as requested. Mr. Langlinais said things did go well considering that everyone was watching as decisions were made regarding a continuing resolution. Mr. Breaux said they also got the opportunity to speak briefly with Speaker Mike Johnson.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **NRCS State Conservationist Report- Ms. Candis Voorhies, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist of Partnerships and Initiatives**

- Ms. Voorhies said the deadline for assessment ranking and cost estimates was March 1, 2024. On March 19<sup>th</sup>, Selections begin and approximately 50% of EQIP and CSP were used to fund the applications.

- EQIP- 282 selected applications for \$17.3 million
- CSP -170 selected applications for \$18.5 million
- Act Now signup deadline is April 26, 2024. There are 251 obligated contracts on 38,000 acres at a cost of \$3.9 million. (42 CSP contracts, 209 EQIP contracts)

Hiring:

- Acting LARU 1 District Conservationist- Ms. Erica Baxley
- State Conservationist interviews were conducted last week. A selection should be made soon but there is a chance that NRCS will have someone to continue as an Acting State Conservationist for another 120 days to get the new candidate trained.
- Area 2 Management and Program Analyst vacancy
- Plant Material Center (PMC) vacancy

Notes:

- State Technical Committee Meeting- April 25, 2024 in Alexandria, LA

OSWC Update

Mr. Breaux mentioned that OSWC serves on numerous boards with one being the Coastal Restoration and Protection (CPRA) board. The new administration through executive order has discussed reorganizing the CPRA Board, and the CPRA agency in relation to the Department of Energy and Natural Resources. (DENR). With this reorganization, removal of different agencies such as Louisiana Department of Economic Development, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, Louisiana Department of Administration as well as elected official agencies which could include LDAF. Mr. Breaux said he plans to submit public comment on this matter and the Commission has been given a copy of these comments, previously reviewed by Commissioner Strain. He said that he would like to create a template for coastal districts to voice their comments on this matter as well. Chairman Garber said if there were no other comments, he would call for a motion to show support for the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) to remain a member of the CPRA board.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

**Seconded by:** Mr. Ed Giering

Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Breaux said attended the Iberia SWCD board meeting recently to discuss the 319 Bayou Du Portage project. Producers in the area have not been as involved as needed. Mr. Breaux said that low involvement may be due to the Lead 319 position being further away from the actual project site, which can be a logistical challenge. During a Zoom call with EPA and DEQ, one of the things proposed for the project was to purchase a no-till drill. St. Martin SWCD advised that they have a drill that was used during the NWQI project that is no longer active. Iberia SWCD requested to use the drill which would lower costs.

EPA is on the way to providing formal approval to Iberia SWCD to fund multiple sugarcane harvester modifications. These modifications will utilize a recent patent where sugarcane leaf residue would go into the soil without being burnt. This would be a valuable, innovative form of cane residue management which we haven't had.

Supervisor Waivers/ Resignations/ Appointments / Reappointments

Chairman Garber said we received a letter from Mr. Will Miller, Tensas-Concordia SWCD, who did not meet the board meeting attendance requirements in the past year. Mr. Miller submitted a letter to the Tensas-Concordia Board and the Tensas-Concordia Board of Supervisors board submitted a supporting letter suggesting the absences were justified and they are requesting the attendance requirements be waived.

Chairman Garber said if there were no comments, he would call for a motion to waive the attendance requirement for Mr. Will Miller, Tensas-Concordia SWCD.

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

Chairman Garber said there are 5 SWCD resignations this month:

- Mr. Eric Savant, Allen SWCD, elected position, effective March 14, 2024.
- Mr. Dustin Morris, Boeuf River SWCD, appointed position, effective March 13, 2024.
- Mr. Jerry Holmes, DeSoto SWCD, appointed position, effective January 22, 2024
- Mr. Patrick Frischhertz, Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position, effective March 19, 2024.
- Mr. Frank Sotile, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position, effective March 19, 2024.

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

- Mr. Eric Savant, Allen SWCD, elected position, effective March 14, 2024.
- Mr. Dustin Morris, Boeuf River SWCD, appointed position, effective March 13, 2024.
- Mr. Jerry Holmes, DeSoto SWCD, appointed position, effective January 22, 2024
- Mr. Patrick Frischhertz, Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position, effective March 19, 2024.
- Mr. Frank Sotile, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position, effective March 19, 2024.

**Motion by:** Mr. Reggie Skains  
**Seconded by:** Mr. Chris Martin  
Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 3 appointments this month:

- Ms. Amie Nunez, Allen SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Eric Savant, effective March 26, 2024- June 30, 2024.
- Mr. Frank Sotile Jr., Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Patrick Frischhertz, effective March 26, 2024- May 4, 2026.
- Mr. Patrick Frischhertz, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position formerly held by Frank Sotile Jr., effective March 26, 2024- June 30, 2024.

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

- Ms. Amie Nunez, Allen SWCD, elected position formerly held by Mr. Eric Savant, effective March 26, 2024- June 30, 2024.
- Mr. Frank Sotile Jr., Lower Delta SWCD, appointed position formerly held by Mr. Patrick Frischhertz, effective March 26, 2024- May 4, 2026.
- Mr. Patrick Frischhertz, Lower Delta SWCD, elected position formerly held by Frank Sotile Jr., effective March 26, 2024- June 30, 2024.

**Motion by:** Mr. Brad Spicer  
**Seconded by:** Mr. Ben Langlinais  
Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Garber said there are 6 reappointments this month:

- Mr. Bradley Pousson, Gulf Coast SWCD, appointed position, effective June 10, 2024- June 10, 2027.
- Mr. Eddie Blanchard, Lafayette SWCD, appointed position, effective June 11, 2024- June 10, 2027.
- Ms. Judy Robin, St. Martin SWCD, appointed position, effective March 26, 2024-March 26, 2027
- Mr. Daniel Luke, St. Mary SWCD, appointed position, effective June 11, 2024- June 10, 2027.
- Mr. Kent Blades, Tangipahoa- St. Helena SWCD, appointed position, effective May 24, 2024- May 24, 2027.
- Mr. Andy Anders, Tensas-Concordia SWCD, appointed position, effective April 24, 2024- April 23, 2027

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

- Mr. Bradley Pousson, Gulf Coast SWCD, appointed position, effective June 10, 2024- June 10, 2027.
- Mr. Eddie Blanchard, Lafayette SWCD, appointed position, effective June 11, 2024- June 10, 2027.
- Ms. Judy Robin, St. Martin SWCD, appointed position, effective March 26, 2024-March 26, 2027
- Mr. Daniel Luke, St. Mary SWCD, appointed position, effective June 11, 2024- June 10, 2027.
- Mr. Kent Blades, Tangipahoa- St. Helena SWCD, appointed position, effective May 24, 2024- May 24, 2027.
- Mr. Andy Anders, Tensas-Concordia SWCD, appointed position, effective April 24, 2024- April 23, 2027

**Motion by:** Mr. Ed Giering

**Seconded by:** Mr. Brad Spicer

Motion passed unanimously.

#### District Supervisor Election- June 8, 2024

Chairman Garber said the election packet was sent to districts on March 1, 2024. Districts were asked to submit a copy of their election notices with addresses of the places they posted the notices which are due this Friday, March 29<sup>th</sup>. The nominating period is April 1, 2024- April 30, 2024. Supervisors who have terms expiring on June 30, 2024 are expected to get their nominating petitions completed with 25 signatures by April 30, 2024. The petition must be postmarked prior to May 1, 2024.

#### SWCC Goals

Chairman Garber said the Commission would review the goals at the next meeting.

#### Correspondence/Articles:

- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation-March/April. 2024- Agriculture intensification as a critical step to enhance sustainable productive systems
- Request for Proposals: Testing Different Event Frames to Successfully Reach Beyond the Choir
- Good Government Program: March 26, April 23, and May 31, 2024
- Morning AgClips: It's Not the Cow: It's the How
- AFBF Welcomes Creation of EPA Office of Agriculture
- Public hearing scheduled for land leveling ordinance
- Lundberg Family Farms expands regenerative rice portfolio
- Cover Crop Field Day Scheduled For Thursday, March 28, 2024
- Illness Impacting Texas Cattle Confirmed as Bird flu

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

Chairman Garber said the next state Commission Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 23, 2024 at the LDAF Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806.

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. Brad Spicer made a motion to adjourn at 3:03 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Giering and passed unanimously.



/s/

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