



Richland Soil and Water Conservation District

2020 Hampton Street, Room 3063A

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March 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

Tim McSwain

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 (outgoing)

Robert Reese, Pollinator Garden Manager (incoming)

Tyler Brown, SC Department of Natural Resources

Candice Giba, John de la Howe Governor's School for Agriculture

Welcome and Call to Order

Mullis called the meeting to order at 6:02pm and gave the invocation.

Approval of Agenda

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

Approval of Minutes

Pride made a motion to approve the minutes of February 8 and was seconded by Burts. Motion carried.

Special Presentation: John de la Howe Governor's School for Agriculture

Giba, Outreach and Student Services Coordinator, provided an overview of the John de la Howe School, which is the oldest public school in SC. It was established as an orphanage in 1797. In the 1980s, it became an alternative school; in 2017, it began the journey towards becoming the third Governor's School in the state, with specialized residential high school programming. The School is situated on 1300 acres in McCormick County, SC and is a fully functioning farm with 900 acres of timber. Programming includes livestock, FFA, 4H, wildlife biology, forestry, skeet shooting, field trials, rodeo club, and more. In addition to the School, the site houses an event center and education center. Students live in residential housing. The site can house up to 180 students but only 40 are currently on-site due to COVID.

Commissioners requested a site tour. Mullis recommended students apply for scholarships from the SC Forage and Grazing Lands Coalition to attend the National Grazing Lands Coalition meeting in Myrtle Beach, SC. Brown recommended students from John de la Howe be included in the 2022 SC Conservation Partnership Conference.

Financial Report

Rhodes reported a starting balance of \$54,174.75, two deposits totaling \$475.00, five checks totaling \$1,690.67, and other debits (mostly payroll) totaling \$2,279.81, for an ending balance of 50,679.27 on 2/28/21. The bank statement was balanced with the Quicken records as of 2/28/21, with two outstanding checks.

Affiliate Membership

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

- John & Kaaren Rue (\$25, new)
- Eastside Printing (\$100, renewal)

Pinewood Lake Park Pollinator Garden Report

Johnson and Reese spread mushroom compost in garden beds. Johnson has completed the Garden Management Guide, which includes a plant list, calendar, garden bed map and designs, tool inventory, budget, and more. The next volunteer day will be held on Saturday, March 20 @ 10am. Vegetable starts will be purchased later in spring.

Epps introduced Reese as the incoming Pollinator Garden Manager. Reese is a Lower Richland resident with seven generations of history in the area. He returned to SC in 2018 after 25 years away. His career is in higher education administration. He is leading the transition of Garden management from Johnson to a team of local community volunteers. Epps facilitated a round of introductions for Reese's benefit, and Mullis welcomed him to the conservation team.

Mullis recognized Johnson for her service and presented her with a threaded clasping coneflower artwork/plaque on behalf of the RSWCD.

Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC) Report

Weber reported RCCC's committees have reviewed historical and conservation grant applications and developed funding recommendations for consideration by the full RCCC. Epps added that during the budget approval process, Administration requested he submit a Capital

Improvement Project request. He submitted a request totaling \$18.4 million over 10 years to implement aspects of the Lower Richland Tourism Plan. One RCCC vacancy has been filled since the last meeting (Darrell Jackson, Jr. in District 10); one vacancy persists.

Education Report

Lindsay reported:

- Four volunteers are packing seeds for distribution through the Seed Sanctuary; 3,000 packets are ready to mail, and staff plans to fill 1,000 requests by the end of March. Lindsay shared a social media post one of the volunteers made to raise awareness about the volunteer opportunity.
- A monthly e-newsletter was distributed on 3/5 and was opened 1,300 times; it featured the upcoming 3/18 Pollinator Conservation Webinar; Richland County rain barrel and compost bin sale; Grower/Buyer Mashup; ACRE funding opportunities, and local events.
- RSWCD's Facebook posts reached 1,500 people in the past month. RSWCD has 950 FB followers, 442 Twitter followers, and 450 Instagram followers. Lindsay attended a Palmetto Environmental Education Certification program (PEEC) workshop recently; participants are excited about the upcoming Pollinator Conservation Webinar, and Lindsay passed along their compliments about Cooper's statewide work to strengthen environmental education in SC.

Cooper reported:

- The Grower/Buyer Mashup, hosted by the SC Department of Agriculture and Midlands Local Food Collaborative (MLFC), has received \$2,800 in sponsorships from 11 sponsors. RSWCD is the fiscal agent for the MLFC.
- RSWCD co-hosted MLFC's quarterly meeting in February, with 23 attendees.
- RSWCD awarded three conservation mini-grants to Pendergrass Fairwold School (\$1,000), Dreher High School (\$500), and Cutler Jewish Day School (\$500). All projects have mentors.
- As decided at the last meeting, RSWCD provided a \$500 sponsorship to Camp Discovery; Executive Director Amy Ellisor sent a thank-you letter. RSWCD's April 12 board meeting will be held at Camp Discovery, with a tour/nature walk at 5pm, sandwiches at 5:45pm, and the board meeting at 6pm. Participants are asked to socially distance and wear masks when appropriate. No zoom meeting option will be available.
- RSWCD advances environmental education through partnership efforts with the Environmental Education Association of SC (EEASC). EEASC's February Midlands+ Meetup attracted 26 attendees. RSWCD supported EEASC's board retreat and strategic planning sessions (x3) in February. During these meetings, EEASC adopted the PEEC program, adopted a policy and procedure manual, and revised its mini-grant program to offer \$1,000 awards for environmental education statewide. RSWCD is a sponsor and coordinator for the EEASC 2021 Conference June 10-12 and is assisting with the administration of a southeastern environmental education landscape analysis and spring fundraiser.
- Mullis and Cooper support livestock producers through participation in the SC Forage and Grazing Lands Coalition (SCFGLC). SCFGLC will host a soil sampling workshop for livestock producers on April 16.

- No new conservation equipment rentals have been reported since the last meeting.
- RSWCD's contribution agreement through the SC Association of Conservation Districts (SCACD) to provide farm bill program outreach through USDA-NRCS will experience a break in funding beginning March 15. This agreement for FY21 is for \$16,800 (approx. \$1,400/month). For the past five months, staff have averaged ~\$1,000/month in requests (\$400 short, on average, due to a lack of staff time to contribute to farm bill program work).
- NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships Patti Jackson-Kelly has offered two funding opportunities to RSWCD: one would provide funding (unspecified amount) to assist with urban agriculture conservation outreach through a 3-year contribution agreement with a 50/50 match requirement. RSWCD would be responsible for producing at least one workshop each year promoting farm bill programs for urban agriculture producers. The second opportunity would provide \$22K over a three-year period to support a community garden in a food desert. Staff have decided not to pursue either opportunity due to a lack of staff time, and because they are already under-requesting on the existing contribution agreement (also due to a lack of staff time).

Mullis stated NRCS approached RSWCD with these opportunities because of RSWCD's strong track record of delivering on our commitments. RSWCD's strategic plan includes an advocacy component for Commissioners to develop stronger relationships with Council members. Mullis suggested RSWCD consider creating a phone tree to facilitate the process of getting messages to Council members and other leaders. Mullis stated, "we need to make Council aware of this situation. We are losing funds available to the County to provide services to our residents."

Following discussion, Commissioners did not choose to formalize/establish a phone tree at this time, but some expressed a willingness to contact Council members and/or administration if an issue is identified and a standardized message/statement is developed. Rhodes requested Mullis call a special meeting, either via Zoom or before the April meeting at Camp Discovery, to discuss these issues further. Rhodes made a motion for Cooper and Epps to provide a list of the things they are unable to complete due to understaffing. The motion was seconded by Laney and was unanimously approved.

NRCS Report

Bonilla-Gonzalez reported on NRCS activities since the last meeting. All federal buildings have been ordered to operate at 25% in-office staffing until further notice. The 25% is calculated including SWCD staff and FSA County Committee members but *not* SWCD Commissioners. The Richland/Calhoun office is therefore allowed to have only four people in the office at a time. Program deadlines are difficult to meet with staff reductions and remote work restrictions. Calhoun SWCD held a drive-thru annual banquet last week. FY21 EQIP total obligations for the year are 103, about 12% higher than last year, with 69 from Calhoun and 34 from Richland. Of the 103, 70 obligations have a high probability of funding. FY21 CSP renewal notices have been sent and four renewal requests have been submitted. Six applications have been received for CSP. A written report is attached (Attachment A). Bonilla-Gonzalez will provide Mullis the

number of active EQIP contracts in Richland County at the next meeting and/or will break out the number of Richland vs. Calhoun contracts in future reports..

New Business

- Affiliate Membership Program Rebranding: Lindsay recommended RSWCD rebrand the RSWCD's "Affiliate Membership Program" to "Friends of RSWCD" to encourage recruitment. Laney made a motion to rebrand the program; Rhodes seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.
- Budget Amendment – Insurance: RSWCD carries inland marine insurance and general tort liability insurance on Commissioners, Lindsay, and two volunteers. RSWCD budgeted \$2,041.02 for insurance in FY21; the actual cost is \$3,056.40 due to a state increase. Cooper recommended RSWCD transfer \$1,015.38 from the laptop budget line item to the insurance line item to cover the difference. Rhodes made a motion to do as recommended; Burts seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. In addition to the tort liability and inland marine insurance, RSWCD also carries workers' compensation coverage through the SC Association of Conservation Districts on Commissioners and Lindsay.

Commissioner/Associate Commissioner/Public Input

Brown reported McMaster has called all state employees back to offices effective next week. Re-entry plans are due by Wednesday. RSWCD has received its second state allocation check from SCDNR (\$7,500.00). A direct deposit option will be available soon.

Next Meeting

Monday, April 12, 2021 @ Camp Discovery, 208 Claude Bundrick Rd, Blythewood, SC 29016.
Tour – 5pm; sandwiches – 5:45pm; meeting -6pm.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:35pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Chanda Cooper, Conservation Education Analyst

**Attachment A: USDA-NRCS Report
Submitted by Emily Bonilla-Gonzalez**

Programs

EQIP

- On Active Contracts
 - Working on practice checkouts, contract reviews and modifications.
 - Worked on Practice design and modification

- EQIP FY21
 - EQIP FY 2021 Applications total 103 Calhoun 69 Richland 34
 - Assessments and priority tool for applicable funding pools was submitted and we ended with 47 application with High priority that will move to the next step
 - Preapproved application 23 on Long leave, Quail Initiative, Sustainable Forest Planning and Organic
 - Completing site visits and meeting with producers to complete the planning portion.
 - Working updating eligibility and other requirements on Protracts
 - Accepted new Applications for FY 2022

CSP

- CSP Renewal FY2021
 - All Applications were picked up for funding 3 are obligated and 1 just got working on it to complete
- CSP Classic
 - Working on Assessments and Ranking for new applications Total 6
- Active CSP
 - Worked on a payment issue

General

- New USDA Workplace Safety Plan and FPAC Staff Guidance to lower in person Staff at USDA Service Center to 25% Capacity for missing Critical Work. Starting March 4, 2021
- Complete Trainings and attended Virtual meetings and teleconferences
- Working on CTA designs
- Working on Training For Planner Certification
- Attended Calhoun Drive through Banquet March 1, 2021