



Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD)

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Meeting Minutes

February 10, 2025, 6 pm

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

Commissioners Present

Jeff Laney, Vice Chair

Jim Rhodes, Treasurer

Mary Burts

Tim McSwain

Associate Commissioners Present

Sarah Burnham

Mary Frances Hendrix

Mary Beth McSwain

Charles Weber

Additional Attendees

Emily Bonilla-Gonzalez

Jessie Egan

Quinton Epps

Chelsea Holliday

Aric Jensen

Jim Johnson

Jennifer Mancke

Jessica Thompson

Lucy Youngblood

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

Approve Agenda and Minutes: Rhodes motioned to approve the agenda. T. McSwain 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: Rhodes gave the following financial report:

Operating Account (01/31/24 Statement)

- Beginning Balance: \$54,621.69+ (01/01/25)
- Deposits and Credits: \$1,450.00+
- Checks: \$2,626.29-
- Expenses and Debits: \$285.26-
- Ending Balance: \$53,160.14 (01/31/25)

Credit Card (01/05/25 Statement)

- Beginning Balance: \$285.26 (01/05/25)
- Payments: \$1,040.26
- Purchases: \$2,396.75
- Ending Balance: \$1,641.75 (02/05/25)

***Easement Stewardship Account (12/31/24 Statement)**

- Starting Account Value: \$55,024.35 (11/01/24)
- Ending Account Value: \$55,675.95 (12/31/24)
- Ending Account Value with Accrued Income: \$55,675.95

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

- Starting Balance: \$220.01+ (01/01/25)
- Credits: \$13,510.70+
- Debts: \$0.00
- Ending Balance: \$13,730.71+ (01/31/25)

PayPal Account (01/2025 Statement)

- Beginning Available Balance: \$350.00 (01/01/25)
- Ending Available Balance: \$375.00 (01/31/25)

*The December 2024 financial statement was provided. The January 2025 statement was not available.

Rhodes also reported the mid-year review of the budget has been completed and is in order.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): Bonilla-Gonzalez reported the change in Administration has resulted in a hold on all aspects of the Inflation Reduction Act, including payments and spending. NRCS does not expect to distribute funding under the IRA anymore but hopes contracts initiated last year will continue. Bonilla-Gonzalez expressed no concerns about the Richland and Calhoun county staff and reported no changes to the process for last year's natural resource program funding applications.

There is a hiring freeze; anything in the works has been put on hold. Odessa Armstrong will return to DC. Daniel Westcot, the Assistant State Conservationist for Area 1, is the Acting State Conservationist. He will hold this position until the end of February.

NRCS has continued to work on payments, applications, and site visits. There were issues with the cost estimator for applications, and NRCS sent out a new estimator.

Bonilla-Gonzalez participated in the 2025 SC Farmer Resource Rodeo. NRCS completed trainings and virtual meetings and is almost done with Conservation Stewardship Program payments for 2024.

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR): Egan reported SCDNR recently hired two new area coordinators. With a total of four field staff, the coordinators will have a larger presence within their conservation districts.

SCDNR launched an online education platform on Google Classroom. The link to the course was emailed to districts. Every commissioner and staff member must complete the training. The course also includes a revamped handbook, which coincides with the modules.

SCDNR is compiling and editing districts' annual reports and will have them ready ahead of Conservation Districts Day at the State House on March 4. Details about the legislative day will come from the South Carolina Association of Conservation Districts.

Egan also reported a good turnout at the South Carolina Partnership Conference.

SCDNR is preparing for upcoming events. The 2025 Stewardship Week is April 28 through May 2. The theme is "Home Is Where the Habitat Is," and SCDNR will host a field day at Belfast Wildlife Management Area on April 30. The SC Envirothon will be held on April 25, and Egan welcomed volunteers for the event.

Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC): Weber reported RCCC's grant period has ended, and grant presentations will begin. The Natural Resources Grant Review meeting is on February 12, and the Historic Preservation Grant Review meeting is on February 19.

T. McSwain added RSWCD will present at the Natural Resources Grant Review meeting. RSWCD applied for grant funding to support the 2026 Richland County Ag + Art Tour and the Seed Sanctuary program. Mancke suggested adding the Little Free Library to the Seed Sanctuary program proposal.

Weber also reported RCCC is looking into watersheds in Richland County to help address water quality concerns.

RSWCD Programs: Thompson reviewed the provided RSWCD program report.

Conservation Items Before County Council: N/A

Commissioner Advocacy: N/A

Old Business:

Ag + Art Tour Sponsorship: Thompson reported the Town of Blythewood has agreed to donate \$500.

Farmer Resource Rodeo: Thompson reported a great turnout at the Farmer Resource Rodeo held on January 30. Approximately 140 farmers and 80 resource providers attended, totaling over 200 attendees. RSWCD and RCCC had exhibitor booths at the event.

T. McSwain addressed a question raised at the event regarding the existence of a user group for farmers. While the initial response at the event was no, T. McSwain clarified a group does exist: the SC Farmer and Agribusiness Association, of which he is a member. Thompson will share this information with event participants.

2025 Agritourism Internship: Thompson reported the internship announcement was posted on social media and the district's website. The internship was also shared with college and university career advisors. The application period closes on February 28. Thompson will review applications once the deadline passes. Thompson encouraged attendees to contact her if they have any references.

MLFC: Specialty Crop Block Grant Application: Thompson introduced Johnson, a business consultant with the SC Small Business Development Center and Co-Chair of the Midlands Local Food Collaborative (MLFC).

Johnson reported MLFC is applying for a Specialty Crop Block Grant administered by the SC Department of Agriculture to implement a Farmer/Chef mashup event, wholesale channel trainings, and networking events for specialty realtors. In the initial planning of the grant application, MLFC considered asking RSWCD to be the grant applicant on behalf of MLFC. The grant requires a statewide impact, and the initial drafts focused on the Midlands. As a result, SC Food Systems will be the fiscal agent and grant applicant for MLFC. Johnson asked RSWCD to write a letter of support to strengthen MLFC's application. The grant is due on February 14. Rhodes motioned to approve RSWCD writing and submitting a letter of support. T. McSwain seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

New Business:

Commissioner Reappointment: Egan conducted Burts's reappointment.

Executive Session: N/A

Public Input: Mancke congratulated Johnson and Thompson on the success of Resource Rodeo. Thompson stated Clemson Extension will need to obtain funding to continue the event. Mancke promoted the Certified SC Showcase, an event to be held on March 27 at the Columbia

Metropolitan Convention Center. The event's reception, Taste of South Carolina, will be held on March 26 at the USC Alumni Center.

Next Meeting: Laney reviewed the upcoming events outlined in the agenda and reminded relevant attendees to submit their statements of economic interest. The submission deadline is March 30 at noon. Mancke reminded attendees about Conservation Districts Day at the State House on March 4. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 10, at 6 pm at Lizard's Thicket, 7938 Garners Ferry Road, Columbia, SC 29209.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 6:54 pm.