



Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD)

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Meeting Minutes

March 9, 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

Associate Commissioners Present

Sarah Burnham

Charles Weber

Additional Attendees

Jessica Blashke

Emily Bonilla-Gonzalez

Quinton Epps

Shawn Goff

Chelsea Holliday

Aric Jensen

Jennifer Mancke

Cameron Sabin

Welcome, Introductions, and Invocation: Mullis called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

Approve Agenda and Minutes: Rhodes motioned to approve the agenda. Burts 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 (03/01/26 Statement)

Beginning Balance: \$72,643.70+ (02/01/26)

Deposits and Credits: \$1,910.00+

Checks: \$6,314.64-
Expenses and Debits: \$2,041.48-
Ending Balance: \$66,197.58+ (02/28/26)

Credit Card (03/05/26 Statement)

Beginning Balance: \$2,041.48 (02/05/26)
Payments: \$2,041.48
Purchases: \$1,750.86
Ending Balance: \$1,750.76 (03/05/26)
Rewards: \$612.06

***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 (03/01/26 Statement)

Starting Balance: \$15,387.91+ (02/01/26)
Credits: \$0.00+
Debts: \$15,167.90-
Ending Balance: \$220.01+ (02/28/26)

PayPal Account (02/2026 Statement)

Beginning Available Balance: \$250.00 (02/01/26)
Ending Available Balance: \$492.28 (02/28/26)

Burts noted a 10-cent discrepancy between the credit card purchases amount and the ending balance.

*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. Of the 63 EQIP applications received from Richland County, 37 are eligible. Fifteen CSP applications have been received from Richland County, and 8 are eligible.

She also noted Orangeburg staff will return to their office. Attendees discussed the Regenerative Pilot Program and soil sampling.

Bonilla-Gonzalez shared the cost list was released last week. There are some changes: some practices have a base pay, and some have an implementation pay. Both will need to be calculated to determine the total amount. Additionally, CSP is changing; there are no more enhancements.

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR): Sabin reported Conservation Districts Program Manager Tyler Brown has accepted a new position. Beginning April 2, he will

start his new role as Deputy Director of the Land and Water Conservation Division with SCDNR. The program manager position will be posted at the end of March.

Sabin reported over 60 people attended Conservation Districts Day at the State House. Mullis added this was the largest turnout for the event. Participants advocated for conversation and promoted the Conservation Districts Technical Assistance Program (CDTAP). The SCDNR annual reports were distributed to legislators and event participants.

Sabin distributed Conservation District training awards to select attendees and noted if anyone is interested in the training, they can contact him or district staff.

Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC): Weber reported RCCC had 19 grant hearings. RCCC recommended 4 applicants for the natural resource grants and 15 applicants for the historic preservation grants. Grant announcements will be made once the budget process is complete.

Weber reported the Crane Creek Watershed Management Plan is with Procurement, and RCCC is waiting to receive it back.

Epps reported the Richland County Recreation Commission (RCRC) is working on a ten-year plan. Individuals can visit <https://richlandcountyparksurvey.org/> to fill out a survey to provide feedback on parks and recreation. RCRC could be a good partner for RCCC; RCRC could advise the Commission on conservation lands and increasing public access.

Weber added the Mill Creek Bridge will be dedicated on March 11 at 2 pm. He encouraged interested parties to speak with Epps for details.

RSWCD Programs: Blashke reviewed the provided RSWCD program report for February. She noted four teams will represent Richland County at this year's Envirothon: two teams from Blythewood High School and two teams from Dutch Fork High School. She reminded attendees RSWCD pays the registration fee for the first three teams to register, so two Blythewood teams and one Dutch Fork team will be covered.

Blashke expanded on the Midlands Local Food Collaborative (MLFC) Chef/Farmer Mini Meet Up. MLFC received grant funding for the event, and RSWCD is providing staff assistance. More information about the event will be available soon. Additionally, the next meeting will not be held on March 26. The new date and time are yet to be determined.

She noted the program report should read RSWCD held its February board meeting on February 9, 2026.

Conservation Items Before County Council: N/A

Commissioner Advocacy: Mancke spoke with Councilwoman Chakisse Newton about recycling in District 11. Holliday and Brown spoke with Senator Overture Walker, and Epps

spoke with Representative Seth Rose on Conservation Districts Day at the State House regarding CDTAP. Weber spoke about RSWCD in a conversation with Representative Nathan Ballentine.

Old Business:

Richland County Ag + Art Tour (RCAAT): Blashke reported \$22,700 in awarded hospitality-tax grant funds thanks to contributions from Councilmembers Dozier Alleyne, English, Newton, and Terracio.

Blashke also reported this year's tour will have 17 sites at 16 locations. Volunteer recruitment has changed. Tour sites will have the opportunity to recruit volunteers for their sign-up tables before the sign-up link is distributed to the general public on April 1. Blashke added Earth Fare will provide food for the Volunteer Appreciation Party as an in-kind donation.

Holliday reported the artisan application has been extended to March 22.

The next RCAAT planning committee meeting will be held on March 10 at 12:30 pm at the Richland County Administration Building.

New Business:

2026 Local Work Group Meeting: Planning for the Local Work Group Meeting will occur while Blashke is out on maternity leave. Attendees selected July 15 as a tentative date for the meeting. Blashke will coordinate with Bonilla-Gonzalez to confirm the date.

Sabin reported Local Work Group Meeting dates must be determined by July 30, and reports are due to NRCS by September 30.

FY26-27 Budget Approval Timeline: The budget approval process will occur while Blashke is out on maternity leave. Attendees decided staff will present a preliminary budget presentation at the April meeting.

Executive Session: N/A

Public Input: Rhodes motioned to appoint Goff as an associate commissioner. Burts seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously. Blashke reminded commissioners to file their statement of economic interest by noon on March 30. Mullis acknowledged the upcoming events listed on the meeting agenda.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 6:58 pm.