

Minutes
Board of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
SCDNR Headquarters
260 D Epting Lane
West Columbia, SC
January 29, 2026 10:00 am

The regular meeting of the Board of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources was held at 10:00 a.m., January 29, 2026 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, Davy Hite, Mike Hutchins, Jerry Lee, Carlisle Oxner 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**

Rev. Eric Skidmore, 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/Constituent Comments**

Shannon Bobertz, Chief of Staff, introduced Scott Whitaker, Coastal Conservation Association; Eddie Kirkley and Mary Anderson, Chesterfield County Council; Derek Shoemake, Kershaw County Council; Randy Lowe, Former SCDNR Board member; Rick Counts, Hunters for the Hungry; and Mike Ruhe, Duke Power.

5. **Constituent Comments**

Mr. Kirkley and Ms. Anderson, Chesterfield County Council, presented a Resolution commending SCDNR, Director Tom Mullikin, S/SGT Tommy Buckhannon and Director of Training LT Erik Martin who were commended for their efforts in the removal of a large and long-standing log jam, in place for more than four years, along a vital stretch of the Lynches River within Chesterfield County.

Mr. Shoemake, Kershaw County Council, presented a Resolution commending SCDNR, Director Tom Mullikin, S/SGT Tommy Buckhannon and Director of Training LT Erik Martin who were commended for their efforts in the removal of a large and long-standing log jam, in place for more than four years, along a vital stretch of the Lynches River within Chesterfield County.

Senator Chip Campsen presented a Senate Resolution to Director Mullikin that commended staff and leaders and participants of the SC7 Expedition for their visionary and public engagement that benefits the State of South Carolina, the Nation, and the World.

Mr. Whitaker informed the Board that CCA is celebrating their 40th Anniversary. Mr. Whitaker also recognized the staff of the Marine Resources Division for their work for the fisheries.

6. Approval of Minutes

Chairman Hartley asked if there were any additions, deletions or corrections to the minutes of the October 23, 2025. *Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the minutes of the October 23, 2025 meeting be approved as submitted. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

7. Agency Reports/Updates

Director's Update:

Director Mullikin reminded Board Members to file their Statement of Economic Interests forms electronically with the SC Ethics Commission with deadline of March 30, 2026.

Director Mullikin then highlighted the following items:

- Conservation Book published (copies for each at their spot)
- Meeting with Governor to explore additional avenues for private investment in conservation
- Budget meetings
- Cape Romain affidavit/deposition
- EFD Red Snapper
- Flounder stocking is imminent, more on that in March.
- Department of Interior meeting/White House visit
- Yawkey Foundation and Boston visit
- Various legislative meetings on budget and statutory priorities
- Traveled to Memphis for Sportsmen's Caucus and spoke to them about Conservation Education Fund
- Sent letter to USFS regarding sporting dog access requests
- Going to DC in mid-February with Blaik Keppler, Will Dillman, Shannon Bobertz and Cheyenne Twilley to meet with Directors of USFWS, NOAA and USFS
- Swore in new Law Enforcement Officer class
- Snow event and helped EMD and was involved in executive calls with Governor
- Setting up a Senate visit to Santee Coastal in March for interested Senators
- Clean up in Lynches River

Commendations:

Commend Law Enforcement Captain Denetta Dawson for being recognized by Charleston Southern University with the Alumni Award.

Commend Private First-Class Kevin Egan for his heroic rescue of an injured red tail hawk at East Point Academy school. His efforts were recognized by the students and the administration.

Commend Brittany Caldwell, Human Resources Benefits Manager, for coordinating and executing the Carolina-Clemson Blood drive at headquarters collecting 20 units of blood and helping to save 60 lives.

Commend the Lancaster County DNR Officers that volunteered their time to support the Pleasant Dale Baptist Church at their block party in October 2025.

Commend Dawn Beaver of Land, Water and Conservation for coordination of the agency-wide food drive for Mission Lexington.

Commend Anna Huckabee Smith for coordinating the SCDNR Halloween Social and pumpkin carving event.

Commend Anna Huckabee Smith for successful approval and submission of the South Carolina Action Plan.

Commend Andrew Grosse, State Herpetologist, for being presented the Distinguished Service Award by the Gopher Tortoise Council at the 47th annual meeting in Tallahassee, Florida. The award acknowledges his long-term service to the organization and to the conservation of the gopher tortoises and the upland ecosystems.

Commend Achi Treptow of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries and the SCDNR staff at Murphy's Island for providing outstanding customer service, comfortable accommodation and for providing an amazing hunting experience.

Commend Audits Manager James Vant on his nomination to the Board of South Carolina State Internal Auditor Association. Mr. Vant was one of nine board members chosen from a pool of 200.

Commend Deborah Green, IT business analyst, and Patty Epley, IT project manager, for their successful completion of the Strategic Artificial Intelligence Graduate Certificate Program at Furman University.

Commend Colonel Chisolm Frampton for earning the inaugural SCDNR Palmetto Excellence in Stewardship Award in recognition of his exceptional dedication to South Carolina's lands, waters and wildlife.

Commend Liz Vinyard, Captains Michelle Taliercio and Brock Renkas from the Marine Resources Division, and Tyler Brown, Brooke Myres, and Jesse Egan from Land, Water and Conservation for their dedication to South Carolina's water and land resources. Through excellent leadership, expertise, and passion, they created meaningful learning experiences for students from Central Carolina Technical College.

Commend Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Category 1 Waterfowl staff for their hard work on the various Waterfowl Lottery Hunts around the state. We received several positive notes from hunters who participated and commented on how impressive the SCDNR team was and expressed their thanks and gratitude for the opportunity.

Commend Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries staff for their selection by the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture to receive their "Agency Champion Award" for work in developing cutting edge research and management techniques to conserve the Federally Threatened Eastern Black Rail. The dedication and commitment of SCDNR's researchers and land managers have made the agency a leader in Black Rail conservation. Chief of Staff Bobertz and Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries Bird Conservation Coordinator Amy Tegeler will accept an award on behalf of SCDNR in Washington in February.

Commend Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Webb Center staff for their assistance during the Hampton County 4-H Jr. Leadership Program's Natural Resources Day at the

Webb Center. April Atkinson, Cathryn Bland, McKenzie Perkins, Zach Smith, David Tant and Keith Hiers were recognized by Dawn Stuckey, 4-H Youth Development Agent for Colleton and Hampton Counties for all they did to make the day such a success and incredible experience for the 12 high school sophomores and juniors from Hampton County schools.

Commend Scott Speares, Chief Budget and Finance Officer, and his team for their recognition by the Comptroller General's office in their Spotlight on Success Section of their feature "The Fiscal Compass." The Comptroller General's office said, "DNR is also doing great work maintaining thorough, well-organized documentation. Clear, complete records make a huge difference when it comes to transparency and audit readiness. Thanks for setting a strong example."

Commend Brooke Maguire of Titling and Licensing office for her assisting a constituent with registering his boat motor. The constituent wrote Director Mullikin a letter commending Brooke for her assistance and going above and beyond to contact the boat dealer on his behalf. The constituent saw the Director's email to staff on social media about the exceptional and important job they do for South Carolina, and he was inspired to write about his experience with Brooke.

Commend Chief of Staff Shannon Bobertz for being appointed as President of the Richland County Bar Association for 2026.

Commend Jessica Egan of the Conservation Districts Section in the Land, Water and Conservation Division for being named a Roaring10 recipient for 2026 from the Clemson University Young Alumni Council. The Roaring10 annually recognizes ten outstanding Clemson University young alumni for their impact in business, leadership, community, educational and philanthropic endeavors. The honor is given to those individuals who exemplify Clemson University's core values of honesty, integrity, and respect. Jessica will receive her Roaring10 at an awards ceremony on May 1, 2026 in Clemson.

Director Mullikin announced the retirements of the following staff: Sandy Rucker who has been the Board Secretary since 1997. Charles Ruth the deer, bear and turkey expert. Finally, Ken Rentiers, Deputy Director for Land, Water and Conservation has announced he's retiring at the end of March.

Presentations:

The Meritorious Service Award was presented to Sandy Rucker.

8. Advisory Committee Reports

A. Governor's Cup Billfishing Series

Blaik Keppler, Deputy Director for Marine Resources, reported that the Governor's Cup Billfishing Series Advisory Board met November 14, 2025 at Fort Johnson. The Advisory Board received an overview of Series revenue and expenditures and the Advisory Board approved outstanding expenses. The Advisory Board reviewed the draft 2025 Annual Report. The Advisory Board discussed planning and preparations for the 2026 tournament series. The Advisory Board approved the nominations for three Advisory Board appointments, which the Board will consider later in the meeting.

- B. Waterfowl
Billy Dukes, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, reported that the Waterfowl Advisory Committee met November 17, 2025 at SCDNR HQ in West Columbia. The Advisory Committee received updates on Category 1 habitat and a research project update. The Advisory Committee received report on the waterfowl project and the annual legislative report.

 - C. Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries
Mr. Hutchins reported that the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee met November 20, 2025 at SCDNR HQ in West Columbia. The Advisory Committee received updates on SC Black Bass Genetics and the bear harvest.

 - D. Land, Water and Conservation
Ken Rentiers, Deputy Director for Land, Water and Conservation, reported that the Land, Water and Conservation Advisory Committee met virtually on January 6, 2026. The Advisory Committee received updates on division activities. The Advisory Committee approved Conservation District Commissioner Appointments/Reappointments/Emeritus, which the Board will consider later in the meeting.

 - E. Law Enforcement
Mr. Swygert reported the Law Enforcement Advisory Committee met January 5, 2026 at the Webb Center. The Advisory Committee received an update on new hires. The Advisory Committee received a briefing on the history of the Webb Center. The Advisory Committee received a presentation and held a discussion on dog hunting with deer and noted their discussion will continue in the spring.

 - F. Heritage Trust
Dr. Hartley reported that the Heritage Trust Advisory Board met January 22, 2026 at Parker Annex Archaeology Center in Columbia. The Advisory Board approved three property acquisition projects, which the Board will consider later in the meeting.

 - G. Marine
Mr. Lee reported the Marine Advisory Committee met January 23, 2026 at Fort Johnson. The Advisory Committee received updates and reports on Red Drum Management and Blue Land Crabs.
9. **Item(s) for Board Information**
- A. Climate Update
Hope Mizzell, Land, Water and Conservation Division, gave the Board a report on the recent ice event. Dr. Mizzell provided drought status, rainfall totals, precipitation percentiles, streamflow, lake levels, groundwater monitoring wells around the state, precipitation forecast and temperature forecast.

 - B. Legal Update
Chairman Hartley stated that this item will be discussed in Executive Session.

10. Item(s) for Board Action

A. Approval of Expenditure from the Broad River Mitigation Trust Fund – Stream Culvert Replacement within Lower Duncan Creek Sub-Watershed

Elizabeth Miller, Office of Environmental Programs, briefly reviewed the request for the approval of expenditure from the Broad River Mitigation Trust Fund for the stream culvert replacement with the Lower Duncan Creek Sub-Watershed, as included in the meeting packet. *Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the Department of Natural Resources Board, acting as the Board of Trustees for the Mitigation Trust Fund, authorize the use of \$106,052 from the Broad River Fisheries Mitigation Trust Fund sub-fund, as requested by the Director and the SCDNR staff, for the purpose of restoring aquatic organism passage and natural stream flow to the Lower Duncan Creek sub-watershed. Mr. Oxner seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.*

B. Approval of Expenditure from Mitigation Trust Fund – Lake Greenwood Fisheries Habitat Enhancement

Chairman Hartley noted that action on the item will be postponed until a future meeting.

11. Executive Session

Mr. Lee 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 Items for Board Action C, D and E and pursuant to SC Code Section 30-4-70(A)(2) to discuss contractual matters related to Items for Board Action F, G, H, I and J and to receive legal update related to Item for Board Information B. Ms. Blackley seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

12. Open Session

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

13. Item(s) for Board Action

C. Conservation District Commissioner Appointments and Reappointments

Ms. Blackley made a motion that the DNR Board approve the following conservation district commissioner appointments as recommended by the Land, Water and Conservation Advisory Committee: Laura Bagwell, Aiken - 1/29/26 - 7/5/29; Denise Parsick, Beaufort - 1/29/26 - 10/4/30; Calvin Bailey, Colleton - 1/29/26 - 1/31/27; Justin Sutton, Georgetown - 1/29/26 - 1/31/27; and Robert Boyce, Lee - 1/29/26 - 7/21/29. Mr. Oxner seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Blackley made a motion that the DNR Board approve the following conservation district commissioner reappointments, as recommended by the Land, Water and Conservation Advisory Committee: Barry Jurs, Berkeley - 4/30/25 - 4/29/29; Cleveland Hiott, Colleton - 4/24/25 - 04/23/29; Ray Crapse, Hampton, 4/30/25 - 4/29/29; Sarah Williams, Kershaw, 5/12/25 - 5/11/29; Joe H. Ghent, Jr., Lancaster - 7/2/25 - 7/1/29; David Coggins, Laurens - 11/2/24 - 11/1/28; Bobby Edmonds, McCormick - 11/24/24 - 11/23/28; and George Ulmer, Orangeburg - 1/5/25 - 1/4/29. Mr. Swygert seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Blackley made a motion that the DNR Board approve the following conservation district commissioner emeritus appointments, as recommended by the Land, Water and Conservation Advisory Committee: Keith Gourdin, Berkeley; William Covington, Marlboro; and Rex Ramsay, Oconee. Mr. Swygert seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

D. Governor's Cup Billfishing Series Advisory Board Appointments

Mr. Oxner made a motion that the SCDNR Board, upon the recommendation of the SC Governor's Cup Billfishing Series Advisory Board of Directors, appoint Mr. Ben Wall, Mr. Robert Garmany and Mr. Scott McCormack to each serve on the Advisory Board for a three-year term beginning 1/1/2026 through 12/31/2028. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion carried with Mr. Swygert voting against the motion.

E. Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee Reappointments

Mr. Hutchins made a motion based on the recommendation of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee Chairman, Mike Hutchins, and SCDNR staff, that the SCDNR Board approve reappointment of Dr. Cleveland T. Smith and Mr. Stan Halliday to the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee for the term beginning July 1, 2025 and expiring on June 30, 2029. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion carried with Mr. Swygert voting against the motion.

F. Preliminary Approval of Property Purchase in Horry County

Mr. Lee made a motion that the SCDNR Board, upon the recommendation of the Heritage Trust Advisory Board, SCDNR staff and the Director, grant preliminary approval and \$20,000 in Heritage Trust Funds to investigate the potential purchase of approximately 9 acres in Horry County that may be dedicated as a Heritage Preserve and placed into the Corpus of the Heritage Trust. Mr. Swygert seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

G. Preliminary Approval of Property Purchase in Clarendon County

Mr. Lee made a motion that the SCDNR Board, upon the recommendation of SCDNR staff and the Director, grant preliminary approval to investigate the purchase of approximately 650 acres in Clarendon County. Mr. Swygert seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

H. Final Approval of Property Purchase in Greenville County

Ms. Blackley made a motion that the SCDNR Board, upon the recommendation of the Heritage Trust Advisory Board, SCDNR staff and the Director, grant final approval to acquire approximately 431 acres in Greenville County, and the expenditure of up to \$295,298 for the purchase price, to be dedicated as a Heritage Preserve and placed into the Corpus of the Heritage Trust. Mr. Oxner seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

I. Final Approval of Property Purchase in Florence County

Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the SCDNR Board, upon the recommendation of the Heritage Trust Advisory Board, SCDNR staff and the Director, grant final approval to acquire approximately 4,969 acres in Florence County that may be dedicated as a Heritage Preserve and placed into the Corpus of the Heritage Trust. Ms. Blackley seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

J. Final Approval of Property Purchase in Florence County

Mr. Hite made a motion that the SCDNR Board, upon the recommendation of SCDNR staff and the Director, grant final approval to complete the purchase of approximately 112 acres in Florence County. Mr. Hutchins seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

14. Time and Location of Next Board Meeting

The Board's next meeting will be held Friday, March 27, 2026 in conjunction with the Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic.

15. Adjournment

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