

Meeting Minutes
Board of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
SCDNR Headquarters
260 D Epting Lane
West Columbia, SC
March 27, 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., March 27, 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 Dr. Mark Hartley presided at the meeting. Board members present included Vice Chairman Duane Swygert, Mike Hutchins, Hope Blackley, Davy Hite (via phone), Carlisle Oxner, and Jerry Lee. 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. **Chairman's Comments**

The Clarendon Farms donation event was attended by SCDNR, Ducks Unlimited, and Governor Henry McMaster. The easement valuation is a quarter of a billion dollars making it the largest conservation easement ever recorded in United States history.

The Harry Hampton Fund has donated a total of \$4,960,000 to SCDNR since 1981, in addition to \$1,300,000 in scholarships.

5. **Introduction of Guests/Constituent Comments**

Shannon Bobertz, Chief of Staff, introduced Buford Mabry, former SCDNR General Counsel; Mike Ruhe, Director of Environmental Affairs and Policy at Duke Energy Corporation; and Norman Pulliam, former SCDNR Board Chairman.

6. **Approval of Minutes**

Chairman Hartley asked if there were any additions, deletions, or corrections to the minutes for the January 29, 2026, Board Meeting. *Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the minutes of the January 29, 2026, meeting be approved as submitted. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.*

7. **Agency Reports/Updates**

Director's Update:

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 highlighted the following items:

- On March 9, eight more abandoned, derelict boats were removed from the Georgetown Harbor resulting in approximately \$400,000 in savings. In total, 83 boats have been removed so far.

- On March 13 at Murrells Inlet, we marked a historic milestone in marine conservation by releasing approximately 10,000 hatchery-grown Southern Flounder into South Carolina estuaries for the first time. The release represents the culmination of four years of pioneering research by SCDNR scientists and established the first Southern flounder stock enhancement program along the Atlantic Coast. The program reflects a science-driven approach to strengthening coastal fisheries and supporting long-term sustainability of species in South Carolina waters and is now serving as a model for not only the rest of the country, but the rest of the world.
- On March 16, we were proud to welcome South Carolina's newest honorary game warden, David Powell, to the SCDNR family. David, a high school sophomore with a passion for wildlife and outdoors, has dreamed of becoming a game warden. Along with the Children's Miracle Network and MUSC Shawn Jenkins Children's Hospital, we were able to make dreams come true. In addition to being sworn in as an honorary game warden, David was also named as an honorary member of the investigations, the K9 team, the drone team, and the dive team.

Presentations:

The Meritorious Service Award was presented to Ken Rentiers.

Commendations:

Commend SCDNR staff for being recognized in Washington, DC, by Association of Joint Venture Management Boards with the Migratory Bird Joint Venture Conservation State Agency Champion Award. The award recognizes SCDNR's work on the conservation and management of the Eastern Black Rail.

Commend Valerie Shannon, Captain Ben Thomas, Amanda Stroud, Pam Corwin, Cheyenne Twilley, Staff Sergeant Tommy Buckhannon, Dan DuPre and agency staff and volunteers who assisted with the 2026 Legislative Reception on February 25 at the SC State Guard Armory. A special recognition to Pam Corwin who generously donated her time to create watercolor wildlife paintings as unique gifts for the guests. It was a wonderful evening and opportunity for General Assembly members, their staff, conservation partners and other special guests to learn what SCDNR is all about. We had 9 members of the Senate, 11 members of the House of Representatives, 165 special guests including staff members and many of our partner organizations in the private sector join us for a fantastic evening made possible by staff and volunteers from across the agency and our partners and especially the Hampton Wildlife Fund.

Commend SCDNR staff on the agency's receipt of the National Award for Transformative River and SC7 Cleanup presented at the Keep America Beautiful Annual Conference recognizing the agency's outstanding leadership in river cleanup, restoration, and corridor stewardship across the Palmetto State, including major efforts along the historic Lynches River and the annual SC7 Expedition.

Commend Joelean Wright of Law Enforcement for her assistance in helping a constituent with obtaining his senior lifetime hunting license and was recognized by the constituent in a letter outlining her exemplary service.

Commend Law Enforcement Lance Corporal Bradley Miller and Lance Corporal Ethan Adair who were recognized in an email from Bailey Burt, SCEMD Region 1 Emergency Coordinator, for their fantastic presentation at the SCEMD Region 1 Quarterly Seminar in Greenville County about the SCDNR A.I.R. team. He was very appreciative of their

presentation and the team's skills and ability to assist across the state with multiple operations.

Commend Law Enforcement First Sergeant John Paul (JP) Jones who was commended in a letter from Dr. David A. Green, Colleton County Fire-Rescue Chief, for his excellent work in responding to a call for a 16-year-old cardiac arrest baseball player and performing chest compressions on the patient until arrival of the fire/paramedics. Dr. Green reported that the patient is now conscious and alert and commended SGT Jones on his critical contribution to saving this child's life.

Commend Law Enforcement Lance Corporal Travis Graham for his hard work that was recognized in an email from Dr. Jim Anderson of Clemson University who wanted to commend LCPL Graham who recently during the snowstorm assisted one of his international students who was heading back to Clemson after conducting research on the coast when a tire blew out on his Clemson truck near Columbia. LCPL Graham (2014 Clemson graduate) stopped by and helped him change his tire. Dr. Anderson noted that "I appreciate your officers' public service and willingness to help. My student and I are highly grateful."

Commend Land, Water and Conservation Division's Melissa Griffin for her work on the publication South Carolina Year in Review 2024 by the State Climatology Office and Robert Clark and Frank Strait for their work on the website A Tale of Two Storms: Debby and Helene by the State Climatology Office, and Meg Gaillard, Cindy Thompson, Keith Bradley, and Csilla Czako for their work on the website The Botanical History Tour by the Heritage Trust Program. These were all winners of the 2025 Notable State Documents Awards presented by the South Carolina State Library which recognizes exemplary state publications, including websites, videos and apps.

Commend Land, Water & Conservation's Tyler Brown and Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries' Kayla Brantley and Joseph Woods on their graduation from the Palmetto Leadership in the Environment, Agriculture, and Forestry Institute - Cohort 3. Also, Kayla Brantley was voted by her peers in the Cohort to receive the "Exceptional Engagement Award." South Carolina's Palmetto Leadership Program for the Environment, Agriculture and Forestry is a two-year intensive academic, experiential learning and networking curriculum designed to facilitate personal and professional growth and success, while sharpening character and leadership skills for each participant.

Commend Education, Outreach and Information's Will Mundhenke, State Naturalist and Director of Education, and Beth Foley, Conservation Education Coordinator, for their hard work and efforts in coordination of the very successful 1st Annual Natural Resource Fest held at the State Farmer's Market on January 30. We received many compliments and emails from people who attended the event, including one from a Williston-Elko Middle School Counselor who brought 12 of her students to the event and emailed to commend staff who "are all a credit to your professions and excellent ambassadors for your field." Also, a mother emailed to thank the DNR team for an incredible opportunity and said her son is "now in love with pursuing his career as a DNR officer..."

Commend Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries' Kevin Kubach, Fisheries Biologist, who was named the 2026 South Carolina American Fisheries Society Chapter Conservationist of the Year for his long-standing leadership in freshwater fisheries

research and conservation. Over more than two decades of service, he has led major statewide sampling initiatives, contributed to conservation planning tools and the State Wildlife Action Plan, and supported habitat protection efforts.

Commend Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries' Preston Chrisman, Fisheries Biologist, who was recently elected President-Elect of the South Carolina Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, a professional organization dedicated to advancing fisheries science and conservation. In this role, he will chair the Program Committee and help plan the chapter's annual meeting and workshops before serving subsequent terms as President and Past-President.

Commend Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries' David Tant, Region 4 Natural Resource Technician, who was recently named Wildlife Section Technician of the Year. With more than 23 years of service working on multiple wildlife management areas in Unit 4D, he is recognized for his strong mechanical expertise, dedication, and reliability in completing a wide range of conservation and land management tasks.

Commend Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries' Andy Krieg, Small Game Technical Assistance Biologist, who received the Willie McCray Conservationist of the Year Award from the Lowcountry Chapter of Quail Forever.

8. Advisory Committee Reports

A. Governor's Cup Billfishing Series Advisory Board

Blaik Keppler, Deputy Director for Marine Resources, reported that the Governor's Cup Billfishing Series Advisory Board met on Friday, February 6, at Fort Johnson. Staff provided an overview of the 2025 Series revenue and proposed expenditures for the remainder of 2026, which the Advisory Board approved. The Advisory Board reviewed and approved the 2026 contracts between the individual tournaments in the series and finally the Advisory Board reviewed and approved nominations for the tournaments committee chair and vice chair positions. The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, August 28, at 10:00 a.m. at Fort Johnson.

B. Waterfowl Advisory Committee

Billy Dukes, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, reported that the Waterfowl Advisory Committee met on March 12, 2026, in this room. The committee received a summary of the 2025-2026 duck season results on Category One waterfowl areas, which indicated harvest above the long-term average for all sites combined and record or near record harvest rates for Donnelley and Santee Delta East WMAs. This year, Santee Delta East had a limit hunt during which every hunter killed and retrieved their limit of ducks. This is a big achievement there from our staff at the upper Coastal Waterfowl Project. Staff provided the status report and maintenance plans for the coming year for Category One areas. Major enhancement projects are planned for Cedar Island, Bear Island and Bonneau Ferry WMAs. The Waterfowl Advisory Committee had three action items and recommendations. First, they endorsed the staff recommendations for the 2026-2027 migratory bird seasons and bag limits. They approved the staff recommendation for Fiscal Year 2027 Duck Stamp budget and they recommended that SCDNR pursue charging successful applicants in the Wood Duck Box Program, \$50 per box, to defray the cost of the program. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 12, at Santee Coastal Reserve.

C. Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee

Mr. Hutchins reported that the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee met at the Love Farms State Shooting Complex in Eastover on Thursday, February 5, at 10:00 a.m. Major Billy Downer, SCDNR Law Enforcement Staff Operations, provided an overview of Love Farms Wildlife Management Area and the Palmetto Shooting Complex including the property acquisitions, facility development and public use opportunities. Conner Owens, Region 3 Fisheries Biologist, presented an overview of an ongoing effort to enhance fish habitats at Lake Murray, focusing on habitat restoration and improving angler access to fish attractors. Jay Butfiloski, Furbearer and Alligator Program Coordinator, presented a summary of the 2025 public alligator hunting season including applicant data, harvest results, management actions aimed at increasing opportunity while maintaining a sustainable population. Mikayla Thistle, Marsh and Wading Birds Biologist, presented a 10-year review of research monitoring management efforts for the Eastern Black Rail in South Carolina, including species status, habitat requirements, and conservation strategies. Will Dillman, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Deputy Director, reported on legislative updates, including legislative priorities and status of new and current bills. The date for the next meeting is April 30, 2026.

D. Land, Water and Conservation Advisory Committee

Mrs. Blackley reported that the Land, Water and Conservation Advisory Committee met on Tuesday, March 10 here at the SCDNR headquarters. The Land, Water and Conservation Advisory Committee received their annual FOIA and legal training from SCDNR Chief Counsel, Susan Porter. Additionally, the Land, Water and Conservation Advisory Committee received a divisional and budget update from Deputy Director Ken Rentiers. The Land, Water and Conservation Advisory Committee offered five new appointments and six reappointments for consideration by the SCDNR Board of Directors. To close out the meeting, the committee thanked and acknowledged Ken Rentiers, who is retiring on March 31, 2026, after 17 years of faithful service and commitment to the division. The next meeting will be scheduled for a date in June of 2026.

E. Law Enforcement Advisory Committee

Mr. Swygert reported the Law Enforcement Advisory Committee met at the Santee Coastal Reserve on March 10, 2026. At the meeting there was a staff presentation by Jay Cantrell on the history of the property. There was also a presentation by the drone team given by Matthew Beckett and Lieutenant Andrew Godowns. The committee unanimously voted to recommend to the SCDNR Board to take up the deer/dog hunting issue, and we have comments that will be included in the next board meeting. The time and date of the next meeting will be announced before the next board meeting.

9. Item(s) for Board Information

A. Climate Update

Dr. Hope Mizzell, Land, Water and Conservation Division, gave the Board a report on the recent snow event. Dr. Mizzell provided temperature analysis, drought status, precipitation percentiles, climate perspective, Statewide Red Flag Fire Alert notice, burning ban notice, streamflow, lake levels, precipitation forecast, and temperature forecast.

10. Item(s) for Board Action

A. Ratification of Governor's Cup Billfishing Series Annual Report

Blaik Keppler, Deputy Director for Marine Resources Division, provided a brief overview of the approved annual report for the Series and requested ratification. *Mr. Lee made a motion that the Department of Natural Resources Board, upon recommendation of the Governor's Cup Billfishing Series Advisory Board, approve the 2025 GCBS Annual Report as provided. Mr. Oxner seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.*

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

Ross Self, Freshwater Fisheries Chief, provided a brief overview of the request to approve the release of funds from the Lake Greenwood budget sub-account of the South Carolina Mitigation Trust Fund in the amount of \$226,000 to continue to support fish habitat enhancement on Lake Greenwood. *Mrs. Blackley made a motion that the Department of Natural Resources Board, as trustees for the South Carolina Mitigation Trust Fund, accept the recommendation of the Director and SCDNR staff, and approve the distribution of Buzzard's Roost/Lake Greenwood Mitigation Trust Funds in the amount of \$226,000 for the purpose of continuing the Lake Greenwood Habitat Enhancement Project, pursuant to SC Code of Law 50-1-310. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.*

C. Migratory Bird Season Approval

Billy Dukes, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, provided a brief overview of the request to approve the 2026-2027 migratory bird seasons with the expansion of the Black-Bellied Whistling Duck limit from one to five. *Mr. Lee made a motion that the Department of Natural Resources Board approve the 2026-27 Migratory Bird Seasons for South Carolina as recommended by the Director, SCDNR staff and approved by the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee. Mr. Hutchins seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.*

D. Duck Stamp Budget Approval

Billy Dukes, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, provided a brief overview of the request to approve the FY27 Migratory Waterfowl Permit funding request in the amount of \$1,272,000. *Mr. Swygert made a motion that the Department of Natural Resources Board approve FY27 Migratory Waterfowl Permit funding request in the amount of \$1,272,000 as recommended by the Director, SCDNR staff and approved by the Waterfowl Advisory Committee. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.*

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 E, F and pursuant to SC Code Section 30-4-70(A)(2) to discuss contractual matters related to Items for Board Action G, H, I, J, and K. Mr. Hutchins 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. Lee seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

13. Item(s) for Board Action

E. Conservation District Commissioner Appointments/Reappointments

Ken Rentiers, Deputy Director of Land, Water and Conservation, provided a brief overview of the request to approve the Conservation District Commissioner appointments and reappointments. *Mrs. Blackley made a motion that the Department of Natural Resources Board, upon the recommendation of the Director, SCDNR staff, and the Land, Water and Conservation Advisory Committee, reappoint John Rice to serve a subsequent term beginning March 28, 2024 through March 27, 2028; Willie Sarratt to serve a subsequent term beginning April 8, 2023 through April 7, 2027; Keith Allen to serve a subsequent term beginning August 16, 2024 through August 15, 2028; Morris Johnson to serve a subsequent term beginning April 29, 2025 through April 28, 2029; Jeff Clark, Jr. to serve a subsequent term beginning May 12, 2025 through May 11, 2029; and David Owens to serve a subsequent term beginning November 29, 2025 through November 28, 2029; and appoint Terrance Wyatt to serve a term beginning March 27, 2026 through January 31, 2027; Grant McClure to serve a term beginning March 27, 2026 through January 31, 2029; Francis Wilson to serve a term beginning March 27, 2026 through April 30, 2027; Kimeko Alexander to serve a term beginning March 27, 2026 through January 31, 2027; and Robert Winchester to serve a term beginning March 27, 2026 through August 20, 2028. Mr. Hutchins seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.*

F. Marine Advisory Committee Reappointment

Blaik Keppler, Deputy Director for Marine Resources, provided a brief overview of the request to reappoint John P. Cribb to serve a second four-year term on the Marine Advisory Committee. *Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the Department of Natural Resources Board, upon the recommendation of the Director, SCDNR staff, and the Marine Advisory Committee, reappoint John P. Cribb to serve a second four-year term beginning July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2030 on the Marine Advisory Committee. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.*

G. Preliminary Approval of Property Acquisition in Jasper County

Ken Prosser, Assistant Deputy Director of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, provided a brief overview of the request to approve evaluation of a potential acquisition in Jasper County. *Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the Department of Natural Resources Board, upon the recommendation of the Director and SCDNR staff, grant preliminary approval to evaluate the potential acquisition of approximately 1.7 acres in Jasper County. Mr. Lee seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.*

H. Preliminary Approval of Property Acquisition in Kershaw County

Mr. Lee made a motion that the Department of Natural Resources Board accept the recommendation of the Director and SCDNR staff and, subject to standard due diligence, grant preliminary approval to investigate the purchase of approximately 1,976 acres in Kershaw County. Mr. Swygert seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

I. Preliminary Approval of Property Acquisition in Barnwell County

Mrs. Blackley made a motion that the Department of Natural Resources Board accept the recommendation of the Director and SCDNR staff and, subject to

standard due diligence, grant preliminary approval to investigate the purchase of approximately 512 acres in Barnwell County. Mr. Swygert seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

J. Preliminary Approval of Property Acquisition in Richland County

Mr. Hutchins made a motion that the Department of Natural Resources Board accept the recommendation of the Director and SCDNR staff and, subject to standard due diligence, grant preliminary approval to investigate the purchase of approximately 114 acres in Richland County. Mr. Blackley seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

K. Approval of Settlement and Acceptance of Property

Luke Allen, Executive Office, provided a brief overview of the request to approve the settlement agreement by which SCDNR would accept title to a portion of Captain Sams Spit on Kiawah Island in Charleston County. Prior to discussion and action on this item, Mr. Hutchins disclosed a potential conflict of interest regarding this matter and submitted a written recusal statement. Mr. Hutchins was excused from and did not participate in the discussion, deliberation, or vote on this matter. Mr. Lee made a motion that the Department of Natural Resources Board, upon the recommendation of the Director and SCDNR staff, approve the settlement pursuant to which SCDNR accepts title to an approximately 76-acre portion of the property commonly known as Captain Sams Spit on Kiawah Island in Charleston County subject to a conservation easement held by the Kiawah Island Natural Habitat Conservancy. Mr. Swygert seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously among the members voting.

14. Comments

Former Board Chairman, Norman Pulliam, thanked the SCDNR Board and staff for continuing to do great work and their spectacular service to the state of South Carolina.

15. Time and Location of Next Board Meeting

The Board's next meeting will be held Thursday, June 4, 2026.

16. Adjournment

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