

MINUTES

SOUTH CAROLINA CONSERVATION BANK

Wednesday, December 18, 2024 - 10:00 am
FMU Freshwater Ecology Center, Florence, SC

The South Carolina Conservation Bank Board (SCCB) held its quarterly meeting on Wednesday, December 18, 2024, at 10:00 am at the FMU Freshwater Ecology Center, Florence, SC. Notice of the date, time, and place of the meeting was posted and mailed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act to the persons, organizations, and news media that have requested such notification. Chairman Michael McShane presided at the meeting and members present included Rob Howell, Peter King, Charles Lane, Thomas Lavender, Jared Thompson, Richmond Wilhoit, Jr.; and Ex-Officio members Russell Hubright for Dr. Walt McPhail, SC Forestry Commission, Ken Prosser for Norman F. Pulliam, SC Department of Natural Resources, Paul McCormack for Duane Parrish, SC Parks Recreation & Tourism, Commissioner Hugh Weathers, SC Department of Agriculture, Secretary Justin Powell, SC Department of Transportation. Board Members absent were Thomas Mullikin and Ex-Officio member Harry Lightsey, SC Department of Commerce.

1) WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

Chairman McShane called the meeting to order, welcomed, and thanked everyone for their attendance. He then recognized and expressed gratitude to Francis Marion University President Dr. Fred Carter and colleagues for hosting the meeting. FMU Executive Vice President Darryl Bridges was invited to speak and describe the FMU Freshwater Ecology Center Complex. Chairman McShane then recognized and welcomed Cody Simpson, representing Governor McMaster's office, and Ben Duncan, Chief Resilience Officer of the SC Office of Resilience. Next, Chairman McShane thanked Lyles Cooper of Pee Dee Land Trust for arranging the meeting as well as the previous day's Board Member tour of nearby protected properties. Ms. Cooper then introduced William Schofield, Chairman of Florence County Council, who welcomed the Board to Florence County.

2) ROLL CALL

Chairman McShane called roll and a quorum was established with 7 Board Members and 5 Ex-Officio members in attendance. Mr. McShane stated that proper public notice had been given for the meeting. He further reminded Board members to state any conflicts of interest during the meeting and recuse themselves from discussion or voting on those matters by completing the recusal form in their board member packets.

3) CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Chairman McShane commented on Snow's Island Celebration and commended Ben Duncan and the SC Office of Resilience on this important conservation success. He then reminded Board members about the upcoming Ethics filing deadline and stated that reminders and links to the filing portal and Ethics Commission training videos will be emailed to Board members in January. Next, he informed the Board that Rob Howell and Jared Thompson are working together to determine ways for the Bank to acknowledge and appropriately recognize corporate partners of Board-funded projects and will submit a report of their suggestions to the Board in the next few months.

4) PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. McShane opened the floor to anyone who'd submitted a request to speak during the Public Comments portion of the meeting. Steve Hamilton, retiring Director of Nation Ford Land Trust, introduced the new Director, Jennifer McAdams. There being no other comments, Mr. McShane called for the next agenda item.

5) ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Mr. McShane stated that the Board was sent a draft copy of the 09/24/2024 Quarterly Meeting minutes prior to the meeting for their review and that copies were within the Board Member meeting materials. The Chairman asked for

any additions, deletions, or corrections to the meeting minutes. There being none, Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Lavender seconded, and the motion unanimously passed.

6) NEW BUSINESS

a) Board Committees

Chairman McShane announced the members of the Grants Review Committee for the 2025 calendar year: Mr. Howell (Chair), Dr. King, Mr. Lavender, Mr. Wilhoit, Dr. McPhail (or SC Forestry designee), Secretary Powell (or SCDOT designee), and Chief Resilience Officer Duncan (or SCOR designee).

b) Director's Update

Director West distributed a proposed amendment to the Bank's internal Policies and Procedures regarding exceptions to *Policy 2.6.1 No Awards for Existing Protected Properties*. The proposed policy amendment was included within Board Member handouts and reads as follows:

Exceptions: Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Board may elect to fund an application request when, in the Board's sole discretion, the project would yield a substantially increased conservation outcome or result in improved public access to the property.

Mr. Lane stated that the proposed policy was reviewed and approved by the Grants Review Committee GRC. Mr. Howell made a motion to approve the policy amendment, Mr. Lane seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. Next, Director West requested Board approval regarding a modification of the Working Ag Fund Income Attestation Form to include a time period look-back of three years; farmers who meet the income requirement for two out of those three years will be eligible recipients of grants from the Working Ag Fund. Mr. Lavender made a motion to approve the Income Attestation Form as modified, Mr. Thompson seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

c) Project Updates

Director West distributed a list of projects and updated Board members on their status. 25 projects totaling over \$38 million dollars and protecting over 13,000 acres have closed so far during FY25. Director West informed Board Members that all outstanding projects are scheduled to close timely and are waiting on federal grants, partner funding, or other reasonable extenuating circumstances.

d) Financial Report

A summary of the Bank's financial position was included within the Board member handouts. Director West reported that the Bank has a total of \$20 million in its Standard Grants Program, nearly \$1.4 in the Working Ag Lands Fund, and \$4.7 million in SHEP Funds, all of which are unobligated & available for new grants. Mr. West also reminded the Board that as reimbursable grants close, the Bank will, in turn, have those funds available for new grant applications. Pending reimbursements total \$12 million, all of which are tracking to be received as expected.

e) Grants Review Committee Recommendations

Chairman McShane yielded the floor to Director West and Mr. Lane to present a review of pending applications and the Grants Review Committee's funding recommendations for the current cycle. Chairman McShane reminded Board members to complete the Recusal Form if they need to recuse themselves from any project discussions due to potential conflicts of interest.

1 Pee Dee Basin RMS Initiative

SC Forestry Commission applied for a \$3,000,000 grant to acquire 880 acres in fee simple in Georgetown County. Maria Whitehead of Open Space Institute Land Trust and James Douglas of SC Forestry Commission spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #1 and a funding level of \$3,300,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

2 Black River SP - Browns Ferry

Open Space Institute Land Trust and SC Parks Recreation and Tourism applied for a \$498,000 grant to acquire 311 acres in fee simple in Georgetown County. Maria Whitehead of Open Space Institute Land Trust and Paul McCormack of SCPRT spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #2 and a funding level of \$498,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

3 Black River SP - Cold Creek

Open Space Institute Land Trust and SC Parks Recreation and Tourism applied for a \$221,107 grant to acquire 179 acres in fee simple in Georgetown County. Maria Whitehead of Open Space Institute Land Trust and Paul McCormack of SCPRT spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #3 and a funding level of \$221,107. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

4 Pipsisewa Passage - Paris Mountain

Naturaland Trust for a \$2,400,000 grant to acquire 65 acres in fee simple in Greenville County. Mac Stone of Naturaland Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #4 and a funding level of \$2,400,00, with a reimbursement of \$1,000,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

5 Beech Hill

Open Space Institute Land Trust applied for a \$3,350,000 grant to acquire 1,643 acres in fee simple Dorchester County. Justin Park of Open Space Institute Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #5 and a funding level of \$3,350,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation. Chairman McShane and Mr. Lane disclosed that they are Board members of the East Edisto Conservancy.

6 Burch's Mill

Florence County applied for a \$1,250,000 grant to acquire 375 acres in fee simple in Florence County. William Schofield, Chairman of Florence County Council, spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #6 and a funding level of \$1,250,000, conditioned on staff approval of a management plan with a level of public access that meets the Bank's statutory requirements. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

7 Utsey Tract

Lowcountry Land Trust applied for a \$300,000 grant for a 298-acre conservation easement in Dorchester County. Ashley Demosthenes of Lowcountry Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #7 and a funding level of \$300,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

8 Oscar's Place

Lowcountry Land Trust applied for a \$80,000 grant for a 50-acre conservation easement in Charleston County. Ashley Demosthenes of Lowcountry Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #8 and a funding level of \$80,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

9 Cattails Tree Farm Extension

Pee Dee Land Trust applied for a \$176,000 grant for a 258-acre conservation easement in Marlboro County. Seth Cook of Pee Dee Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #9 and a funding level of \$176,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

10 Red Top Park

Lowcountry Land Trust applied for a \$100,000 grant to acquire 6 acres in fee simple in Charleston County. Ashley Demosthenes of Lowcountry Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #10 and a funding level of \$100,000 conditioned on staff approval of a management plan with a level of public access that meets the Bank's statutory requirements and a conservation easement that ensures the historical and conservation values are protected. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

11 Alston Tract

Congaree Land Trust applied for a \$64,350 grant for a 174-acre conservation easement in Sumter County. Stuart White of Congaree Land Trust and the landowner spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #11 and a funding level of \$64,350. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

12 Red Cabin

Upstate Forever applied for a \$500,000 grant for a 272-acre conservation easement in Spartanburg County. Scott Park of Upstate Forever spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #12 and a deferral of funding pending a review appraisal to be obtained by the Bank to assess the project further. Since the Grants Review Committee's meeting, a review appraisal was conducted that confirms the appraisal value of the project. Following discussion, Mr. Lavender made a motion to approve a funding level of \$500,000, Mr. Lane seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

13 KAFA Lynches River Tract

Congaree Land Trust applied for a \$35,250 grant for a 130-acre conservation easement in Lee County. Stuart White of Congaree Land Trust addressed the Board with a request to withdraw the application and resubmit in the next funding cycle. Chairman McShane accepted the applicant's request to withdraw the application.

14 Price Family Farm

Nation Ford Land Trust applied for a \$205,000 grant for a 199-acre conservation easement in York County. Steve Hamilton of Nation Ford Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #14 and a funding level of \$205,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

15 Rivers Farm 1

Due to potential conflicts of interest, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Lavender recused themselves from discussion or voting on this project. SC Farm Bureau Land Trust applied for a \$885,000 grant for a 669-acre conservation easement in Sumter/Lee Counties. Richard Carr of SC Farm Bureau Land Trust and the landowner spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #15 and a funding level of \$885,000 from the Working Ag Lands fund. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

16 Burrows Farm 1

Due to potential conflicts of interest, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Lavender recused themselves from discussion or voting on this project. SC Farm Bureau Land Trust applied for a \$288,000 grant for a 284-acre conservation easement in Sumter County. Richard Carr of SC Farm Bureau Land Trust and the landowner spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #16 and a funding level of \$288,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

17 Rivers Farm 2

Due to potential conflicts of interest, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Lavender recused themselves from discussion or voting on this project. SC Farm Bureau Land Trust applied for a \$410,000 grant for a 348-acre conservation easement in Sumter County. Richard Carr of SC Farm Bureau Land Trust and the landowner spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #17 and a funding level of \$410,00 from

the Working Ag Lands fund. The Board unanimously approved the Grant Review Committee's recommendation.

18 Burrows Farm 2

Due to potential conflicts of interest, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Lavender recused themselves from discussion or voting on this project. SC Farm Bureau Land Trust applied for a \$248,000 grant for a 296-acre conservation easement in Sumter County. Richard Carr of SC Farm Bureau Land Trust and the landowner spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #18 and a funding level of \$248,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

19 Tokeena Angus

Due to a potential conflict of interest, Mr. Lavender recused himself from discussion or voting on this project. SC Farm Bureau Land Trust applied for a \$160,000 grant for a 99-acre conservation easement in Oconee County. Richard Carr of SC Farm Bureau Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #19 and a funding level of \$160,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

20 Jeffers Tract

Pee Dee Land Trust applied for a \$20,000 grant for a 32-acre conservation easement in Florence County. Seth Cook of Pee Dee Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #20 and a funding level of \$20,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

21 Hodge Tract

Congaree Land Trust applied for a \$39,600 grant for an 89-acre conservation easement in Clarendon County. Stuart White of Congaree Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #21 and a funding level of \$39,600. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

22 Sam Dargan Tract

Pee Dee Land Trust applied for a \$20,000 grant for a 40-acre conservation easement in Darlington County. Seth Cook of Pee Dee Land Trust and Keith Williamson, former Conservation Bank Board member and local landowner, spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #22 and a funding level of \$20,000. The Board unanimously approved the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

7) BOARD MEMBER OPEN DISCUSSION

Board members expressed their gratitude to Board leadership and Bank staff. Chairman McShane thanked the ex-officio members and stated appreciation for their continued collaboration. Ben Duncan, Eric Fosmire, Maria Whitehead, Terry Hurley, Cody Simpson gathered to present Francis Marion University and the SC Conservation Bank with a special recognition for their help in the Snow's Island acquisition. Darryl Bridges accepted the gift on behalf of Dr. Carter, and Chairman McShane and Raleigh West accepted it on behalf of the Bank.

8) TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chairman stated dates for future Board meetings:

03/19/2025 Quarterly Board Meeting, Columbia, SC (GRC will meet on 03/05/2025 for FY25 Cycle 3 Project Application Review)

06/18/2025, Quarterly Board Meeting, Location TBD (GRC will meet on 06/04/2025 for FY25 Cycle 4 Project Application Review)

Other Tentative FY26 Quarterly Board Meeting dates are September 17, 2025 & December 10, 2025

9) ADJOURN

The Chairman called for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Lavender made the motion, Mr. Lane seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.