



Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD)

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Meeting Minutes

April 13, 2026, 6 pm

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

Commissioners Present

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Jim Rhodes, Vice Chair

Mary Burts, Treasurer

Tim McSwain

Associate Commissioners Present

Mary Frances Hendrix

Additional Attendees

Emily Bonilla-Gonzalez

Quinton Epps

Chelsea Holliday

Jeff Laney

Jennifer Mancke

Tucker Taylor

Carter Weston

Welcome, Introductions, and Invocation: Mullis called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm. Guests introduced themselves. Laney gave the invocation.

Approve Agenda and Minutes: Burts motioned to approve the agenda. Rhodes seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously. Rhodes motioned to approve the minutes. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

Reports:

Financial: Burts gave the following financial report:

Operating Account (04/01/26 Statement)

Beginning Balance: \$66,197.58+ (03/01/26)

Deposits and Credits: \$3,242.28+

Checks: \$5,362.82-
Expenses and Debits: \$1,819.51-
Ending Balance: \$62,257.53+ (03/31/26)

Credit Card (04/05/26 Statement)

Beginning Balance: \$1,750.86 (03/05/26)
Payments: \$1,750.86
Purchases: \$868.30
Ending Balance: \$868.30 (04/05/26)
Rewards: \$594.20

***Easement Stewardship Account (01/01/26 to 01/31/26 Statement)**

Starting Account Value: \$58,334.29 (01/01/26)
Ending Account Value: \$58,545.00 (01/31/26)
Ending Account Value with Accrued Income: \$58,545.00

SCACD Contribution Agreement Account (04/01/26 Statement)

Starting Balance: \$220.01+ (03/01/26)
Credits: \$37,804.81+
Debits: \$37,804.81-
Ending Balance: \$220.01+ (04/31/26)

PayPal Account (03/2026 Statement)

Beginning Available Balance: \$492.28 (03/01/26)
Ending Available Balance: \$0.00 (03/31/26)

*Easement Stewardship Account statements do not arrive monthly.

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

She recently attended the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) rollout training. Program changes include the way in which applications are reviewed and assessed. There are two pools for funding: EQIP and the Regenerative Pilot Program.

Regenerative Pilot Program contracts are different than EQIP contracts; they last for five years. These contracts are focused on improving soil health and the overall health of productions.

The practice list for Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications was released on April 13, but was quickly removed for adjustments.

NRCS staff have been told this is an interim year with many changes.

Additionally, Bonilla-Gonzalez is conducting site visits, collecting data from producers, and working on conservation plans. She is working on 135 EQIP applications and 25 CSP applications across Calhoun and Richland Counties.

She also reported Orangeburg field staff have returned to their office.

Assessments and rankings are due June 19.

Mullis reported he attended the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Fly-In in Washington, D.C., on March 25. Attendees met with Kennon White, the Assistant Chief for the South Region of NRCS. Mullis stated there is uncertainty regarding funding from NRCS and encouraged attendees not to take contribution agreements for granted. Bonilla-Gonzalez added NRCS is scrutinizing partnerships.

Mullis hopes the reorganization plan will be released soon.

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR): No one from SCDNR was present. Epps reviewed the provided SCDNR-Conservation Districts' monthly report and statewide report for March. Stewardship Week is April 26 – May 3. This year's Field Day will be at Yon Family Farms in Ridge Spring, SC, on April 29 from 10 am to 3 pm.

Mullis noted a few farms throughout the state were interviewed in preparation for Stewardship Week, including his own. There will be an article in South Carolina Wildlife magazine.

Mullis also reported Tyler Brown is now the Deputy Director of the Land and Water Conservation Division, and Brooke Myres is the Acting Conservation Districts Program Manager.

Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC): Epps reported RCCC will present its annual report before County Council on April 14. The presentation will cover upcoming projects and tasks such as easements, land donations, and grants, as well as work related to the Historic Preservation Plan and Comprehensive Plan.

RSWCD Programs: Epps reviewed the provided RSWCD program report for March.

Mancke added Hammond School, after twenty years, is becoming a Green Step School. In March, she attended the South Carolina Wildlife Federation Conservation Lobby Day at the State House.

Epps stated Burts and Hendrix judged the youth conservation poster contest entries on April 13.

Attendees discussed the Local Work Group meeting.

Conservation Items Before County Council: Epps reiterated RCCC will give their annual report before County Council on April 14. The Comprehensive Plan will go before the planning commission on April 13, and then will go before County Council for approval.

Commissioner Advocacy: Mullis, along with Mike Stewart, NACD South Carolina Board Member-Alternate from Greenville County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Kim

Alexander from Oconee Soil and Water Conservation District, attended the NACD Fly-In. Mullis, Stewart, and Alexander met with all South Carolina senators and representatives except for Nancy Mace and discussed passing the nonpartisan farm bill, accessing Inflation Reduction Act funds, keeping Section 319 funding, and losing farmland.

Mullis reported the Senate accepted the Conservation Districts Technical Assistance Program (CDTAP), but as one-time funds of \$2 million, and not as recurring funds. The House of Representatives is now considering the program.

Old Business:

Richland County Ag + Art Tour (RCAAT): Holliday reported Councilman Livingston allocated \$3,000 in discretionary funds to the tour, resulting in an increased marketing budget. The planning committee is considering digital marketing agency Spruce Strategies to manage the tour's social media platforms.

Last month, staff reported the tour would feature 17 sites. The tour will now feature 16 sites; Blossom Plant and Produce dropped out.

This year's tour will have a passport. There are four suggested routes for visitors: Blythewood, Columbia City Center, Columbia Piedmont, and Lower Richland. Visitors who complete a suggested tour route will receive a collectible pin.

The planning committee is actively recruiting volunteers to staff check-in tables during the tour weekend.

The next planning committee meeting is on April 15 at the Richland County Administration Building. A Tour Site Meeting/Marketing Workshop is on April 26 at Midlands Technical College Northeast.

New Business:

Agritourism Intern Recommendation: Epps reported staff recommends Matthew Amico for the agritourism intern. Rhodes motioned to hire Matthew Amico as the 2026 agritourism summer intern. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

FY26 Adopt-a-Stream Funds: Holliday requested the remaining funds of \$230.01 allocated for Canva be transferred to the Adopt-a-Stream program to cover the purchase of additional supplies, including Petrifilm. Rhodes motioned to move the remaining funds from Canva to Adopt-a-Stream. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

FY26 Branded Apparel Order: Holliday reported staff are moving forward with purchasing branded apparel. Commissioners, associate commissioners, and staff will receive green cotton t-shirts. Commissioners will receive polos in addition to the t-shirts. Holliday will send an email with additional details.

FY27 Draft Budget Review: Epps presented the FY27 draft budget for review. Mullis inquired about the South Carolina Association of Conservation Districts (SCACD) Contribution Agreement. Mullis noted NACD dues will increase, but an amount has not been announced yet.

Attendees will review the FY27 budget and vote on it in May if the board is ready.

Commissioner Vacancy Nomination: Burts motioned to recommend Rhodes as the Conservation District Commissioner Appointment candidate. McSwain seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

Executive Session: N/A

Public Input: Taylor and Weston thanked RSWCD for allowing them to attend the meeting. Attendees discussed an aerator for rent.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 7:10 pm.