

Meeting Minutes
Board of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
SCDNR Headquarters
260 D. Epting Lane
West Columbia, SC 29172
August 24, 2026, 10:00 a.m.

The special-called meeting of the Board of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources was held at 10:00 a.m. on August 24, 2026, both in person at the SCDNR Headquarters, 260 D. Epting Lane, West Columbia, SC 29172, and virtually via Microsoft Teams. Notice of the date, time, and place of the meeting was posted and mailed to the news media. Chairman Dr. Mark Hartley presided at the meeting. Board members present included Vice Chairman Mr. Duane Swygert, Mr. Mike Hutchins, Ms. Hope Blackley, Mr. Davy Hite, Mr. Carlisle Oxner, and Mr. Jerry Lee. Staff members of the Department of Natural Resources were present at the meeting.

1. Call to Order

Chairman Hartley called the meeting to order and welcomed all attendees.

2. Chairman's Comments

Chairman Hartley stated that the purpose of this special-called meeting was to address a recently drafted House Resolution concerning deer hunting with dogs and SCDNR's ongoing public engagement process. He explained that the resolution expressed support for lawful deer hunting with dogs and private property rights and called upon the Board to conclude its current review.

Chairman Hartley stated that the Board respects the role of the General Assembly and would consider the appropriate course forward consistent with SCDNR's statutory responsibilities and mission.

3. Item(s) for Board Action

A. Update on Dog-Deer Hunting Stakeholder Information-Gathering Process

Mr. Will Dillman, Deputy Director of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, provided an update on the public engagement and information-gathering process concerning deer hunting with dogs that was initiated at the direction of the Board following its June meeting. Mr. Dillman reported that SCDNR held three public meetings in Florence, Orangeburg, and Walterboro to allow interested members of the public to share their experiences, perspectives, and concerns. Between 850 and 950 people attended each meeting.

Mr. Dillman stated that SCDNR also established an online portal for individuals who were unable to attend a meeting or preferred to submit comments electronically. SCDNR received more than 4,400 individual comments, approximately 4,000 of which came from individuals who hunt in, lease, or own property in Game Zones 3 or 4. Mr. Dillman thanked everyone who attended or spoke at a meeting or submitted comments online. He also recognized the SCDNR staff members from throughout the agency who organized and supported the meetings on a short timeline.

Mr. Dillman reported that the public comments were thorough and thoughtful and that staff was working to summarize them in a detailed and comprehensive report for the Board that could also be made available to the General Assembly. He explained that the primary recurring concerns involved private property rights, hunting traditions, enforcement, changing land use in South Carolina, and relationships between landowners and hunters rather than biological or natural resource management

concerns. Mr. Dillman concluded by requesting further direction from the Board regarding how SCDNR should proceed.

Chairman Hartley outlined two options for the Board's consideration:

Option 1

The SCDNR Board continues its information-gathering process and proceeds with the next phase of the stakeholder engagement.

Option 2

The SCDNR Board concludes its inquiries, meetings, and surveys but maintains a summary of the information collected to date and provides it to the General Assembly if requested.

At Mr. Hutchins's request, Chairman Hartley invited each Board member to comment on the two options.

Vice Chairman Swygert supported continuing the information-gathering process, emphasizing the importance of public input. He also noted that the Law Enforcement Advisory Committee had unanimously supported restrictions related to deer hunting with dogs. He expressed support for Option 1.

Mr. Hutchins stated that SCDNR had gathered substantial information through the three public meetings and more than 4,400 comments. He expressed concern that private property disputes may fall outside SCDNR's statutory authority and opposed SCDNR recommending specific legislative changes. He supported compiling the information collected and providing it to the General Assembly for its consideration. Accordingly, he supported Option 2.

Mr. Oxner objected to efforts to pressure the Board and stated that he could support either option.

Mr. Lee stated that he attended two public meetings and believed the participation was heavily weighted toward dog hunters. He disclosed that he hunts deer with dogs and acknowledged the concerns of both dog hunters and still hunters. He questioned whether additional focus groups would provide a balanced perspective and supported concluding the process and retaining the information collected for the General Assembly. He supported Option 2.

Ms. Blackley emphasized the importance of allowing citizens to be heard and retaining the information already collected. She also stressed the need for SCDNR to remain within its responsibilities while protecting public safety and the agency's ability to perform its other duties. She supported Option 2.

Mr. Hite stated that his experience hunting both with and without dogs gave him an appreciation for the hunting tradition and private property concerns involved. Having reviewed the public input, he believed SCDNR had received sufficient information and should remain within its statutory authority. He supported Option 2.

Chairman Hartley asked Ms. Susan Porter, General Counsel, to summarize previous legislation concerning deer hunting with dogs. Ms. Porter reviewed H. 4703, enacted

as Act No. 353, and subsequent legislative proposals, including S. 36, S. 706, H. 3563, H. 3998, H. 3272, and S. 936. She noted that the subsequent bills did not advance beyond committee and that stakeholder input had been used during prior legislative efforts.

Chairman Hartley stated that the issue involves both private property and natural resource concerns and that SCDNR had provided substantial opportunities for public input. He emphasized that the General Assembly is responsible for enacting laws and supported concluding the engagement process and providing the information collected to the General Assembly.

Mr. Hutchins reiterated that SCDNR had collected substantial information and should provide it to the General Assembly without recommending specific legislative restrictions. He suggested that, if additional information were needed, the Board could consider continuing only a broader survey.

Chairman Hartley stated that SCDNR had received approximately 4,400 comments and substantial input through the public meetings and characterized the process as one of the Department's most comprehensive efforts concerning this issue.

Mr. Hutchins suggested that staff compile the current comments and meeting input and compare the recurring themes with prior public-engagement efforts rather than conduct another survey.

Mr. Dillman clarified that the process was intended to identify areas of conflict and potential solutions, not to serve as a public vote or measure of support.

Ms. Porter cautioned that combining current and prior participation totals could result in duplicate counting. She also noted that the earlier reports were approximately ten years old and that significant development and changing conditions in South Carolina should be considered when comparing the information.

Ms. Blackley emphasized that the public's participation should be meaningful and supported providing the information collected to the General Assembly.

Mr. Hutchins expressed concern that dog hunters were disproportionately represented at the public meetings and that the input might not fully reflect other affected groups. He stated that this could support a broader survey but acknowledged that prior information might provide sufficient additional context.

Mr. Lee stated that the meetings and online process were open to all interested individuals and emphasized that dog hunters should not be characterized as dangerous or irresponsible. He believed the public had been given sufficient opportunity to be heard and supported concluding the process.

Chairman Hartley recommended removing "if requested" from Option 2 so that SCDNR would provide the summary to the General Assembly upon completion.

Mr. Hutchins suggested preserving the option to conduct additional surveys but stated that he would also support Option 2 without further revision.

Mr. Lee opposed continuing the information-gathering process and supported Option 2 as presented.

Chairman Hartley determined that Option 2 would be modified only to remove the phrase "if requested."

Vice Chairman Swygert made a motion that the SCDNR Board continue its information-gathering process and proceed with the next phase of the stakeholder engagement. The motion died for lack of a second.

Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the SCDNR Board conclude its inquiries, meetings, and surveys but maintain a summary of the information collected to date and provide it to the General Assembly. Mr. Lee seconded the motion. Mr. Hutchins, Ms. Blackley, Mr. Hite, Mr. Oxner, and Mr. Lee voted in favor of the motion. Vice Chairman Swygert voted in opposition. The motion passed by majority vote.

4. Comments

Ms. Porter reported that approximately 250 applications had been received for the announced focus groups. Following the Board's action, she stated that SCDNR would promptly notify the public that the focus groups and application process had been discontinued. She would work with Ms. Cheyenne Twilley, Public Information Officer, to prepare a press release for Board review.

Mr. Oxner suggested that focus group applicants could submit comments to their respective members of the General Assembly.

Mr. Hutchins suggested that the public notice explain that the Board concluded the remaining meetings because sufficient information had been collected.

5. Time and Location of Next Board Meeting

The Board's next meeting will be held Friday, September 11, 2026, in conjunction with the SCDNR Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Luncheon.

6. Adjournment

Chairman Hartley made a motion that the meeting be adjourned. Mr. Hutchins seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.