



**Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD)**

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**Meeting Minutes**

February 9, 2026, 6 pm

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

**Commissioners Present**

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Jim Rhodes, Treasurer

Mary Burts

Tim McSwain

**Associate Commissioners Present**

Sarah Burnham

Mary Frances Hendrix

Bailey Mullis

Charles Weber

**Additional Attendees**

Emily Bonilla-Gonzalez

Quinton Epps

Kevin Godwin

Chelsea Holliday

Aric Jensen

Jennifer Mancke

Brooke Myres

Barbara Padget

Cameron Sabin

Jessica Thompson

**Welcome, Introductions, and Invocation:** K. Mullis called the meeting to order at 6:08 pm. McSwain gave the invocation.

**Approve Agenda and Minutes:** Burts motioned to add the Caughman Road Mini-Grant to new business. McSwain seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously. Rhodes motioned to approve the amended agenda. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously. McSwain motioned to approve the minutes. Rhodes seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

## **Reports:**

**Financial:** Rhodes gave the following financial report:

### **Operating Account (02/01/26 Statement)**

Beginning Balance: \$67,243.72+ (01/01/26)  
Deposits and Credits: \$12,842.28+  
Checks: \$6,772.49-  
Expenses and Debits: \$669.81-  
Ending Balance: \$72,643.70+ (01/31/25)

### **Credit Card (02/05/26 Statement)**

Beginning Balance: \$592.06 (01/05/26)  
Payments: \$592.06  
Purchases: \$2,041.48  
Ending Balance: \$2,041.48 (02/05/26)  
Rewards: \$621.05

### **\*Easement Stewardship Account (11/01/25 to 12/31/25 Statement)**

Starting Account Value: \$56,632.90 (11/01/25)  
Ending Account Value: \$58,334.29 (12/31/25)  
Ending Account Value with Accrued Income: \$58,334.29

### **SCACD Contribution Agreement Account (02/01/26 Statement)**

Starting Balance: \$220.01+ (01/01/26)  
Credits: \$15,167.90+  
Debts: \$0.00  
Ending Balance: \$15,387.91+ (02/01/26)

### **PayPal Account (01/2026 Statement)**

Beginning Available Balance: \$242.28 (01/01/26)  
Ending Available Balance: \$250.00 (01/31/26)

\*Easement Stewardship Account statements do not arrive monthly.

**Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS):** Bonilla-Gonzalez reviewed the provided NRCS report. She continued to work on active contracts and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications. Due to the federal shutdown, program deadlines were extended to January 15.

Bonilla-Gonzalez also reported lots of changes are being made. In early February, the state leadership team was in training, and they will provide updates on changes in the near future. Regarding the new NRCS Regenerative Pilot Program, NRCS does not have a standard of operations yet due to expected changes with the program. She also noted expected changes for CSP easement enhancements.

Bonilla-Gonzalez stated NRCS is working about two months behind schedule. Obligations will most likely get pushed to June/July. She reported NRCS is supposed to get more funding for EQIP than last year, but stressed there are many unknown factors. The EQIP process is being streamlined and the practice list is being simplified.

Kellee Melton is the Acting State Conservationist for South Carolina. Daniel Westcot is Assistant State Conservationist – Field Operations, Area 1, and Acting Assistant State Conservationist – Field Operations, Area 2. Odessa Armstrong is the Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships. Armstrong was Acting State Conservationist while Melton and Westcot were away at training.

Attendees discussed the South Carolina Association of Conservation Districts' Feral Swine Exclusion Fence Funding program. Mullis noted the application deadline has been extended to February 13.

**South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR):** Myres introduced the new East Piedmont Area Coordinator, Cameron Sabin. She explained Jessie Egan has moved into a program development position, where Jessie will run Envirothon and bring programs to districts. Myres reported SCDNR co-hosted the partnership conference in January, compiled district annual reports, and held an Envirothon coaches training.

Upcoming events include Conservation Day at the State House on March 3, the Palmetto Sportsman's Classic on March 27-29, Envirothon on April 17, and Stewardship Week on April 26 to May 3 with Field Day on April 29.

**Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC):** Weber reported the RCCC grants program has closed, and committees are scheduled to meet with applicants. Weber reported 20-24 grant applicants have applied for over \$500,000 in total.

Weber and Jensen reported the Historic Preservation Plan went before County Council last week. Council took another week to review the plan, and will decide whether or not to accept the plan at the February 10 meeting.

The Crane Creek watershed grant is with procurement. Additionally, RCCC will present its annual report to County Council in March.

**RSWCD Programs:** Holliday reviewed the provided RSWCD program report for January.

**Conservation Items Before County Council:** Jensen referred to the earlier conversation on the Historic Preservation Plan.

**Commissioner Advocacy:** Mullis reported the National Association of Conservation Districts will formally request Section 319 grant success stories.

### **Old Business:**

**Richland County Ag + Art Tour (RCAAT):** Thompson shared the RCAAT timeline. She reported the tour site application window closes on February 15. The artisan application is open until March 15, and the committee is actively recruiting artisans.

Thompson reported Councilwoman Terracio has granted \$3,000 in discretionary funds to the 2026 tour.

Gregory Sprouse with Central Midlands Development Corporation submitted the FY27 Hospitality-Tax application.

Thompson submitted the FY27 RCCC Natural Resource grant application. The application requests funding for the RCAAT coordinator, artisan coordinator, and intern. McSwain will give the grant proposal before the Natural Resource Committee on February 11.

The statewide Ag + Art Tour meeting will be on February 18 at 9 am via Zoom, and the RCAAT planning committee meeting will be on February 18 at 12:30 pm at the Richland County Administration Building.

### **New Business:**

**Commissioner Re-election:** With Jeff Laney's resignation, the vice chair position became vacant. McSwain moved for Mullis to continue to serve as chair, for Rhodes to assume the role of vice chair, and for Burts to assume the role of secretary/treasurer. Rhodes seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

Attendees discussed advertising the open board position appointed by SCDNR. McSwain motioned to advertise the position. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

**Caughman Road Elementary School Mini-Grant:** Caughman Road Elementary School, a 2025 spring-cycle mini-grant recipient, requested an extension, which was approved through December 15, 2025. Due to point of contact changes, the school did not submit their reimbursement form by the deadline. Attendees discussed honoring the school's reimbursement after the extension deadline. McSwain motioned to fulfill the reimbursement request. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

**Special Recognition:** East Piedmont Area Director Barbara Padget recognized Mullis as the 2025 Hugh Hammond Bennett Regional Producer Award recipient. The National Conservation Planning Partnership's Hugh Hammond Bennett Award for Conservation Excellence recognizes individuals at the local, state and national level for extraordinary achievements in and contributions to the soil and water conservation movement in the United States.

**Executive Session:** N/A

**Public Input:** N/A

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 7:03 pm.