



Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD)

2020 Hampton Street, Room 3063A

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Meeting Minutes

April 14, 2025, 6 pm

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

Commissioners Present

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Jeff Laney, Vice Chair

Jim Rhodes, Secretary/Treasurer

Mary Burts

Tim McSwain

Associate Commissioners Present

Charles Weber

Additional Attendees

Quinton Epps

Chelsea Holliday

Faith Isreal

Aric Jensen

Jennifer Mancke

Rosemary Martin-Jones

Bailey Mullis

Jessica Thompson

Welcome, Introductions, and Invocation: K. Mullis called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

Laney gave the invocation.

Approve Agenda and Minutes: Laney motioned to approve the agenda. McSwain seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously. Rhodes motioned to approve the February and March board meeting minutes. Laney seconded the motion. The motion was brought to a vote and passed unanimously.

Reports:

Financial: Rhodes gave the following financial report:

Operating Account (03/31/25 Statement)

- Beginning Balance: \$50,080.91+ (03/01/25)
- Deposits and Credits: \$1,600.00+
- Checks: \$3,677.62-
- Expenses and Debits: \$104.74-
- Ending Balance: \$72,973.55+ (03/31/25)

Credit Card (03/05/25 Statement)

- Beginning Balance: \$ (03/05/25)
- Payments: \$1,409.95
- Purchases: \$1,753.39
- Ending Balance: \$1,753.39 (04/04/25)
- Rewards: \$551.04

***Easement Stewardship Account (1/31/25 Statement)**

- Starting Account Value: \$55,675.95 (1/01/25)
- Ending Account Value: \$55,755.39 (1/31/25)
- Ending Account Value with Accrued Income: \$55,755.39

SCACD Contribution Agreement Account (03/01/25 Statement)

- Starting Balance: \$220.01+ (03/01/25)
- Credits: \$0.00
- Debts: \$0.00
- Ending Balance: \$220.01+ (03/31/25)

PayPal Account (03/2025 Statement)

- Beginning Available Balance: \$810.52 (03/01/25)
- Ending Available Balance: \$1610.42 (03/31/25)

*The January 2025 financial statement was provided. The March 2025 statement was not available.

K. Mullis reported the current contribution agreement expires in September, the end of the fiscal year. The plan was to renegotiate the agreement; however, this may not occur due to executive orders. The District may not have this revenue and should consider alternatives.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): No one from NRCS was present, nor was a written report submitted. K. Mullis reported NRCS staff is down, with approximately 80 employees remaining after a second round of layoffs. Land orders are not being served. NRCS will look for partnerships to complete their work. This could lead to a good position for conservation districts. K. Mullis stated taxpayer money was wasted through the organization; however, processes were improving before the executive orders. Acting State Conservationist Daniel Westcot met with staff and believes NRCS will be a better, more efficient organization once the transition period ends.

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR): N/A

Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC): Weber reported RCCC is in the process of completing a grant application for the Crane Creek watershed. The application is due by May 15.

Epps encouraged attendees to volunteer for the Richland County Ag + Art Tour on June 7 and 8. The committee needs 102 volunteers to work 4-5 hour shifts.

The Conservation Division recently hired Christian Ridgell for the land program planner position, making it fully staffed.

Mancke added Akoma Cares, a homeschool and community resource organization, has planted their garden at Pinewood Lake Park. She connected Akoma Cares with Keep the Midlands Beautiful so Akoma Cares can assist with clean-up at the park.

K. Mullis inquired about Statewide School and Community Gardening Coordinator Amy Dabbs' question regarding a pollinator garden. Epps contacted her but did not receive a response.

RSWCD Programs: Thompson reviewed the provided RSWCD program report.

Conservation Items Before County Council: Epps reported RCCC has a South Carolina Department of Environmental Services watershed grant application informational briefing before County Council, and Jensen will present the application to Council on April 15. Epps also stated RCCC holds easements the Council may consider selling.

Amanda Jones, Richland County Ag + Art Tour Planning Committee Chair, will present on the tour before County Council on May 13 and thank them for their support.

On April 1, County Council recognized Aneysha Laureano with a proclamation for winning the 2024 National Association of Conservation Districts' Youth Conservation Poster Contest in the 2nd-3rd grade category.

Commissioner Advocacy: K. Mullis attended the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Fly-In event in Washington, D.C., where participants met with the chiefs of staff for six representatives. K. Mullis reported the meetings were productive, with discussions largely focused on the impact of recent executive orders on farmers, producers, and conservation districts. K. Mullis added participants were encouraged when they learned President Trump is now taking more time to issue executive orders.

K. Mullis stated the District should follow up with Representative Annie McDaniel after connecting at Conservation Districts Day at the State House.

McSwain saw Councilmember Gretchen Barron at a historic sign unveiling at a local school.

Old Business:

Ag + Art Tour Sponsorship: Thompson reported Councilmember Don Weaver has given an additional \$1,000 in h-tax funds on top of his previous contribution of \$3,000 to support the 2025 Richland County Ag + Art Tour.

2025 Agritourism Internship: Thompson reported a candidate has been selected for the agritourism internship; however, a contract has not been issued yet. Epps will converse with Synithia Williams, Director of Community Planning and Development, to discuss internship logistics before proceeding with the contract.

MLFC: Specialty Crop Block Grant: Thompson reported no updates.

New Business:

Strategic Plan Review: Thompson led the review of goal one of the strategic plan. Staff acknowledged goal one is being met. The district partnered with Clemson Extension to host Resource Rodeo, an informational event for farmers and producers. The district held its Local Work Group meeting in August 2024. Staff also promote partner events and participate in the South Carolina Forage and Grazing Lands Coalition.

K. Mullis acknowledged a potential opportunity regarding the feral swine exclusion fencing program. He has been talking with Clemson Extension about offering a fencing demonstration to be held at Sandhill Research and Education Center.

Mancke suggested a workshop on cover crops for smaller farms, possibly led by Mixon Seed. K. Mullis stated the district could contact them.

Laney suggested a section in the district's monthly newsletter for farmers. The section could include best management practices, links to partner organizations, and information about RSWCD's equipment rentals. K. Mullis added quick interviews with Clemson Extension staff could be beneficial.

Mancke noted the district needs alternative solutions to marketing the local work group meeting. K. Mullis suggested calling farmers directly because most do not see promotions on social media.

In conclusion, attendees determined two ideas to further meet goal one of the strategic plan: offer a cover crop workshop for small farmers and create a section in the district's newsletter for farmers. K. Mullis advised the district not to show preferential treatment when selecting an organization for the cover crop workshop.

Contribution Agreement Payment Status: K. Mullis referenced his earlier comments in stating the district should be good through September.

Executive Session: N/A

Publix Input: K. Mullis encouraged attendees to attend the Home is Where the Habitat Is Field Day hosted by SCDNR. There is no cost to attend, but individuals must register.

Martin-Jones reported she has been busy with chicken embryology presentations at schools, working with Green Step schools, final reports, and planning for summer.

Isreal reported she hopes to have volunteers from the Master Food Preserver program lead demonstrations during the Ag + Art Tour. She is conducting classroom presentations and teaching students how to grow and can their own food. Isreal also offers canning presentations to the public with the next class in June. Isreal added she has been in contact with the Lourie Center. Burts recommended Isreal contact Dr. Marva Coates, Richland One Adult Education Director, for a potential partnership. In response to a question about advertising workshops, Isreal explained she promotes workshops through her database of past participants, event calendar listings, social media posts, and word of mouth.

K. Mullis stated the SC Envirothon will be held on April 25.

Next Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 12, at 6 pm at Lizard's Thicket, 7938 Garners Ferry Road, Columbia, SC 29209.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 6:49 pm.