

2026 Fall State Technical Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: September 1st, 2026

9:30 AM-12:00 PM

Location: 3727 Government St Alexandria, LA Time:

AGENDA ITEMS

Welcome and Opening Remarks from NRCS State Conservationist Sarah Trichel

Mrs. Trichel welcomed partners and discussed the importance of having State Technical Committee meetings in terms of delivering conservation in the state of Louisiana. She asked that everyone please bring up concerns, issues, and input on the important items on today's agenda. She stressed that NRCS is committed to being locally led and today's meeting is a big part of that model.

Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program from Acting NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Agreements Candis Voorhies

Mrs. Voorhies outlined the \$35 million multi-state notice of funding opportunity, open until September 21st across 14 eligible states, including Louisiana, targeting feral swine trapping, training, and restoration. Awards range from \$75,000–\$3 million; requires 25% cost share (with a cash component, unlike the prior in-kind-only rule) and cover trapping and monitoring but not dispatching. She explained that For-profit entities, foreign organizations, and loose partnerships are ineligible to apply as well as other federal agencies. Applications go through Grants.gov only and selections are expected by October 23rd.

FY26 Program Updates from NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs Kelli McClelland

Ms. McClelland gave updates on FY 26 Funding, with Louisiana obligating nearly \$117 million across EQIP, CSP, and ACEP in FY26. Louisiana approved funding for 15% of EQIP applications, with 40% allocated to the Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP). Additionally, 23% of CSP applications received funding, with 48% allocated to RPP. She reported EQIP funded \$50M, CSP \$25M, and RCPP \$2.6M and Louisiana is now 100% obligated for the year. She also stated that September 30 will be the first funding pool cutoff for FY27, which is earlier than past years. Ms. McClelland also covered High Priority Practices and discussed maintaining current areas and practices as well as interest in joining the Source Water Protection Subcommittee.

Regenerative Pilot Program from NRCS State Resource Conservationist Dana Shuff and NRCS State Soil Scientist Mitch Mouton

Mrs. Shuff discussed that a whole-farm assessment is required, at least one primary soil-health practice, and soil health testing (CEMA 216) to qualify for the Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP). Soil sampling must be done by a "Qualified Individual" (QI); the state is building a QI list and asking partners to help identify candidates, who must self-certify. For

FY 27, the state is proposing to keep nearly all soil/water resource concerns and all land uses eligible and are proposing to add 7 new primary regenerative practices and asked for input from the committee.

Mr. Mouton discussed that Soil Health Testing requires a pre-work meeting between producer, NRCS, and a QI, plus detailed documentation (3 composite samples, 15 total sample points with coordinates). Louisiana funded nearly 200 RPP contracts in FY26 which required CEMA 216 testing. Louisiana was able to fund well above the original 25% funding target. Mr. Mouton stated that long-term goals for RPP are to track soil health outcomes over the 5-year contract period to demonstrate conservation impact beyond dollars spent. He also explained that states now have more flexibility to tailor practices than in the standardized FY26 rollout and asked for comments on what RPP should look like in Louisiana. The committee discussed why soil and water were chosen as the two mandatory resource concerns for the Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP).

Hot Topic Impacts on Louisiana Landscape (Group Discussion)

The committee discussed why soil and water were chosen as the two mandatory resource concerns for the Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP).

A member raised concerns about water-quality metrics being used for future legislative/regulatory purposes; NRCS staff reassured that participation in NRCS programs is voluntary, no data is reported to regulatory agencies and having an irrigation water management plan may protect producers if future water legislation requires conservation plans. It was further discussed that irrigation water management plans that NRCS assists developing for producers actually saves water and allows producers to irrigate efficiently with the least amount of water and energy necessary to support the crops.

A member advocated wildlife/bird habitat outcomes to be better credited to farmers, not just soil health. Staff noted this is part of a larger ongoing conversation at the agency/department level (e.g., Master Farmer program) about crediting voluntary conservation work.

A High rate of farmland conversion (housing, and AI data centers) is a growing concern; NRCS is continuing to promote the Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) program to keep land in agricultural use. ALE requires a partnering "eligible entity" to hold the easement (unlike WRE, which NRCS holds directly) Louisiana currently has only one ALE (Vermilion Prairie, which was established in 2018).

NRCS will circulate additional ALE education material and information via the State Technical Committee mailing list.

A related Forest Resilience/Forestland easement program (FRP) has no designated area yet in Louisiana.

When asked about expected staff reductions, NRCS confirmed no staff reductions are planned in Louisiana. The agency will be investing in training (e.g., Louisiana Agriculture) and capacity-building partnerships instead.

When asked about TSPs vs contractors on the vendor list and how they are different, NRCS Staff clarified difference between Technical Service Providers (TSPs landowner-selected, paid via contract funds) and vendor lists (self-listed contractors for EQIP-type work).

Partner Highlights and Upcoming Events

Louisiana Wildlife & Fisheries announced a new Louisiana Forestry Initiative (300 applicants, \$4M to contract) and a pending RCPP application for forest/wetland work. Rice Stewardship announced a coastal restoration (\$65M for ongoing/future projects), and waterfowl habitat projects are all in progress.

Department of Ag & Forestry: "Good Lands" video series, mobile ag education trailer (launching Jan. 2027), and new Clean Water Act 319 project sites.

Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture discussed they will have their regional meeting on Oct 1st and offered their outreach to NRCS and all the guest partners.

Louisiana Farm Bureau highlighted the Master Farmer Program as a model of successful partnership and emphasized the Louisiana Master Farmer Program and the value of locally led partner-driven conservation efforts amid upcoming legislative and land pressure challenges.

Closing Comments from NRCS State Conservationist Sarah Trichel

Rest of NRCS staff introduced themselves to guest partners, and the meeting closed with Sarah addressing an emphasis on locally led, voluntary conservation and staying in contact between meetings and thanked everyone for their participation in the meeting.

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Sarah Trichel
Louisiana State Conservationist