



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

2020 Hampton Street, Room 3063A

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**Meeting Minutes**

July 7, 2025, 6 pm

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

**Commissioners Present**

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Mary Burts

Tim McSwain

**Associate Commissioners Present**

Sarah Burnham

Mary Beth McSwain

Bailey Mullis

Charles Weber

**Additional Attendees**

Emily Bonilla-Gonzalez

Tyler Brown

Jessie Egan

Quinton Epps

Chelsea Holliday

Aric Jensen

Amanda Jones

Jennifer Mancke

Jessie McNevin

Tess Overstreet

Jessica Thompson

Alexis Wallraf

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

**Approve Agenda and Minutes:** T. McSwain motioned to approve the agenda. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously. T. McSwain motioned to approve the minutes from the May 12 Board Meeting and the June 26 Special Called Meeting. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

## **Reports:**

**Financial:** Thompson gave the following financial report for May:

### **Operating Account (05/31/25 Statement)**

Beginning Balance: \$74,547.97+ (05/01/25)

Deposits and Credits: \$725.00+

Checks: \$3,211.82-

Expenses and Debits: \$1,576.42-

Ending Balance: \$70,484.73+ (05/31/25)

### **Credit Card (05/05/25 Statement)**

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

Payments: \$1,528.52

Purchases: \$2,727.01

Ending Balance: \$2,727.01 (06/05/25)

Rewards: \$593.59

### **Easement Stewardship Account (4/01/25 to 4/30/25 Statement)**

Starting Account Value: \$55,951.23 (4/01/25)

Ending Account Value: \$55,869.65 (4/30/25)

Ending Account Value with Accrued Income: \$55,869.65

### **SCACD Contribution Agreement Account (06/01/25 Statement)**

Starting Balance: \$220.01+ (05/01/25)

Credits: \$14,959.39+

Debts: \$0.00

Ending Balance: \$15,179.40+ (05/31/25)

### **PayPal Account (05/2025 Statement)**

Beginning Available Balance: \$1,610.42 (05/01/25)

Ending Available Balance: \$1,710.42 (05/31/25)

The June financial report was not provided because the July statements were unavailable.

**Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS):** Bonilla-Gonzalez reviewed the provided NRCS report. She stated she is currently the only person in the office. On the state level, NRCS is operating with under half the employees it needs, so there have been processing delays. Regarding EQIP, Bonilla-Gonzalez added NRCS may get additional funding to support more obligations.

**South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR):** Egan referenced the provided SCDNR-Conservation Districts Monthly Report and invited attendees to contact district staff for the Individual South Carolina Conservation District Reports if they wish. She also reported SCDNR has been busy attending local work group meetings. SCDNR is preparing for aid

applications, and more details will become available. Additionally, SCDNR has received positive feedback on the Conservation Districts training.

Brown acknowledged upcoming events, including the NACD Southeast Region Meeting on August 2-6 in Louisville, Kentucky, and the SCACD Mid-Year Meeting on September 8 at Phillips Market Center in West Columbia. He also stated the Local Work Group Meeting deadline is August 15, and the East Piedmont Area meeting will be scheduled for late October in Kershaw.

**Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC):** Weber reported the Historical Committee has been working on a self-guided tour of Richland County called the Enrich Tour. The tour is in its final stages of development, and more details will be announced soon.

Commissioners are reviewing the latest draft of the Richland County Historic Preservation Plan.

In May, RSWCD submitted a letter of support to accompany RCCC's application for the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services Watershed Plan Development Grant for the Crane Creek Watershed. Weber announced RCCC received \$100,000 in grant funding to support the project.

Attendees discussed conservation issues related to Goodwill Plantation.

**RSWCD Programs:** Thompson reviewed the provided RSWCD program reports for May and June.

**Conservation Items Before County Council:** Richland County Ag + Art Tour Planning Committee Chair Amanda Jones invited County Council members and the public to attend the Richland County Ag + Art Tour during the May 13 County Council meeting.

Attendees discussed Richland County's Comprehensive Plan and were encouraged to visit the plan's website (<https://planthefuture.govocal.com/en/projects/richland-county-comprehensive-plan>) for more details.

**Commissioner Advocacy:** Thompson reported Councilmembers Branham, Little, Terracio, Barron, English, and Newton, and Assistant County Administrator Jensen were engaged with the Ag + Art Tour.

Brown reported SCDNR was approved for an educator and outreach coordinator position and will post the position within the next two weeks.

### **Old Business:**

**Ag + Art Tour:** K. Mullis thanked Jones for her leadership in organizing this year's tour and RSWCD's agritourism intern Tess Overstreet for her support.

Jones requested a contract extension to complete tour duties, noting she still had hours and mileage available in her contract. T. McSwain made a motion to extend Jones' contract through August 15. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

Thompson reported 6,185 individuals attended the tour. Jones noted this was a great accomplishment considering this year's tour featured 17 tour sites, compared to 20 last year. Attendees discussed presenting tour statistics to County Council.

K. Mullis reported Clemson Extension will no longer manage the Ag + Art Tour. A nonprofit with a new board is being formed to coordinate the event; however, there is concern about this. Interested parties have discussed soil and water conservation districts' impact on past tours and how they could play a role moving forward.

**2025 Agritourism Internship:** Overstreet introduced herself.

### **New Business:**

**Strategic Plan Review:** Thompson stated goal 3 of the strategic plan is being met through RSWCD's Youth Conservation Poster Contest and classroom presentations, and by participating in the National Association of Conservation Districts Stewardship Week, Green Step Schools, and the SC Envirothon.

Jessie McNevin with the University of South Carolina (USC) Office of Sustainability noted USC students engage in outreach through classroom visits and programs. She suggested adjusting the Envirothon schedule to allow college student participation. Attendees discussed potential partnerships, including using college students as mentors for Envirothon teams. Thompson and McNevin will connect to discuss other possibilities.

**Local Work Group Meeting:** The Local Work Group Meeting is scheduled for July 24. Bonilla-Gonzalez is not available to attend, and attendees discussed possible options. Attendees decided to keep the meeting on July 24 since it has already been advertised. Bonilla-Gonzalez will either record her portion of the presentation for viewing at the event, or Gail Wescot may be able to present on Bonilla-Gonzalez's behalf.

**SC Commissioner's School for Agriculture (SCCSA) District Support:** During the Special Called Meeting held on June 26, commissioners voted to support two full student scholarships at \$500 each for the SC Commissioner's School for Agriculture. T. McSwain moved to continue supporting two full student scholarships totaling \$1,000, even if the students are not from Richland County. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

**SC Association of Conservation Districts (SCACD) Contribution Agreement Status:** K. Mullis explained when the contribution agreement began ten years ago, SCACD did not have the legal status to directly receive and manage the funds from NRCS. RSWCD was approached to be the fiscal agent and hold the funds on SCACD's behalf. The current agreement is about to expire,

and NRCS has identified another one million dollars to continue the agreement, but the agreement must be made with the original agreement holder. RSWCD must hold the funds for the contribution agreement to continue. T. McSwain moved to continue the agreement and continue being the fiscal agent for the agreement. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

**National Wildlife Federation Grant:** The National Wildlife Federation's (NWF) Conservation Champions program offers grants up to \$15,000 for farmers and outreach partners to learn about and develop creative outreach strategies. K. Mullis explained these funds could support RSWCD's outreach programs. The application deadline was June 30, but it may not be a hard deadline. T. McSwain moved to pursue the NWF grant. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

**Executive Session:** N/A

**Public Input:** Attendees discussed current legislation. Regarding the Young Farmer Loan Program, a bill has been filed, but has not yet received a hearing. Conversations are occurring behind the scenes, and the bill may advance in 2026. Brown stated additional information may become available in the next two to three months.

K. Mullis acknowledged the events listed on the agenda.

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 7:06 pm.