

Waterfowl Advisory Committee
August 5, 2025
Meeting Minutes
South Carolina Waterfowl Association
8444 Old River Rd, Pinewood, SC 29125

Members Present:

Chairman John Hilton, Vice Chairman Ernie Wiggers, Stuart Cochran, Bill Mace, Bob Perry and Dr. Mark Hartley

DNR Staff Present:

Deputy Director Will Dillman, Assistant Deputy Director Ken Prosser, Chief of Wildlife Billy Dukes, Assistant Chief of Wildlife (Regions 1 & 3) Willie Simmons, Assistant Chief of Wildlife (Regions 2 & 4) Sam Chappellear, Statewide Waterfowl Biologist Molly Kneece, Region 3 Coordinator Barry Kesler, Region 4 Coordinator Alicia Farrell, FERC Coordinator Elizabeth Miller, and Wildlife Section Administrative Coordinator Patty Castine.

Constituents Present:

David Wielicki, CEO SCWA; Jonathan Patrick, SCWA; Michael Melcher, Santee Cooper; Chad Holbrook, Santee Cooper; Charles Grant, Jim McCutchen and Max Nelson

Call to Order

Chairman Hilton called the meeting to order at 9:30AM, with notice that the date, time, and place of the meeting was posted on the DNR website in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act and gave the invocation.

Introductions and Constituent Comments

Chairman Hilton opened the meeting. Committee members, staff and constituents introduced themselves.

Constituent Comments

Charles Grant made comments regarding Greentree Reservoir and Hickory Top WMA and how there is no monitoring or organization from DNR Law Enforcement to regulate the crowds of people who show up to hunt. He requested that DNR take into consideration setting aside a specific day or days designated for youth and senior citizen hunts. Bob Perry agreed that there should be special days set aside that meet that criteria and thanked Mr. Grant for his comments.

Jim McCutchen asked the Committee if there are plans to enhance waterfowl hunting on public lands, specifically, Santee Cooper. Chairman Hilton responded referring to a cut grass spraying project that's been going on next to the Greentree Reservoir for several years now. He also referred to a potential winter drawdown that will hopefully enhance waterfowl hunting in the area.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Hilton requested a motion to approve the minutes of the May 1, 2025, Waterfowl Advisory Committee meeting. Bob Perry made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Stuart Cochran and passed with unanimous approval by the Committee.

Comments from the Chair

Chairman Hilton welcomed everyone and introduced David Wielicki, SCWA Chief Executive Officer and gave a quick overview of the facility and thanked David for hosting the Committee.

Comments from David Wielicki, SCWA Chief Executive Officer

David Wielicki gave a presentation of the South Carolina Waterfowl Association and their camps, Camp Woodie summer camp and Camp Leopold school camp.

Comments from DNR Leadership

Chief Dukes thanked David Wielicki and Jonathan Patrick for hosting the meeting and introduced Will Dillman as the new Deputy Director for Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries and welcomed Dr. Mark Hartley as a new member of the Waterfowl Advisory Committee.

Cat I Mid-Season Habitat Updates

Assistant Chief Sam Chappelle gave an update on the Cedar Island renovation. They are currently waiting on final permits and then they will be ready to begin. Staff have struggled at Sandy Beach trying to get Stoney Bay dry due to high lake levels. They've attempted to pump it dry, but with no success. Throughout the regions, planting has occurred and conditions look good. There have been no complaints from the public regarding Samworth WMA.

Assistant Chief Willie Simmons gave an update on Clemson Waterfowl Area and Beaverdam WMA. Planted crops are looking good but there are concerns regarding excessive rainfall affecting the crops. At Wateree and Love Farm WMAs, crops are looking good on both of these properties as well. Deer buster fences have been installed at Love Farm. At Cooks Mountain pond at Wateree, there are still issues controlling water depth. Staff have utilized a drone to monitor conditions. Overall conditions look good. As long as there are no water issues, they anticipate a good season.

State Waterfowl Biologist Molly Kneece gave an update on Santee Coastal Reserve and Bear Island. She has monitored the habitat by air boat at night and conditions are looking good. Conditions are looking great at Santee Delta as well and thanked staff for their efforts there. She will be traveling to Clemson Waterfowl Area and Beaverdam later in the week to monitor the current conditions there.

Chief Dukes reported that Category II waterfowl area Duncan Creek is making progress and a new structure will be installed soon.

Chairman Hilton thanked staff for their continued hard work.

Santee Cooper Winter Drawdown

Chairman Hilton introduced Michael Melcher and Chad Holbrook from Santee Cooper to discuss the possibility of reimplementing a winter drawdown. Mr. Melcher gave a very informative presentation and answered the Committee's questions. Chairman Hilton did address Mr. Melcher regarding why the winter drawdown was discontinued. Mr. Melcher stated that after the 2007 drought, lake levels were at their lowest since the 1950's making the agency nervous about lowering water levels and currently they are resource constrained. He stressed that the demand of power usage has increased as well due to continued development in the area and also meeting the needs of water levels from a fisheries aspect. Bob Perry asked Mr. Melcher to go back to a point in his presentation showing the guide curve. "The Committee and duck hunters, sportsman who use the lake would really like to see...we don't have a problem with the way the curve looks from February to November, but what we would like to see is the actual lake level get closer to the bottom of the guide curve on the shoulder months and asked if Santee Cooper could drop the lake level just for a three month period of time without...give us the rationale for why that can't be done and you can still maintain all of these other obligations." Mr. Melcher stated that all he can do is take the Committee's feedback to the folks who make these decisions. Chairman Hilton voiced his concerns regarding the negative impact that flooding is having on a host of wildlife species that are living in the bottomland going up the river. Mr. Melcher stated there is not a lot they can do to help due to the river peaking. Chairman Hilton mentioned that Santee Cooper for decades had the storage

capacity available until the drought in 2007 and now they are afraid to put it back which is reasonable, but he feels the community hasn't done a good job expressing the impact or maybe is just now realizing what's happening. Bob Perry stated that what the Committee would like for Mr. Melcher to do is to talk to management to see if there can be a little bit of flexibility on that period from November through January to where they could come down a little closer to the bottom of the guide curve. That would be beneficial to downstream resources and he doesn't think it would cause harm downstream. Mr. Melcher stated the flip side to that would be water would be constrained and they would have to reduce minimum flows in the springtime. After further discussion, Chairman Hilton thanked Mr. Melcher for coming and presenting his data.

Committee Discussion Regarding Winter Drawdown

Chairman Hilton addressed the Committee stating that he was satisfied that they had covered everything that was needed to discuss regarding the drawdown and asked if anyone had anything to add. Bob Perry asked what the status was on the comprehensive study on coastal assets related to how they would fare in various sea level rise scenarios. Chief Dukes stated that the information should be available and would check on the progress and hopefully it can be added to an upcoming agenda.

Meeting Adjournment

Chairman Hilton thanked everyone for attending and thanked Bob Perry for his previous service as Chairman of the Committee and called for a motion to adjourn. Bob Perry made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Bill Mace. The meeting adjourned at 12:45 PM and lunch was provided by SCWA.

Date, Time, and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Waterfowl Advisory Committee will be held Thursday, November 6th at SCDNR Headquarters, 260 D Epting Lane, West Columbia, SC 29172.