

Minutes  
Board of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources  
SCDNR Headquarters  
260 D Epting Lane  
West Columbia, SC  
May 15, 2025 10:00 am

The regular meeting of the Board of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources was held at 10:00 a.m., May 15, 2025 at the SCDNR Headquarters, 260 D Epting Lane, West Columbia, SC. Notice of the date, time and place of the meeting was posted and mailed to the news media. Chairman Mark Hartley presided at the meeting. Board members present included Hope Blackley (by phone), Davy Hite (by phone), Mike Hutchins, Jerry Lee, Carlisle Oxner (by phone), and Duane Swygert. Director Mullikin and staff members of the Department of Natural Resources were present at the meeting.

1. **Call to Order**

Chairman Hartley called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Invocation**

Dave Tafaoa, SC Law Enforcement Assistance Program, offered the invocation.

3. **Pledge of Allegiance**

Vice Chairman Swygert led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

4. **Introduction of Guests**

Emily Cope, Deputy Director for Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, introduced Damon Walker; Bubba Ross; and Rick Counts, Hunters for the Hungry.

5. **Constituent Comments**

Mrs. Cope stated that Mr. Walker and Mr. Ross have requested to make comments.

Mr. Walker's comments were related to deer depredation.

Mr. Ross's comments were related to his recently published book *Bearded Tales*. Mr. Ross presented the first copy to the agency and noted that a portion of the proceeds will be donated to the agency to support the turkey program.

6. **Approval of Minutes**

Chairman Hartley asked if there were any additions, deletions or corrections to the minutes of the March 28, 2025 meeting and April 17, 2025 orientation. *Mr. Lee made a motion that the minutes of the March 28, 2025 meeting and April 17, 2025 orientation be approved as submitted. Mr. Hutchins seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

7. **Agency Reports/Updates**

Director Mullikin reminded Board members that the luncheon announcing the 2024 Division Employees of the Year and the 2024 SCDNR Employee of the Year will be held at Wateree Range. Friday, June 6, 2025 at 14068 Garners Ferry Road, Eastover, SC, beginning at noon.

**Commendations:**

Director Mullikin commended Johnny Stowe of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries who was commended in a letter from a Georgia constituent who was grateful for Johnny's

help when he assisted his daughter when she ran out of gas on I-20 near Browntown. Her father said that he was 200 miles away and was unable to find a wrecker service to help. He said that Johnny was the only one who stopped to be of help. Johnny was able to get her gas tank filled and on her way. Her father was very grateful for his act of kindness and concern.

Director Mullikin commended SCDNR employees Wildlife Biologist Hunter Young, GIS Analyst Megan James and Fisheries Biologist Zach Dailey on their graduation from the LeadSC program. LeadSC provides emerging leaders in state government with the knowledge and skills to be successful, while fostering a desire to create a career within state government.

Director Mullikin commended Charles Ruth and Jay Cantrell of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries on their collaboration on significant wild turkey research for over 10 years. Their publication – *Survival and cause-specific mortality of male wild turkeys across the southeastern United States* - published in *The Journal of Wildlife Management* on behalf of The Wildlife Society has ranked within the top 10% of most-viewed papers published by the journal in 2023.

Director Mullikin commended SCDNR staff who were recognized in a letter and Certificate of Appreciation from S.C. State Forester Scott Phillips of the S.C. Forestry Commission for their collaboration as part of the multi-agency effort to contain and ultimately control the Table Rock Fire and the Persimmon Ridge Fire in March and April 2025. The following SCDNR staff assisted with the fire response: Ken Forrester, Art Breedlove, Justin Anderson, Chad James, Pat Cloninger, Austen Attaway, Bob Miller, Kevin Conley, Rob Harrison, Kolby Taylor, Tammy Waldrop, Matt Norris, Cameron Gravely and Chris Gravely.

Director Mullikin commended Brooke Myres of Land, Water and Conservation on her hard work in coordination of the 2025 S.C. Envirothon competition with 1<sup>st</sup> place overall winner Spartanburg High School Team 2 who will represent S.C. at the National Conservation Foundation-Envirothon this summer in Alberta, Canada.

Director Mullikin commended Jessie Egan, Jennifer Morris, Katie Hoffman, Mary Bracey, John Hayes, and Brooke Myres of Land, Water and Conservation on their efforts in leading Conservation Districts statewide in coordinating the celebration and outreach efforts for South Carolina Stewardship Week from April 27 - May 4, 2025. This statewide effort included a Governor's Proclamation, assisting Conservation Districts with direct classroom visits, hosting a statewide conservation field day, and outreach videos bringing awareness to Stewardship Week. Also, recognize the Greenville Soil and Water Conservation District on their selection as the 2024 Outstanding District of the Year.

Director Mullikin commended the Office of Human Resources staff, agency staff, and hiring supervisors for their efforts that led to recognition of our agency by the S.C. Human Affairs Commission for a significant increase in our level of goal attainment of 5.1% from reporting year 2023 to 2024.

Director Mullikin commended Brittany Caldwell, Rachel Milan, Elise Wells, Sarah-Emily Carter and Trista Bishop of the Employee Appreciation Planning Committee and volunteers Maureen Lane, Chelsea McClain, LeKeisha Williams, Stephanie Welch and

Kathy Diaz for their support and hard work on the Employee Appreciation events held in the four regions across the state that were well attended and enjoyed with games, a delicious meal and fellowship together in appreciation for the work of staff across the agency.

Director Mullikin commended Law Enforcement Region 3 PFC Brandon Cato who was commended in a phone call from a constituent who called to compliment PFC Cato who came to their subdivision to help with an injured deer. He wanted us to know that PFC Cato could not have been more helpful and polite, and he could not have been more pleased with his encounter with him and DNR.

Director Mullikin commended Law Enforcement Region 4 Captain Dennetta Dawson and her officers who were commended in a note from Isle of Palms Police Chief Kevin Cornett for their assistance in response to another “Senior Skip Day” on the Isle of Palms. He said that “Captain Denetta Dawson is an amazing partner and the SCDNR agents that came out were very professional. They were a huge help and played a major role in our successful operation.”

Director Mullikin commended Law Enforcement Captain Lee Ellis, LT Raquel Salters, LT Erik Martin and LT Jason Smith of the SCDNR Compliance Team for their hard work during the recent audit conducted by the SC Criminal Justice Academy on behalf of the Law Enforcement Training Council. The team achieved 100% compliance and SCCJA Assessor Mr. Bianco commended the audit as having gone exceptionally well and described our team’s performance as the “Golden Standard.”

Director Mullikin commended Samantha Fleming-Scarboro of Titling & Licensing who was commended in an email from a customer who conducted business at our facility and said he felt compelled to reach out and tell us it was a good experience due to our employee Sam who he said is a “credit to the corps of public servants....Superior customer service skills....Two thumbs up to all of you!”

### **Director Updates**

Mrs. Cope distributed and gave a brief overview of the 2024 Waterfowl Project Report.

At this time, Board members spoke of the work that Mrs. Cope has accomplished over her 26-year career with SCDNR and congratulated her on her new endeavor with Ducks Unlimited.

## **8. Advisory Committee Reports**

### **A. Waterfowl**

Billy Dukes, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, reported that the Waterfowl Advisory Committee met on May 1, 2025. The Advisory Committee received updates on the infrastructure and status of Category 1 WMAs and project habitat. The Advisory Committee approved the 2025-26 Duck Stamp Budget, as recommended by staff. The Advisory Committee received the Waterfowl Status Report.

### **B. Heritage Trust**

Chairman Hartley reported that the Heritage Trust Advisory Board met May 8, 2025. The Advisory Board received presentations on Bottomland Ecology and Restoration and Public Access on the Great Pee Dee River Heritage Preserve,

Lewis Ocean Bay Wildfire and Response, Stock Enhancement of Marine Fish and Recent Excavations at Pockoy Island Ring 2 and Green's Shell Enclosure. The Advisory Board approved a property acquisition project and request for use which the Board will consider later in the meeting.

C. Saltwater Recreational Fisheries

Blaik Keppler, Deputy Director for Marine Resources, reported that the Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Advisory Committee met May 14, 2025. The Advisory Committee approved the FY 2025 budget proposal as presented by staff.

**9. Item(s) for Board Information**

A. Climate Update

Hope Mizzell, Land, Water and Conservation Division, gave the Board report on recent wildfire activity. Dr. Mizzell provided drought status, rainfall totals, precipitation percentiles, streamflow, lake levels, groundwater monitoring wells around the state, precipitation forecast and temperature forecast.

B. 2025 Turkey Season Update

Jay Cantrell gave the Board an update on the 2025 turkey season. The update included the legislative changes, total reported harvest, harvest reporting methods, top five counties based on harvest per unit area of habitat, non-resident harvest, harvest by day and turkey tag sales and fulfillment.

**10. Item(s) for Board Action**

A. Request of Use – St. Helena Sound Heritage Preserve/Wildlife Management Area – Ashe Island

Lorianne Riffin, Director, Office of Environmental Programs, reviewed the Request of Use – St. Helena Sound Heritage Preserve/Wildlife Management Area – Ashe Island, as included in the meeting packet. *Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the SCDNR Board, as recommended by the Heritage Trust Advisory Board, SCDNR staff and the Director, grant approval to Marine Air Corps Station Beaufort for the temporary use for permanent placement of dredged material on the three existing dredged material containment areas on Ashe Island, a portion of the St. Helena Sound Heritage Preserve and Wildlife Management Area. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

B. Approval of FY 26 Migratory Waterfowl Permit Budget

Mr. Dukes reviewed the FY 26 Migratory Waterfowl Permit Budget, as included in the meeting packet. *Mr. Swygert made a motion that the SCDNR Board accept the recommendations of the SCDNR Staff, the Director and the Waterfowl Advisory Committee, and approve the FY26 Migratory Waterfowl Permit funding request in the amount of \$822,200. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

**11. Executive Session**

*Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the SCDNR Board go into executive session pursuant to SC Code Section 30-4-70(A)(1) to discuss personnel matters related to Item for Board Action G and H and SC Code Section 30-4-70(A)(2) to discuss contractual matters related to Item for Board Action C, D, E and F. Mr. Swygert seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

## **12. Open Session**

*Mr. Lee made a motion that the SCDNR Board return to open session, noting that no action was taken during executive session. Mr. Swygert seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

## **13. Item(s) for Board Action**

### **C. Preliminary Approval of Property Purchase in Jasper County**

*Mr. Swygert made a motion that the SCDNR Board accept the recommendation of the Director and SCDNR staff and grant preliminary approval to investigate the potential purchase of approximately 635 acres in Jasper County. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

### **D. Preliminary Approval of Property Purchase in Greenville County**

*Ms. Blackley made a motion that the SCDNR Board accept the recommendation of the Director and SCDNR staff and grant preliminary approval and the expenditure of \$20,000 of state appropriated funds to investigate the potential purchase of approximately 32 acres in Greenville County. Mr. Swygert seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

### **E. Preliminary Approval of Property Purchase in Pickens County**

*Mr. Lee made a motion that the SCDNR Board accept the recommendation of the Director and SCDNR staff and grant preliminary approval to investigate the potential acquisition of approximately 1,347 acres in Pickens County. Mr. Hutchins seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

### **F. Final Approval of Property Purchase in Aiken County**

*Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the SCDNR Board grant final approval to acquire and expend \$1,000,000 in Heritage Trust Funds to purchase approximately 304 acres in Aiken County to be dedicated as part of the Aiken Gopher Tortoise Heritage Preserve and placed in the corpus of the Heritage Trust as recommended by the Heritage Trust Advisory Board. Mr. Swygert seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

### **G. Law Enforcement Advisory Committee Appointments and Reappointment**

*Mr. Swygert made a motion that the SCDNR Board, upon the recommendation of SCDNR Staff and the Director, appoint Frampton Ferguson, Michael Strange and Jennifer Wells to serve a first four-year term, Rusty McClam and John Wilson to serve a first three-year term and Charles McHorn to serve a first two-year term on the Law Enforcement Advisory Committee, all beginning on 6/1/2025. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

*Mr. Swygert made a motion that the SCDNR Board, upon the recommendation of SCDNR Staff and the Director, re-appoint Paul Napper to serve a three-year term on the Law Enforcement Advisory Committee, beginning on 6/1/2025 through 6/1/2028. Mr. Hutchins seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

### **H. Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee Reappointments**

*Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the SCDNR Board approve re-appointing Mr. William (Mac) McKelvey Baughman to the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Board as recommended by staff and Chairman Hutchins. His term of*

*service will be June 1, 2025 - May 31, 2029. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

*Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the SCDNR Board approve re-appointing Mr. Woodrow Wilson (Trey) Watford, III to the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Board as recommended by staff and Chairman Hutchins. His term of service will be June 1, 2025 - May 31, 2029. Mr. Swygert seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

**14. Time and Location of Next Board Meeting**

The Board will hold a teleconference meeting on July 11, 2025.

**15. Adjournment**

*Mr. Swygert made a motion that the meeting be adjourned. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*