



Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD)

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Meeting Minutes

May 12, 2025, 6 pm

Lizard's Thicket, 7938 Garners Ferry Road, Columbia, SC 29209

Commissioners Present

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Jeff Laney, Vice Chair

Mary Burts

Tim McSwain

Associate Commissioners Present

Sarah Burnham

Mary Frances Hendrix

Mary Beth McSwain

Charles Weber

Additional Attendees

Emily Bonilla-Gonzalez

Jessie Egan

Chelsea Holliday

Aric Jensen

Jennifer Mancke

Jhessye Moore-Thomas

Bailey Mullis

Jessica Thompson

Welcome, Introductions, and Invocation: K. Mullis called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm. Jensen gave the invocation.

Approve Agenda and Minutes: Mancke requested the "Upcoming Events" section of the agenda be amended to include the Environmental Education Association of South Carolina (EEASC) Annual Conference on June 19-21 at the Francis Marion University Freshwater Ecology Complex in Florence. Burts motioned to approve the amended agenda. Laney seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously. T. McSwain motioned to approve the minutes. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

Reports:

Financial: Thompson gave the following financial report:

Operating Account (04/30/25 Statement)

Beginning Balance: \$72,973.55+ (04/01/25)

Deposits and Credits: \$8,560.00+

Checks: \$3,852.44-

Expenses and Debits: \$3,133.14-

Ending Balance: \$74,547.97+ (04/30/25)

Credit Card (03/05/25 Statement)

Beginning Balance: \$3,133.14 (04/05/25)

Payments: \$3,133.41

Purchases: \$1,528.52

Ending Balance: \$1,528.52 (05/05/25)

Rewards: \$551.04

Easement Stewardship Account (2/01/25 to 3/31/25 Statement)

Starting Account Value: \$55,755.39 (2/01/25)

Ending Account Value: \$55,951.23 (3/31/25)

Ending Account Value with Accrued Income: \$55,951.23

SCACD Contribution Agreement Account (03/01/25 Statement)

Starting Balance: \$220.01+ (04/01/25)

Credits: \$0.00

Debts: \$0.00

Ending Balance: \$220.01+ (04/30/25)

PayPal Account (04/2025 Statement)

Beginning Available Balance: \$1,610.42 (04/01/25)

Ending Available Balance: \$1,610.42 (04/30/25)

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): Bonilla-Gonzalez reviewed the provided NRCS report.

NRCS is working on application conservation plans. All assessments and Tier 3 applications have been completed. Of the 25 pre-approved Tier 2 applications, 16 have been completed. NRCS has not yet received any Tier 1 applications.

Additionally, NRCS is working on Conservation Stewardship Program applications, practice checkouts, and modifications. NRCS is also working with local producers to control drainage and erosion issues.

Bonilla-Gonzalez was pleased to note information about NRCS' services is spreading and people are utilizing the resources. She reported many new customers, including new and beginning

farmers and socially disadvantaged farmers, are coming through NRCS. Several new customers are from Richland County.

She also reported NRCS went through a second round of deferred employment and is now severely understaffed. K. Mullis reported a reorganization plan is expected to be released within the week.

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR): Egan reported SCDNR was heavily involved with Stewardship Week. Governor Henry McMaster proclaimed April 27 through May 4, 2025, as SC Stewardship Week. The proclamation was presented to the Greenville Soil and Water Conservation District. SCDNR led a field day at Belfast Wildlife Management Area in Kinards, SC, with approximately 40 attendees and produced digital media content, including two videos and a social media toolkit.

SCDNR is becoming involved with the South Carolina Association of Conservation Districts (SCACD) Policy/Position Committees. Egan reported legislative and education have more defined committees. SCDNR and SCACD hope to have defined committees for all policy/position topics.

The two new area coordinators have been trained and are working with their districts, and now the team has a set schedule for attending district board meetings. Egan will attend RSWCD board meetings during all odd months. During even months, the SCDNR monthly report can be read in her absence.

Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC): Weber reported RCCC is completing their grant application for the Crane Creek watershed. He also reported the Commission is fully staffed.

Attendees discussed recent news regarding Richland County and Scout Motors.

RSWCD Programs: Thompson reviewed the provided RSWCD program report.

Conservation Items Before County Council: K. Mullis reported Amanda Jones, Richland County Ag + Art Tour Planning Committee Chair, will speak before County Council on May 13.

Commissioner Advocacy: T. McSwain engaged with Mayor Sloan Griffin during an RSWCD pop-up event at Doko Meadows Park. Attendees discussed adding another row to the Commissioner Advocacy chart to note engagements with other public officials.

Old Business:

Ag + Art Tour: Thompson reported trifold brochures are in, and the next planning committee meeting is May 15.

Thompson also reported all but four time slots have at least one volunteer covering the shift. The responsibility for recruiting volunteers was shifted more to the tour sites this year, which helped encourage earlier sign-ups compared to last year.

The Volunteer Appreciation Party is scheduled for June 1 at Senate's End, and registration for the event is open.

On May 9, Thompson and Richland County's Public Information Office interviewed Jim Lalumondier for an artisan resource video. Thompson has also connected with Gregory Sprouse from the Central Midlands Development Corporation for hospitality tax funding reimbursements.

K. Mullis noted the South Carolina Farm Bureau is providing the Ag Combine Simulator. The bureau requires a volunteer to staff the simulator, but there is no volunteer for Sunday's shift. B. Mullis volunteered to cover the Sunday shift.

2025 Agritourism Internship: Thompson reported Tess Overstreet will begin her internship on May 15. She will encourage Overstreet to attend the next board meeting.

New Business:

Strategic Plan Review: Thompson stated goal 2 of the strategic plan is being met through the Conservation Education Mini-Grant program and Green Step Schools mentorship. Thompson is attending facilitator training in June and will be certified to teach educators Project Learning Tree, Project WET, and Project WILD curricula. RSWCD staff also attend monthly EEASC meetups in the Midlands for professional development and to network with other educators. Burts noted RSWCD commissioners and staff participate as judges for local science fairs.

RSWCD has the following educational tools available for educators: Envirothon training trunk, Enviroscope watershed model, a rainfall simulator, a rain gauge, a vermicomposting bin, and an Adopt-a-Stream freshwater monitoring kit.

K. Mullis added the South Carolina Forage and Grazing Lands Coalition also has an Enviroscope model, which could potentially be used if needed.

Attendees decided to promote educational tools for educators on social media and in the newsletter during the summer, ahead of school starting in August.

RCCC Letter of Support: Thompson drafted a letter to support RCCC's grant application for the Crane Creek watershed. Laney motioned to approve the letter as is. T. McSwain seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

Junior Associate Commissioner Position: Laney proposed offering one to two Junior Associate Commissioner positions.

Attendees agreed the positions should be open to 9th-12th grade students and discussed recruiting students through guidance counselors, 4-H, Envirothon, conservation clubs, and agricultural programs.

Egan advised creating a plan of what is expected of the junior board and what individuals can get out of the opportunity. She suggested contacting Clarendon County, which used to have a successful junior board. K. Mullis will connect with a contact in Clarendon County, and Mancke will connect with a contact in Orangeburg County for input.

Associate Commissioner Reappointment: Burts motioned to reappoint Burnham. T. McSwain seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously. Laney motioned to appoint B. Mullis as an associate commissioner. T. McSwain seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

Executive Session: N/A

Public Input: Jhessye Moore-Thomas, Extension Associate for the Climate Smart Grown in SC program, introduced herself. The Climate Smart program serves small to mid-scale farmers and promotes cover crops and tillage reduction. She also encouraged attendees to mark their calendars for Clemson Extension's Watermelon Field Day, an annual event held in July in Blackville.

K. Mullis reviewed upcoming events. Mancke invited attendees to contact her if they would like to donate to the EEASC Annual Conference's silent auction.

Attendees discussed recent guest appearances on Making it Grow episodes.

Next Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, June 9, at 6 pm at Lizard's Thicket, 7938 Garners Ferry Road, Columbia, SC 29209.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 7:15 pm.