

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

January 28, 2020  
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 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. Steve Horvath  
Mr. John Alan Williams- LACD President  
Mr. Larry Sayes  
Dr. Mike Salassi, LSU AgCenter

**Members absent:**

Southern University Agricultural Center  
Representative

A quorum was present.

**Others Present:**

Mr. Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist  
Mr. Tim Landreneau, NRCS  
Mr. Jason Nolde, LACD 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President  
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**

Mr. Horvath said there was a change in the adjournment motion. Mr. Ed Yerger was listed as making and seconding the motion. Chairman Skains called for a motion to approve the minutes as amended.

**Motion by:** Mr. Steve Horvath.

**Second by:** Dr. Ernest Girouard

Passed unanimously

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### NRCS/OSWC Farm Bill Cooperative Agreement-Brad Spicer, Executive Director, SSWCC

- Farm Bill Total after November Draw: Approximately \$609,000.00
- Funds have been requested to reimburse districts that have over earned during FY 18-19 during the upcoming week.

### LACD and NACD 2020 Meetings-Brad Spicer and Alan Williams, LACD President

- 235 attendees at the LACD Master Farmer Luncheon
- 225 attendees for the LACD Awards Dinner
- 215 attendees registered for the LACD Annual Meeting overall.
- 2021 LACD Annual Meeting will be Baton Rouge on January 13-15, 2021
- NACD Annual meeting will be in Las Vegas, NV on February 8-12, 2020
- The next NACD meeting is the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and it will be in New Orleans, LA

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### Election of State Commission Officers- Chairman Skains asked Vice Chairman Dr. Ernest Girouard to conduct the SSWCC Officer's election.

- Vice Chairman Girouard asked for nominations for Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. Mr. Larry Sayes nominated Mr. Reggie Skains and Mr. Steve Horvath nominated Dr. Ernest Girouard. Nominations were closed. Election for Chairman was taken by voice count. The Commission elected Dr. Ernest Girouard as Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission.
- Dr. Girouard asked for nominations for Vice Chairman. Mr. Ed Yerger nominated Mr. Steve Horvath and Mr. John Alan Williams seconded the nomination of Mr. Horvath.
- **Motion:** Mr. John Alan Williams made a motion to approve Mr. Steve Horvath as Vice-Chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ed Yerger and passed unanimously.
- Dr. Girouard asked for nominations for Secretary-Treasurer. Mr. Ed Yerger nominated Mr. Larry Sayes. **Motion:** Mr. Ed Yerger made a motion to approve Mr. Larry Sayes as Secretary-Treasurer. The Motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Horvath and passed unanimously.

### Supervisor Resignations/Reappointments/Appointments

- Chairman Girouard said there have three reappointments for a three year terms. Mr. Dean Smith- New River SWCD- February 28, 2020- February 28, 2023, Mr. Jerry Robinson- Northeast SWCD- February 24, 2020- February 24, 2023, and Mr. Theron Ty Rogers- West Carroll SWCD- February 24, 2020- February 24, 2023.
- Chairman Girouard asked for a motion to approve the reappointments for a three year term.

**Motion by:** Mr. Ed Yerger

**Seconded by:** Mr. Steve Horvath  
Passed Unanimously

### NACD Travel Requests

- Chairman Girouard said there are four request to approve travel to attend the 2020 NACD Annual Meeting being held in Las Vegas, NV on February 8-12, 2020 for:

East Carroll SWCD- Mr. Donavon Taves, Rapides SWCD- Ms. Brenda Archer, Sabine SWCD- Mr. John Alan Williams, and Tensas-Concordia SWCD- Ms. Zacki Cummings

- Chairman Girouard called for a motion to approve the travel requests to attend the 2020 NACD Annual Meeting Las Vegas, NV on February 8-12, 2020.

**Motion by:** Mr. Larry Sayes  
**Seconded by:** Mr. Ed Yerger  
 Passed unanimously

District Memo for SSWCC Director Position

- The Commission is asking the districts to submit their outstanding candidate’s resumes with cover letters from the districts stating why the district supports their nominee by Friday, February 21, 2020.
- Chairman Girouard asked the Commission how they wanted the process of interviewing and selecting the Commission’s recommendation for consideration by Commissioner Strain
- Chairman Girouard said due to the Mardi Gras Holiday, they need to reschedule the February 25, 2020 meeting and the March 24, 2020 meeting due to the NACD Spring Fly-In.
- Chairman Girouard called for a motion to reschedule the meetings and the process for interviewing and selecting the candidate the commission will recommend to Commissioner Strain for the SSWCC Director.

**Motion:** Mr. Larry Sayes made a motion to move the SSWCC February meeting to February 26, 2020 and schedule the March SSWCC meeting on March 17, 2020. At the February SSWCC meeting, the Commission will select the candidates to be interviewed and at the March SSWCC meeting, the Commission will select the person they will recommend to Commissioner Strain for the SSWCC Director position. The motion was seconded by Mr. Reggie Skains and passed unanimously.

- Dr. Girouard called for a motion to approve the memo to be sent to districts instructing them on the procedure to follow if they are submitting a candidate for the SSWCC Director position.

**Motion by:** Mr. Steve Horvath  
**Seconded by:** Mr. Larry Sayes  
 Passed unanimously

Correspondence-Chairman Girouard

Repeal of WOTUS (Waters of the United States) Rule

- The rule has never fully taken effect because of numerous court challenges, but the repeal formally restores the previous regulatory regime nationwide until the current administration releases its own rule to deal with the issue of conflicting court rulings on jurisdictional waters.

EPA Ushers in New Water Rule

- The “Waters of the U.S.” (WOTUS) rule is now called the “Navigable Waters Protection Rule”. The new rule is an attempt to help clarify what water features fall under federal jurisdiction while following congressional intent and adhering to earlier court cases.

Fridays on the Farm: Conservation Gumbo

- Article reviews the operation of Mr. Eric Unkel’s family farm that consists of 3,600 acres of rice and crawfish as well as a cattle operation. The farm uses the process of precision land leveling which among other benefits enables producers to reduce the amount of water it takes to flood rice fields. Mr. Unkel is a former Allen SWCD board member.

### United Nations Declares 2020 as the International Year of Plant Health

- According to USDA, everyone can help avoid the adverse impact from pests and diseases on agriculture and forest production, livelihoods, and food security by taking these few important actions: Look for and report unusual signs of pests or diseases in trees and plants to your local extension, state department of agriculture, or local state natural resources management office, Don't move firewood; instead buy heat-treated firewood or responsibly gather wood near the place it will be burned to ensure tree-killing beetles hiding inside can't spread to new areas, always declare food, plants, or other agricultural items to U.S. Customs and Border Protection when returning from international travel so they can make sure these items are free from pests and diseases, and contacting your state agriculture office before buying seeds or plants online from other countries to find out if they need to be inspected and certified as pest and disease free and meet other conditions to legally bring them into the United States.

### Farmers Say Controlling Erosion a Win-Win

- Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, NRCS, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources outlines solutions for stabilizing severe stream bank erosion: Cleanup trees in and around streams, protect stream banks with rock riprap, reshaping stream banks and seed with native plants, and install grassed waterways. These actions stabilize stream banks, reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and enhances the scenery.

### Tiny AI Devices Aim to Enrich Farmers and Their Soil

- Enveritas, a U.S. non-profit, signed an agreement with IBM to pilot the AgroPad project to analyze soil samples remotely and quickly. The AgroPad can perform onsite chemical analysis in 10 seconds; reading nitrate or chloride levels from a drop of water or a small soil sample. Enveritas plans to provide the devices for free to farmers in coffee-growing regions of Latin America and Africa and IBM aims to make them affordable to everyone.

### News: No Till Cropping System Reaches Milestone in SD's Wettest Year on Record

- In South Dakota's wettest year on record, half the cropland in the state that was planted used a no-till cropping system. No-till percentage has grown from 37% share of total cropping system use in 2004 to 50% this past year and key practices used with no till are cover crops and crop rotations to regenerate and build healthy soils.

### Reduced Soil Tilling Helps Both Soils and Yields, Stanford Researchers Find

- Stanford University researchers determined that monitoring crops through machine learning and satellite data, farms that till the soil less can increase yields of corn and soybeans and improve the health of the soil.

### Conserving the Floodplains Could Save Billions of Dollars

- In most of the U.S., particularly along the Mississippi River floodplain, it would in most cases cost taxpayers less to buy and conserve vacant land in floodplains now than to pay federal insurance claims and recovery funds over the next 30-100 years.

### A Dirty Truth: Humans Began Accelerating Soil Erosion 4,000 Years Ago

- Recent research combining carbon dating analysis, sediment accumulation rates, and pollen records from 632 lake beds worldwide finds deforestation is tied to increased soil erosion.

### Central Review of Legislative & Regulatory Actions

- Louisiana Final Rules from DEQ: Adopted rules regarding industrial radiographers, adopted a rule to establish a regulatory permit that can be used to authorize the construction and operation of certain boilers and process heaters and certain cooling towers.
- Louisiana Proposed Rules from DEQ: Rule that will incorporate the updated federal regulations into Louisiana's water quality regulations which includes a revision that increases the enforceability of Louisiana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits that included

U.S. EPA approved analytical methods and effluent limitation guidelines, rule regarding permits for stationary combustion turbines, and rule regarding triennial revisions to water quality standards.

#### NRCS State Conservationist Report- NRCS State Conservationist, Chad Kacir

- NRCS is attempting to fill 800 positions in the coming months. If we can fill these positions, we are hoping to fill another 500 to 600 positions during the summer months. There are currently 8 to 10 positions available in Louisiana. NRCS is pushing to get the local individuals to fill positions in their area.
- NRCS Program Allocations Have Been Announced:
  - EQIP- \$21 million
  - CRP- There is a large renewal and sign up on the way. NRCS has CRP 800 contracts that expire this year mostly in the Northeastern part of the state. Farm Service Agency (FSA) and NRCS have been discussing having training sessions regarding handling the CRP workload.
  - CSP Grassland Initiative- currently being wrapped up for the fiscal year. The signups have been ongoing.
- Restructuring Plan

We have approval from the Chief Financial Officer and the Civil Rights Office of NRCS to proceed with the restructuring plan. The next step is sending a letter to the US House Budget Committee. They will have 30 days to comment on the letter and if there are no comments that will be a sign to proceed as normal. NRCS is hoping to announce the 13 DC positions at the beginning of March in state and then nationally if all the positions aren't filled from within the state.
- Visiting Around The State

Mr. Kacir has been visiting some field offices and some supervisor's properties. He will visit all the conservation districts this year and in the next 30-60 days, NRCS will send districts a new Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). These documents had to be rewritten to include all the district duties and all the things NRCS reciprocates to the districts. Mr. Kacir has signed all 44 new MOAs and they are on the way to the Grants and Agreements team. All districts in the US are working on these MOA's so there may be a delay.
- NACD Meeting/Spring Fly-In- Mr. Kacir will be in Washington D.C. for the Fly-In. Chief Lohr has been discussing outlining a new vision and mission for NRCS. Chief Lohr is still focused on helping people help the land but he does want to make additions.
- New "Conservation Desktop Streamline Initiative"(CDSI)

There is a new computer system for NRCS to use technology to handle business. It is the newest version that has been released which takes the place of "Toolkits" which is used to develop the maps and conservation plans. Additionally, "CART" is another computer assessment tool used in helping evaluate applications for different programs.
- Mentors and Soil Health Champions

Chief Lohr is planning to ask some conservation district supervisors and agriculture producers to become mentors. Mr. Kacir said that NRCS has noticed that many of the new college enrollees may not have been raised on the farm but they have an interest to work in agriculture. Mr. Kacir said he would like to create a group of known soil health champions. NRCS wants these folks to be widely known in a variety of types of agriculture. He would like these mentors and soil health champions to be available for field days to respond to attendees' questions. Mr. Kacir said it would be great to have the new 13 DC positions do a leadership training class to talk about interaction with districts and new supervisor training. He suggested courses could be developed and scheduled during the Annual LACD meeting.

#### LSU Report- Dr. Mike Salassi, LSU AgCenter

- Dates to Remember:  
February 4, 2020- Northeast Louisiana Rice Forum- Rayville Civic Center  
February 6, 2020- Northeast Louisiana Crops Forum- Delhi Civic Center  
February 12-14, 2020- Ag Consultants Meeting- Marksville, LA  
February 26, 2020- Table Project Field Day- North Louisiana

The Precision Agriculture Conference was held last week in Alexandria. The LSU College of Agriculture is evaluating possibly developing a Precision Agriculture degree. The person receiving this degree would be educated in data collection and how to present it. Another degree that is being discussed is in Plant Health.

#### OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Spicer thanked Mr. Skains for being a great chairman during these last 4 years. There was a lot accomplished and he looks forward to working with Chairman Girouard and the rest of the Commission members. Dr. Girouard also thanked Mr. Skains for all of his hard work.

Dr. Girouard congratulated Mr. John Alan Williams from the Sabine SWCD for becoming LACD President as well as his 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, Mr. Jason Nolde from the Calcasieu SWCD, and welcomed them to the SSWCC meeting.

#### NEXT MEETING

Chairman Girouard said the next State Commission Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 26, 2020 at 1:15 P.M. in the Veterans Auditorium, 5825 Florida Boulevard, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70806.

#### PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

#### ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Girouard 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 2:40 P.M. The motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Horvath and passed unanimously.

/s/ Dr. Ernest Girouard



Dr. Ernest Girouard, Chairman State Soil and Water Conservation Commission