



Richland Soil and Water Conservation District

2020 Hampton Street, Room 3063A

Columbia, SC 29204

(803) 576-2080 - Fax (803) 576-2088

www.rcgov.us/rswcd • soilandwater@rcgov.us

February 8, 2021

Virtual Meeting/6:00pm

Commissioners Present

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Jeff Laney, Vice Chair

Jim Rhodes, Secretary/Treasurer

Hemphill Pride, III

Mary Burts

Associate Commissioners Present

Charles Weber

Mary Frances Hendrix

Dr. Jamie Browder

Others Present

Quinton Epps, Conservation Division Manager

Chanda Cooper, Education Program Coordinator

Mary Hannah Lindsay, Community Outreach Coordinator

Anne Marie Johnson, Pollinator Garden Manager

Tyler Brown, SC Department of Natural Resources

Welcome and Call to Order

Mullis called the meeting to order. Rhodes gave the invocation.

Approval of Agenda

Rhodes made a motion to approve the agenda and was seconded by Pride. Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

Rhodes made a motion to approve the minutes of January 11 and was seconded by Laney. Motion carried.

Oath of Office

Brown administered the Oath of Office to Burts.

Financial Report

Rhodes reported two deposits totaling \$4,550, other credits of \$1,847.50, two checks totaling \$1,024.32, and eight other debits totaling \$1,985.97, leaving a balance of \$52,567.00. The Charles Schwab investment account had \$54,838.81 as of December, 2020.

Affiliate Membership

Since the last meeting, these are the new and renewing affiliate members:

- Anne Marie and Jim Johnson (Honorary Affiliates)
- Charles and Sharon Weber
- Envirothon Sponsorship in Honor of Charlie Fisher
- Envirothon Sponsorship in Honor of Nancy Stone-Collum

At the last meeting, the group voted to extend the deadline for each commissioner to recruit two new affiliate members by one month. Staff will send additional information packets and affiliate membership cards to Burts and Pride.

Pinewood Lake Park Pollinator Garden Report

Johnson reported the garden is dormant for winter. She is making progress in the war on voles; shrews have begun using the voles' tunnels. Plants and seeds have been ordered for spring planting. In March, she will begin reinstalling the irrigation. She is finalizing a management plan to facilitate the transition of garden management to a new garden coordinator.

Cooper reported Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD) is not eligible to apply for a second Urban Agriculture Conservation grant while the first grant remains active and, due to staffing constraints, she has been unable to research other grant opportunities.

Approximately \$8,000 remains in the 2020 Urban Agriculture Conservation grant and will be used within the next few months. Rhodes asked what funding will be needed to continue the garden project; Epps reported staff hopes to transition garden management to volunteers. Rhodes is willing to contact potential garden sponsors if a project budget is available.

Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC) Report

RCCC elected new officers at their last meeting in January: John Grego as Chair, Buddy Atkins as Co-Vice-Chair and Chair of the Conservation Committee, Sam Holland as Co-Vice-Chair and Chair of the Historic Committee, and Robert Squirewell as Treasurer. The RCCC still has vacancies, as reported during the last meeting. Glenice Pearson has been reappointed to the RCCC by Councilman Livingston. The RCCC developed more comments on the Land Development Code. The application deadline for RCCC grants was last Friday. Several land donations, easements, and land purchases are under consideration; contact Epps for details.

Education Report

- Cooper polled meeting participants RE: their communication preferences. Four participants indicated no preference and two indicated they would prefer fewer, shorter messages.
- Grower/Buyer Mashup event planning with the Midlands Local Food Collaborative is underway; the program has recruited commitments from 8 sponsors for a total of \$1,500. The next planning meeting will be held 2/11/21 at 2:30pm. Cooper and Browder plan to attend.

- RSWCD partnered with four County departments to host a Winter Garden Watch Party sharing videos from the pollinator demonstration garden with the public. More than 100 people registered to attend and 40 people, including panelists, attended.
- Richland County's Public Information Office designed a plant list for the pollinator garden at Pinewood Lake Park. The guide is available online and staff will mail printed copies to commissioners.
- RSWCD is planning a joint "Pollinator Conservation for Educators" webinar with SC DHEC's Champions of the Environment program, the Environmental Education Association of SC (EEASC), SC Green Steps Schools, SC Wildlife Federation, and the SC Garden-based Learning Network for March 18. Johnson, Lindsay, and Cooper will present. The event is being advertised on billboards across state as well as on national and state listservs.
- RSWCD co-hosts monthly Midlands Meetups for environmental educators in partnership with EEASC; 18 people participated in the January meetup and 40 people have registered for the February meetup (which happens tomorrow)! Through these events, RSWCD supports professional development opportunities for environmental educators.
- RSWCD is also providing staff support for other EEASC initiatives, including the EEASC 2021 annual conference June 10-12; the Southeastern Environmental Education Alliance's Landscape Analysis; and the Palmetto Environmental Education Certification (PEEC) Program.
- RSWCD's Conservation Education Mini-Grant spring application period closed last week; four applications were submitted and are being reviewed by Burts, Browder, and staff. Awards may be announced by the end of week.
- Cooper presented a webinar for the Trout in the Classroom program of SC DNR, which is being conducted virtually in partnership with Riverbanks Zoo this year due to COVID.
- Recent no-till drill rentals included the SC Department of Corrections (\$3,300) and one resident (\$1,242). Mullis, who manages the equipment rental program for RSWCD, reported more rentals have occurred and have not yet been invoiced.
- Lindsay has redesigned the affiliate membership database and will send "time to renew" notices monthly. She also plans to contact recent affiliates whose memberships have expired asking them to renew their support.
- Lindsay participated in one PEEC program professional development event in January.
- Staff have ordered pre-printed packets to save staff/volunteer time for the Seed Sanctuary. Volunteers are helping pack seeds for the program and staff plan to mail seeds to 1,000 residents by the end of March. Additional volunteers are needed.
- Lindsay applied for the Friends of NACD grant to expand community outreach related to the Seed Sanctuary. The final report for the 2020 Friends of NACD grant will be submitted soon. NACD used a photo from RSWCD's Seed Sanctuary to promote the 2021 Friends of NACD program on social media.
- Submissions for the 2021 Conservation Poster Contest are due April 30.
- Social media stats: Instagram – 440 followers; Twitter – 439 followers; Facebook – 930 followers.
- Lindsay developed a new brochure for RSWCD; it is available on the website.

NRCS Report

No report was available.

New Business

- Bookkeeping Recommendation: Rhodes made a motion to transition RSWCD's bookkeeping system from Quicken to the \$40/month QuickBooks Essentials plan. Pride seconded the motion and it was approved. Rhodes further moved for staff to work with bookkeeper Ginger Spires to assist with the transition. The motion was seconded by Burts and was approved.
- Camp Discovery Partnership: Burts made a motion for RSWCD develop a \$1,500/year partnership with Camp Discovery in lieu of considering them as applicants through the Conservation Education Mini-Grant program. The motion was seconded by Rhodes.

During discussion, Rhodes recommended adding to the motion "as long as funding is available." Browder spoke strongly in support of Camp Discovery's proposal and explained Camp Discovery's virtual programs are impressive and provide children with the opportunity to participate in environmental learning experiences, even during COVID, and even for schools and students who would not normally be able to participate due to funding and transportation constraints. He believes Camp Discovery's reach in terms of number of students and teachers impacted is likely larger than Camp Discovery reports and suggested additional information for Camp Discovery to provide, including how many students they presently serve, how many students they plan to serve in the future, how many teachers they presently serve and plan to serve in the future, their intended program outcomes, and their program evaluation system. Burts suggested Camp Discovery's Executive Director speak to RSWCD to provide more information.

Rhodes moved to table Burts's motion until more information becomes available. Following further discussion, he withdrew his motion to table and called for a vote on the original motion from Burts.

Laney made a friendly amendment to Burts's motion to pull the proposed funding for this partnership from the FY21 mini-grant line item, and to make the contribution conditional upon a presentation from Camp Discovery. The amendment was seconded by Rhodes and was unanimously approved.

Cooper requested clarification as to whether the \$1,500 in proposed support would be in addition to the \$1,000 fall 2020 Conservation Education Mini-Grant RSWCD had provided to Camp Discovery, or if it would include the fall award (and would therefore be only \$500 in spring 2021). She expressed support for an additional \$1,500 since Camp Discovery's programs are strong, their grant reports are submitted on time and are complete, and they have a track record of cooperating well with RSWCD.

Following discussion, Rhodes amended Burts's original motion to contribute \$500 to Camp Discovery for the project this spring and reconsider future funding during the FY22 budget approval process. Laney seconded the amendment and it was unanimously approved.

Rhodes seconded Burts's motion, as twice amended, to contribute \$500 to Camp Discovery this spring, and the motion was unanimously approved. Cooper will plan a future RSWCD meeting at Camp Discovery and/or arrange for a virtual presentation by Camp Discovery's Executive Director Amy Ellisor.

- SCACD Priority Legislation: Epps referred Commissioners to the spreadsheet of relevant legislation under consideration. S122 and S220 could have a positive impact on RCCC's easement programs. H3454 and H3543 could help promote agricultural production and tourism. Other bills have potential positive impacts on conservation and agriculture.

Brown explained one of the recommendations from the SC DNR/SWCD strategic planning survey was for the SC Association of Conservation Districts (SCACD) to be more engaged in the legislative process. SCACD leadership identified a list of 19 proposed bills (from the stack of 900 which were pre-filed) that may be of interest to SWCDs, will track the progress of these bills, and will provide updates to the SWCDs. Brown explained some bills will move more quickly than others, and other bills will receive more attention and discussion.

The group discussed the proposal to reorganize the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC). Epps observed issues with the quality of SC DHEC's dam safety program had nothing to do with management at SC DHEC and was a result of defunding by the legislature. Brown indicated the proposal to reorganize seems to be related to the diverse mission of DHEC to cover both health and environmental issues.

Old Business

Mullis reminded the group RSWCD had a soil health/cover crop research project at Jason Carter's farm several years ago, and the trial plot was burned during a joint training exercises between the Richland County Sheriff's Department and the military. Carter's claim for crop damage was eventually paid by the military, but RSWCD's claim was denied. RSWCD's attorney appealed the military's decision and the issue was never settled. Last week, RSWCD's attorney reported the JAG attorney has notified him that the claim will be considered now that a new hire is in place. Commissioners requested more information as to the date and amount of RSWCD's claim.

Commissioner/Associate Commissioner Input

Hendrix reported she looks forward to seeing Camp Discovery.

Burts reported we have \$3,500 in the FY21 mini-grant line item; other mini-grant proposals under consideration would use, at most, \$2,000. Camp Discovery's mini-grant proposal/request was for \$1,365. Awarding them \$500 now would leave them \$865 short to complete their proposed project. After discussion, commissioners agreed to proceed with making the \$500 contribution now and considering additional funding following a presentation from Camp Discovery.

Brown reported Mullis has been elected vice chair of the southeast National Association of Conservation Districts.

Rhodes moved to adjourn at 7:33 pm. Burts seconded the motion.

Next Meeting

March 8 at 6pm – location TBD

Respectfully Submitted,

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Chanda Cooper, Conservation Education Analyst