



Richland Soil and Water Conservation District

2020 Hampton Street, Room 3063A

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June 8, 2020

Virtual Meeting • 6:00pm

Commissioners Present

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Jeff Laney, Vice Chair

Jim Rhodes, Secretary/Treasurer

Hemphill Pride, III

Mary Burts

Others Present

Quinton Epps, Conservation Division Manager

Chanda Cooper, Education Program Coordinator

Charlie Fisher, Administrative Assistant

Mary Hannah Lindsay, Education Program Assistant

Anne Marie Johnson, Pollinator Garden Manager

Tim McSwain, Richland County Conservation Commissioner

Charles Weber, Richland County Conservation Commissioner

James Kilgo, SC Forests and Water Advisory Group

Reginald Liddell, USDA-NRCS

Mary Hendrix

Jim Manning, Richland County Councilman

Welcome and Call to Order

Ms. Cooper provided a Zoom meeting orientation and introduced participants. Chairman Mullis called the meeting to order and gave the invocation.

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Pride and approved unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 11 board meeting. Commissioner Laney seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Special Presentation: SC Forests and Water Advisory Group

Mr. Kilgo is a representative of the SC Rural Water Association and is working to identify public/private funding that can be used to improve water quality and enhance water quantity by using forests and forest management as a tool. He has collaborated with other Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs)—notably the Kershaw SWCD—on water quality improvement projects in the past and is interested in becoming more involved in the Richland SWCD.

He provided information about the SC Forests and Water Advisory Group: a new collaborative advisory board comprised of statewide management-level and higher representatives of state agencies, NGOs, corporate partners, water utilities, and forestry organizations. The Advisory Group's goal is to use forests as a tool to answer statewide questions related to source water protection and water quality/quantity enhancement. The Advisory Group will meet quarterly, beginning this year, to identify and prioritize watersheds for funding. It will also host an annual Forests and Water Consortium Meeting to share the Advisory Group's recommendations with a wider audience and develop action items. Priorities include improving communications between the water and forest sectors in SC; prioritizing watersheds and identify appropriate funding mechanisms for water quality improvements; providing trainings to raise awareness among stakeholders about how forests can protect and improve water quality and quantity; and to create a business case for water utilities to invest in land protection and forest management. Mr. Kilgo will share a one-pager with the Richland SWCD explaining this new initiative.

Financial Report

Commissioner Rhodes reported a starting bank balance of \$49,970.26, expenses totaling \$3,708.36, and an ending total of \$46,261.90. A separate mitigation bank fund contains approximately \$52K which must be held to cover future expenses related to the conservation easement.

Affiliate Member Report

Commissioner Laney reported no new Affiliate Members have joined since the last meeting.

Pinewood Lake Park Pollinator Garden

Ms. Johnson shared the latest "Buzz" from the Richland SWCD's Pollinator Demonstration Garden at Pinewood Lake Park. The Richland SWCD received a \$30K Urban Agriculture Conservation Grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts to revitalize a defunct raised bed community garden at Pinewood Lake Park in February of this year. Since the last Richland SWCD meeting, Ms. Johnson and her husband, Jim, have built and installed four bee nesting boxes and continued maintenance and irrigation work on existing beds. She showcased the floral diversity in the demonstration garden and explained how floral diversity contributes to insect diversity. Challenges in the Garden include voles, aphids, and spider mites. Over the summer, Ms. Johnson will complete the bee habitat beds and will begin collaborating with Richland County staff to design signage for the Garden. Publicity about the project is still on hold, pending a discussion with Richland County Councilwoman Chakisse Newton.

Conservation Division/Conservation Commission Manager Report

Mr. Epps reported the Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC) has reviewed and provided comments to the Richland County Planning Division of the Community Planning and Development Department on the 600 page draft Land Development Code. It has also provided a second round of comments on the Community Development Block Grant draft mitigation plan; the RCCC is concerned with how projects were selected and how funds were allocated in the plan. The RCCC decided additional survey work is not needed to proceed with the Walden Pond modelling and feasibility study. The RCCC/Conservation Division is proceeding with a plan to purchase a tractor and implements for maintaining the roads and wildlife plots on the Mill Creek and Cabin Branch tracts; the process awaits Administrative approval. There is a tree-trimming project at Pinewood Lake Park. Mr. Epps continues to follow the Fairfield County Wastewater Treatment Plant proposal; the June Environmental Planning Advisory Committee meeting was cancelled because the Preliminary Engineering Report has not been completed.

Education Report

Ms. Cooper has developed a series of short Conservation Tip videos which are being shared on social media by the Richland County Public Information Office. Four have been released to date, on topics including Trash the Poop, pollinator conservation, and composting. She has also developed four educational videos for the Green Steps School program on topics including composting, vermicomposting, cover crops, and plants in every classroom.

Richland SWCD has requested \$5,810 of a one-year \$10,000 contribution agreement from USDA-NRCS via the SC Association of Conservation Districts. Funds are available to the SWCD for farm bill program outreach and related tasks. While COVID-19 interrupted the SWCD's planned workshops which would have fallen under this agreement, Ms. Cooper feels confident staff can complete the work to request the remaining \$4,190 in the three months remaining on the project.

Dr. Buz Kloot with the University of South Carolina approached Richland SWCD about partnering with him on urban agriculture conservation outreach on topics including soil health, turfgrass management, and integrated pest management. While the topic is a good fit for the Richland SWCD, particularly with the new Seed Sanctuary and Pollinator Demonstration Garden projects, Richland SWCD lacks the staff time, resources, and support to accept more new projects at this time.

Chairman Mullis explained Richland SWCD frequently receives project proposals because of our reputation and track record of success. However, the Richland SWCD is currently experiencing a poor relationship with County Administration which affects its ability to complete projects which benefit the citizens (and reflect well on Richland County Council and Administration). Chairman Mullis and RCCC Chair Carol Kososki met with Richland County Administrator Leonardo Brown recently to discuss these issues, including the lack of communication. Administrator Brown indicated he feels his staff *is* working with and communicating with the

Richland SWCD and RCCC but admitted he “has some work to do” to address the RCCC’s and RSWCD’s concerns.

Richland SWCD awarded seven Conservation Education Mini-Grants totaling \$4,500 in the 2019-2020 school year; many projects were completed before the end of the school year, but COVID-19 prevented some schools from completing their project work. In those instances, Ms. Cooper has provided a one-year extension on grant funds.

Each year, Richland SWCD recognizes one Richland County teacher as the local Conservation Teacher of the Year. The award would have been announced and presented in May, but due to COVID-19 and associated staff limitations, the award was not announced before the end of the school year. Ms. Cooper recommended holding the award and presenting it in August, once school resumes, to allow for maximum publicity for the teacher within his/her school and school district. Commissioners agreed.

Ms. Lindsay reported the Seed Sanctuary, which received one of four \$2,500 Friends of the National Association of Conservation District grants nationwide to launch, has received 1,860 requests for seeds. Requests have slowed since the initial announcement. To date, we have shipped 2,500 seed packets to >400 residents. Spring seed shipments have concluded and we will resume mailing seeds for fall planting in mid-summer. The biggest obstacle to the Seed Sanctuary program currently is the inability to host volunteer work sessions to pack seed. A thank-you card is included with each seed shipment that asks seed recipients to share photos of their gardens on social media using the hashtags #RCSeedSanctuary #ReseedRichland, and Ms. Lindsay showed a timelapse video one family created of their seedlings growing in upcycled milk cartons. ColaDaily highlighted the program in an Instagram post; this boost gained 40 new Instagram followers for Richland SWCD. This project has provided a huge boost in awareness of our organization and programs, and it has also increased our social media and e-newsletter following so that our future conservation messages will have a much wider audience.

More than 40 “Where Would We BEE Without Pollinators” poster contest entries were received, in spite of COVID-19 school closures and disruptions. Judges chose 17 winners in four grade categories, and staff posted these winners online and requested the public’s help in selecting a “People’s Choice Award.” This resulted in a huge spike in audience engagement with Richland SWCD’s social media presence.

The group discussed the importance of youth education and the power of youth programming to shape future leaders. Commissioner Laney shared a Richland SWCD Speaking Contest award he received as a youth commissioner in 1992, and Mr. Epps recalled remarks by SC Farm Bureau President Harry Ott emphasizing the importance of agricultural education opportunities for youth.

NRCS Report

No report was provided by District Conservationist Emily Bonilla-Gonzalez, but incoming Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations Reginald Liddell introduced himself and

stated he looks forward to working with SC SWCDs in coming months. Priorities will include increasing staffing in order to put conservation practices on the ground in SC.

Strategic Plan Review/Update

Ms. Cooper has received input from Commissioner Laney RE: scheduling Strategic Planning sessions for the Richland SWCD. Strategic Planning will be completed in a series of three sessions, one per month, from 4:30-6:00pm. One of these meetings will include the FY21 budget work-session. Ms. Cooper asked Commissioner Laney to provide potential dates so she can share a Doodle poll with other Commissioners.

Associate Commissioner Applications

Richland SWCD has received three applications from prospective Associate Commissioners: Tim McSwain, Charles Weber, and Mary Hendrix. Commissioner Laney made a motion to defer this action item until the next meeting; Commissioner Rhodes seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously. Mr. McSwain, Mr. Weber, and Ms. Hendrix all expressed their interest in serving.

FY21 Budget

Due to COVID-19, staff have not had time to prepare the FY20 expense report or a program/budget proposal for FY21. However, two funding requests can be considered at present. Richland SWCD has been invited to participate in a fundraiser to purchase a mobile saw for the SC Forestry Commission, Forestry Association of SC, and SC Forestry Foundation to use in education programs. Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to contribute \$500 to the fundraiser; Commissioner Burts seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Mr. Epps explained that Community Planning and Development Department Administrative Assistant Charlie Fisher, who currently provides staff support to the Richland SWCD, does not have a County-issued laptop computer and was therefore unable to perform most of her duties during the COVID-19 shutdown. Mr. Epps recommended the Richland SWCD purchase a laptop computer at a cost of \$1100 to allow Ms. Fisher to work remotely (as other staff members have been doing since March 20). Questions arose about how Ms. Fisher's reassignment out of the Conservation Division would affect her ability to work remotely; whether the RCCC would be willing to split the cost of the computer, since Ms. Fisher also provides staff support to the RCCC; why Richland County had not already equipped Ms. Fisher to work remotely; and whether there would be any issues with Richland County Information Technology or Administration in setting up the laptop. It is uncertain whether or how the County's remote work policy will change in the coming months, and whether Ms. Fisher's position will be approved for remote work access. Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to purchase the computer; Commissioner Burts seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. The computer will be labeled "Property of the Richland SWCD."

Announcements

Commissioner Burts thanked fellow commissioners for their assistance with getting signatures for her petition for candidacy; she has received nearly 150 signatures. Ms. Hendrix introduced

herself and expressed her interested in serving as an Associate Commissioner. Councilman Jim Manning thanked the group for the opportunity to join the meeting and learn more about the Richland SWCD programs.

Next Meeting

The next RSWCD meeting will be held at 6pm on August 10, location TBA.

Chairman Mullis adjourned the meeting at 7:52pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Charlie Fisher, Admin. Asst.