



Richland Soil and Water Conservation District
2020 Hampton Street, Room 3063A
Columbia, SC 29204
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April 12, 2021
Strategic Planning Session – 4pm
Business Meeting – 6 pm

Commissioners Present

Kenny Mullis, Chair
Jeff Laney, Vice Chair
Jim Rhodes, Secretary/Treasurer
Mary Burts

Associate Commissioners Present

Mary Frances Hendrix
Charles Weber
Tim McSwain
Dr. Jamie Browder

Others Present

Quinton Epps, Conservation Division Manager
Chanda Cooper, Education Program Coordinator
Robert Reese, Pollinator Garden Manager (virtual)
Tyler Brown, SC Department of Natural Resources
Claudia Santiago, Congaree National Park
Amy Ellisor, Camp Discovery
Heather Phelps, Camp Discovery

Welcome and Call to Order

Mullis called the meeting to order at 4:16pm.

Strategic Planning Session: Response to FY22 Budget Recommendations

The administrator's proposed FY22 budget cuts 100% of General Fund support for Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD) staff positions and transfers the cost of those staff positions into the Richland County Conservation Commission's (RCCC's) 0.5 mil Special Revenue Fund. This Fund is designated by County ordinance as a "separate and segregated fund for the purpose of funding projects and activities of the Richland County Conservation Commission approved by the Richland County Council." Commissioners from RCCC and RSWCD expressed several concerns about this proposal, including:

- Support of the RSWCD and its programs are not "projects" or "activities" of the RCCC and so using RCCC Special Revenue Funds for these costs is inappropriate.

- Commissioners from both RCCC and RSWCD believe a structure whereby RCCC and RSWCD staff are funded from the same revenue source could lead to conflicts.
- The proposed budget reduces Conservation Division funding by 30% overall, and this reduction will reduce opportunities for conservation-related projects, programs, and services.
- The budget proposal was developed without conservation stakeholder involvement, as neither RCCC Commissioners, RSWCD Commissioners, nor Conservation Division staff were consulted.

RCCC Commissioners have drafted a letter to Richland County Council describing these concerns and have asked RSWCD to co-sign the letter. Following discussion, Laney made a motion for the RSWCD to sign on to the latest draft of the RCCC letter (Attachment A) with no modifications and for Chairman Kenny Mullis to have the latitude to approve additional minor revisions to the letter on behalf of the full RSWCD board. The motion was seconded by Rhodes and was unanimously approved.

Tour of Camp Discovery

Amy Ellisor and Heather Phelps led participants on a tour of Camp Discovery. Situated on 116 scenic acres of forests, meadows, creeks, and wetlands in Blythewood, SC, Camp Discovery provides an outdoor learning environment for year-round exploration and hands-on learning. Their nature-based programs provide real-world learning to enrich both minds and hearts for the health and well-being of people, the community, and the planet. Ellisor explained how Camp Discovery adapted to the COVID-19 virtual learning environment by creating “Nature at Your Doorstep” virtual programs. Camp Discovery also provided training for 20 other teachers, student teachers, and parent educators in the GLOBE Citizen Science Initiative in partnership with NASA. The Camp was also able to provide nature-based programming for homeless families through a partnership with St. Lawrence Place. The actual costs for students to participate in Camp Discovery programs is approximately \$37-38/child, but the maximum schools are able to pay is \$15/child. Camp Discovery appreciates RSWCD’s financial support through Conservation Education Mini-Grants and donations and hopes to continue this partnership to provide nature-based education experiences for Richland County students and families.

Approval of Agenda

Rhodes made a motion to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded by Laney and was unanimously approved.

Approval of Minutes

Rhodes made a motion to approve the minutes of March 8 and was seconded by Laney. The motion was unanimously approved.

Pinewood Lake Park Pollinator Garden Report

Reese joined the meeting by phone to provide an update on the Pinewood Lake Park Pollinator Garden. He has met with Anne Marie and Jim Johnson multiple times to learn more about garden maintenance, including operation and maintenance of the irrigation system, and is now coordinating volunteer workdays at the Garden. Garden volunteers have added new compost, replaced some plants, and planted several varieties of summer vegetables and wildflowers. Six community volunteers have participated in two planting days and the Lower Richland Alumni Association is interested in providing financial support for tools and supplies for the Garden.

Financial Report

Rhodes reported RSWCD’s March 31, 2021 First Citizens bank statement showed a starting balance of \$50,679.27; three deposits totaling \$18,247.19; five checks totaling \$6,040.71; seven other debits

totaling \$1,961.14; and an ending balance of \$60,924.61. The bank statement is balanced with QuickBooks as of March 31, 2021. RSWCD has \$54,398.37 in its Charles Schwab mitigation account.

Affiliate Membership Report

Since our last RSWCD meeting, we have two new Friends: Ravindran Surendran (\$100, renewal) and Walreed Pizza Co., LLC (\$250, new). RSWCD has received \$1,575 through the Affiliate Member/Friends of RSWCD program this fiscal year (since July 1, 2020).

NRCS Report

No report was available during the meeting, but District Conservationist Emily Bonilla-Gonzalez emailed a written report to RSWCD staff and staff forwarded the report to Commissioners following the meeting (Attachment B).

RCCC Report

Weber reported RCCC has been engaged in discussions of the FY22 budget proposal since it was made public a few weeks ago. McSwain reported RCCC received \$551,533 in grant requests and approved \$250,000 in awards (approximately \$50,000 in conservation grants and \$200,000 in historic preservation grants).

Education Report

- Cooper reported she has turned down another cooperative agreement offered by USDA-NRCS for Project Empowerment - Keeping SC Female Landowners Informed. The Project's goal is to educate women on the technical and financial services available from USDA-NRCS and will provide female landowners information to help them make informed decisions to address resource concerns on their farming operations. Staff declined to pursue the opportunity due to a lack of staff resources (i.e., time).
- RSWCD assisted with the coordination and hosting of the 2021 Grower/Buyer Mashup in partnership with the SC Department of Agriculture, Midlands Local Food Collaborative, and eleven sponsors, including the SC Association of Conservation Districts. The event featured 46 exhibits from farmers, chefs, and resource providers and was attended by a total of 126 people. Sponsorships totaled \$2,700.
- In the past month, volunteers have packed over 3,500 seed packets for the Seed Sanctuary. Over 250 requests have been mailed to Richland County residents.
- Hannah, Chanda, and Anne Marie Johnson presented at a webinar on pollinator conservation that was hosted by SCDHEC's Champions of the Environment and EEASC. 107 people participated and were mailed "swag bags" following the event which included a copy of the RSWCD's pollinator activity guide.
- The RSWCD facilitated a \$23,000 sponsorship of the Palmetto Environmental Education Certification Program from the SCDHEC Champions of the Environment program to EEASC.
- RSWCD's April e-newsletter was distributed to 3,000 people.
- Additional information about educational programs was provided in a written report (Attachment C).

Commissioner/Associate Commissioner/Public Input

Governor Henry McMaster has proclaimed April 25-May 2 Soil and Water Stewardship Week, and districts statewide are encouraged to celebrate with local announcements.

Next Meeting

Monday, May 10, 2021 @ 6pm via Zoom

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:44pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Chanda Cooper, Conservation Education Analyst

Attachment A: Letter to Council RE: FY22 Budget Proposal

Dear Richland County Council:

As both appointed and elected officials, the Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC) and the Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD) Commissionersⁱ are respectfully requesting Council reinstate the Conservation Division's FY22-23 budget to our FY21 Council-approved budget. We make this request based on over two decades of direct oversight of RSWCD's award-winning programs and the innovative RCCC programs in land conservation and historic preservation.

Without consulting Commissioners or Conservation Division staff, Richland County Administration, and in particular the Community Planning and Development (CP&D) Department Director, "zeroed out" all General Fund support for RSWCD support staff for FY22-23 (see attached Table). Through the budget process, the CP&D Director has unilaterally nullified Richland County Council's two-decade long General Fund support for RSWCD. Importantly, the proposed FY22-23 budget reallocates the RCCC Special Revenue Fund (0.5 mil) to fund all or a portion of the following RSWCD support positions:

- Director of Conservation
- Conservation Education Analyst
- Administrative Assistant

Because Special Revenue Funds are "restricted and committed", the Commissioners have requested opinions from both the Legal Department and the Finance Department whether or not such reallocation is not inconsistent with our ordinance. It is our opinion funding of RSCWD support staff may not be allowed under our ordinance. In addition, RSWCD sought the opinion of the arrangement from the agency that provides statewide support to conservation districts, and the agency's staff found the proposed arrangement to be unprecedented.

In order to reallocate RSCWD support staff, the proposed budget also significantly reduces the RCCC's professional services allocation by \$100,000. These funds are critical to implement the Lower Richland Tourism Plan and other important RCCC projects. For example, RCCC funds have been used in the past to support a comprehensive effort to identify sites and histories throughout the county that need to be studied and shared. Such projects, funded through professional services contracts, enable us to "catch up" on long neglected historic and conservation projects, often in overlooked minority communities. Many of these African-American neighborhoods, like Allen and Benedict Court, will be allowed to disappear without our having been able to so much as document the important part of the county's history this site and many others represent.

In conclusion, this proposed budget, drafted without consulting the Conservation Division staff, RCCC, and RSWCD, will end the county's direct expression of support through the General Fund for all RSWCD support staff. It will also negatively impact RCCC's efforts to implement our upcoming projects due to a reduction in our professional service funds, with the additional and unprecedented burden of RCCC being required to financially support RSWCD-allocated staff. We, the Commissioners of RCCC and RSWCD, respectfully request your assistance in restoring \$226,930 in eliminated General Fund monies to our budget (which supports the staff positions dedicated to the Richland Soil and Water Conservation District), \$71,160 for Pinewood Lake Park, and \$72,828 for Mill Creek and Cabin Branch tracts, for a total of \$370,918. Additionally, the RCCC requests the restoration of \$100,000 in Professional Services funds eliminated from our Special Revenue Fund.

Respectfully,

RCCC
District 1
Charles Weber

District 2
Tim McSwain

District 3
Sam Holland, Vice Chair

District 4
Glenice Pearson

District 5
James ("Buddy") Atkins, Ph.D., Vice Chair

District 6
John Grego, Chair

District 7
Robert C. Squirewell, Treasurer

District 8
Carol Kososki

District 10
Darrell Jackson, Jr

District 11
Gail Rodriguez

RSWCD
J. Kenneth Mullis, Chairman

Jeff Laney, Vice Chairman

The Honorable Jim Rhodes,
Secretary/Treasurer

The Honorable Hemphill Pride, III

The Honorable Mary Burts

ⁱ The Conservation Division of the Community Planning and Development Department provides direct staff support to the Commissioners of the Richland Soil and Water Conservation District and Richland County Conservation Commission to implement the responsibilities of the District and Commission.

Richland County Council created the Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC) by ordinance in 1998. The RCCC is charged with promoting the protection of the county's natural, historical, and cultural resources and promoting nature-based recreation and eco- and heritage tourism. Each of the eleven members of County Council appoints a representative to the Commission. The RCCC is funded from a Special Revenue Fund (0.5 mil).

The Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD) promotes the wise use of natural resources for long-term sustainability. Conservation districts are political subdivisions of state government ((Section 48-9-10, et.seq., SC Code of Laws, as amended) under the local direction of a five-member

board of commissioners. Three commissioners are elected in the general election; two are appointed by the SC Department of Natural Resources.

ii The FY21 Council-approved Conservation Division budget supports five full-time positions. Staff time is allocated between the RSWCD and the RCCC from three budget sources, the General Fund, the RCCC's Special Revenue Fund (0.5 mil), and transfers from the General Fund. These positions and the budget allocation are shown below:

FY 21 Budget Positions, Status and Funding Sources

Position	Status	Allocation	Entity	Budget Fund
Director of Conservation	Filled	50% 50%	RSWCD RCCC	General Fund 0.5 mil
Conservation Program Analyst	Vacant	100%	RCCC	0.5 mil
Conservation Education Analyst	Filled	100%	RSWCD	General Fund
Land Program Planner	Vacant	100%	RCCC	General Fund (Transfer)
Administrative Assistant	Vacant	40% 60%	RSWCD RCCC	General Fund

Attachment B: NRCS Report

NRCS Monthly Report March 2021

Programs

EQIP

- On Active Contracts
 - Working on practice checkouts, contract reviews and modifications.
 - Regular management of active contracts
- EQIP FY21
 - Working in completing the assessment and ranking for the 47 application with High priority. Deadline April 23
 - Preapproved application 23 on Long leave, Quail Initiative, Sustainable Forest Planing and Organic. Worked on conservation planning and contract documentations
 - Completeing site visits and meeting with producers to complete the planning portion.
 - Accepted new Applications for FY 2022
 - Completed site visits for new producers 4 Richland 2 Calhoun

CSP

- CSP Renewal FY2021
 - All Applications were completed and contracts obligated
- CSP Classic
 - Working on Assessments and Ranking for new applications Total 8
- Active CSP
 - Working with producers on implementations of practices.

General

- New USDA Workplace Safety Plan and FPAC Staff Guidance to lower in person Satff at USDA Service Center to 50% Capasity for missin Critical Work. Starting April 12, 2021
- Complete Trainings and attended Virtual meetings and teleconferences
- Working on CTA designs
- Working on Training For Planner Certification

Attachment C: Education Report

April 12, 2021

Declined USDA-NRCS Funding Opportunity

USDA-NRCS invited RSWCD to submit a budget proposal for a funding agreement to lead Project Empowerment - Keeping SC Female Landowners informed. The Project's goal is to educate women on the technical and financial services available from USDA-NRCS and will provide female landowners information to help them make informed decisions to address resource concerns on their farming operations. Staff declined to pursue the opportunity due to a lack of staff resources (i.e., time).

Grower/Buyer Mashup

RSWCD assisted with the coordination and hosting of the 2021 Grower/Buyer Mashup in partnership with the SC Department of Agriculture, Midlands Local Food Collaborative, and eleven sponsors, including the SC Association of Conservation Districts. The event featured 46 exhibits from farmers, chefs, and resource providers and was attended by a total of 126 people. Sponsorships totaled \$2,700.

Seed Sanctuary Update

In the past month, volunteers have packed over 3,500 seed packets for the Seed Sanctuary. Over 250 requests have been mailed to Richland County residents. We plan to meet the rest of our requests by mid-April and have already been in contact with more volunteers about getting more seeds packed! Send any busy bodies our way, or you can volunteer your own time if you would like -- contact Hannah.

Pollinator Conservation Webinar

Hannah, Chanda, and Anne Marie Johnson presented at a webinar on pollinator conservation that was hosted by SCDHEC's Champions of the Environment and EEASC. Chanda gave a presentation on pollinator ecology; Hannah presented on RSWCD's pollinator lesson plan; and Anne Marie Johnson spoke about pollinator conservation principles to 107 people via Zoom. We received good feedback, and all participants received a "swag bag" that includes a copy of the pollinator lesson plan.

Professional Development for Environmental Educators

- The District co-hosted the EEASC March Midlands Meetup for environmental educators; 27 educators participated.
- The District facilitated a \$23K sponsorship of the Palmetto Environmental Education Certification Program from the SC DHEC Champions of the Environment program to EEASC.
- Staff provided two pollinator conservation education kits and one vermicomposting education kit to the Cutler Jewish Day School.
- Staff provided support for the development of new promotional materials for SC Project Learning Tree.
- Staff are assisting with coordination of the 2021 EEASC Conference (which has received sponsorships from RSWCD, SCDNR, SC Conservation Districts Foundation, and 20 other agencies and organizations).
- Staff assisted with the launch of the SC Environmental Education Landscape Analysis Survey (in partnership with the Southeast Environmental Education Alliance)

Soda City Earth Day

Hannah and Chanda will be tabling for RSWCD at Soda City's Earth Day on 4/24 from 9am-1pm -- anyone is welcome to join! This event is a lot of fun and Jane Hiller with Sonoco Recycling/Green Steps Schools organizes it. We will provide some "swag" and seeds to anyone who stops by!

Upcoming events:

Please promote these to parents and teachers in Richland County!

- Poster contest deadline: 4/30
- Educator award nomination deadline: 4/30
- EEASC Annual Conference: 6/10 – 6/12 (virtual sessions and face-to-face field trips)

Social Media Report

- April e-newsletter distributed to >3,000 subscribers
- Facebook 947 followers
- Twitter 441 Followers
- Instagram 461 Followers