

2026 Spring State Technical Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: May 8, 2026

Location: 3727 Government St. Alexandria, LA

Time: 9:30am-12:00pm

AGENDA ITEMS

Welcome and Opening Remarks from Sarah Trichel Acting NRCS State Conservationist

Dana Shuff State Resource Conservationist opened the meeting with introductions from 20 attendees representing NRCS, FSA, wildlife, forestry, and agriculture partners. Attendees were requested to sign in to ensure accurate record-keeping and participation acknowledgment.

Sarah Trichel Acting State Conservationist emphasized that NRCS's work is locally led and that the committee's input directly shapes how financial assistance is prioritized across Louisiana.

Sarah discussed the Regenerative Pilot Program and that RPP is a new pilot initiative focused on soil health, running through EQIP and CSP programs. It requires a whole-farm assessment and soil health testing called CEMA 216 at the start and end of each contract, utilizing Qualified Individuals (QIs)-certified crop advisors, or those with an ag degree and soil testing experience to conduct the testing.

Wetland Expedited Minimal Effects Procedure from Mitch Mouton NRCS State Soil Scientist

Mitch introduced a long-awaited procedure for granting exemptions to producers converting marginal wetlands with minimal ecological impact.

The procedure creates a structured way to grant exemptions for wetland conversions with minimal ecological impact, using 3 core functions: wildlife

habitat, water quality, and flood storage. Key input will be needed from the committee including the geographic radius for "wetlands in the area," rare/unique wetland designations, and which expedited minimal effect (EME) categories to adopt.

A Wildlife and Forestry Subcommittee will lead follow-up input sessions; interested members were asked to email Dana Shuff-State Resource Conservationist.

NRCS Resource Concerns from Dana Shuff NRCS State Resource Conservationist

Dana discussed that NRCS is reverting to the original SWAPA framework (Soil, Water, Plant, Animal, Air + Energy/Human) to organize resource concerns more clearly and simplifying a previously expanded list into a tighter structure.

Louisiana's top 10 parish-reported concerns that were compiled from parish-level locally led meetings included soil erosion, soil health, water quantity, plant health, livestock health, and terrestrial habitat.

Programs Update from Kelli McClelland NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

Kelli gave an update on FY26 EQIP funding: It received \$44M; only 14% of 2,250 applications can be funded. Also updates on CSP funding: that it received \$22M; 20% of 823 applications expected to be funded.

Discussed EQIP High-priority practices and source water protection watersheds guide funding allocation. She also discussed that this year they did a workload prioritization tool to help separate high priority versus medium and low saying this helps reduce the number of what's needed to high-prioritize and address in the application process.

She addressed that the Regenerative Pilot Program accounts for \$16M of the EQIP total; other initiatives include Longleaf Pine, Gopher Tortoise, National Water Quality Incentive Program and RCPP.

Land Use Breakout Session (Resource Concern Discussions)

There was a break in the meeting during this time for breakout sessions by land use (cropland, pasture, forestry) to gather partner input to refine ranking criteria used to prioritize funding.

Susan Robbins from The Louisiana Rural Water Association

Louisiana Rural Water Association presented their Source Water Protection Program, introducing Glenda Guimbellot as the new point of contact.

Discussed that Louisiana Rural Water Association presented its source water protection role, connecting drinking water systems with regulatory and ag partners. The program has been funded through USDA/FSA, since the 1985 Farm Bill, and requires technicians to complete three protection plans per year. DEQ is re-inventorying 555 public water wells through 2028, assisted by the program.

Addressed that a major AI data center in Richland Parish- Holly Ridge is expected to withdraw 5 million gallons per day from groundwater. Stressed aquifers- Sparta, Carrizo-Wilcox, and Chico and were flagged as high-priority concerns. The potential collapse of a sulfur dome near Sulphur, LA poses a serious threat to the Chico aquifer and surrounding water systems.

Partner Updates from Various

Ducks Unlimited gave updates active on Rice stewardship with acknowledgment of a \$10M dollar Advancing Markets for Producers grant that was given for LA, 10 projects were underway under the Coastal

Restoration and mottled duck conservation are underway providing habitat across 1,500 acres.

Lower Miss Valley Joint Venture updated Desired Forested Conditions guide; two active RCPPs showing quail recovery; new prescribed burn associations now active statewide.

National Wildlife Federation updated that Statewide water management campaign underway; forest biodiversity white paper published; tracking 85–90 legislative bills.

LA Dept of Environmental Quality is developing watershed plans for Bayou Teche and Cocodrie in Red River Basin; acknowledged that an interactive water quality map is also available on the LDEQ website

The Office of Soil and Water Conservation is adding 2 new watershed coordinator positions, the staff is going from 11 to 13 personnel and contracting with Ducks Unlimited for watershed implementation plans.

LA Forestry Association reported that timber markets for small-diameter timber are shifting to bioenergy-biochar, sustainable aviation fuel; also, Louisiana Tech's new 22,000 sq ft Forest Innovation Center opens in fall.

US Forest Service-Catahoula Ranger District reported that 120,000 acres burned with prescribed fire and upcoming pine snake releases.

Closing Comments from Sarah Trichel Acting State Conservationist

Sarah closed meeting with encouragement for partners to maintain ongoing communication beyond the biannual meetings.

Sarah Trichel, State Conservationist