



**NORTH CAROLINA
SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION
BUSINESS SESSION MEETING MINUTES
January 7, 2024**

Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
Division of Soil & Water Conservation
Sheraton Imperial Hotel RTP
Imperial Rooms 4 - 7
4700 Emperor Boulevard
Durham, NC 27703

Commission Members	Guests	Guests
Chris Hughes	Tim Beard	Linda Bunnell
Billy Kilpatrick	Elise McLaughlin	Jeff Stone
James Lamb	Eric Pare	Randy McDaniel
John Langdon	Amanda Sands	John East
Brian Parker	Keith Larick	Rachel Smith
Derek Potter	Charlie Bass	Tim Huffman
George Teague	Dewitt Hardee	Angie B. Quinn
Commission Counsel	James Ferguson	Myles Payne
Phillip Reynolds	Barbara Bleiweis	Craig Myers
Guests	Bill Yarborough	Mike Willis
David Williams	J'Nay Domineck	Steve Harris
Julie Henshaw	Jane Humphrey	Richard Saunders
Matt Safford	Nicole Warren	Beth Pugh Farrell
Josh Vetter	Michael Murphy	Mark Waller
Bryan Evans	Landon Swisher	Tommy Houser
Michael Shepherd	Steve Modlin	Tracy Warren
Lisa Fine	Jennie Hanifan	Chester Lowder
Cayle Aldridge	Joseph Wenzel	Denny Norris
Tom Hill	James D. Booth	Guests - Online
Scott Melvin	Bob Lindsay	Anne Coan
John Beck	Rob Baldwin	Heather Reichert
Helen Wiklund	Melanie Harris	Lorien Deaton
Ken Parks	Henry Faison	

Chairman Langdon called the meeting to order at 3:14 p.m. Chairman Langdon asked everyone to pause for a moment of silence in memory and honor of our nation's farmers and ranchers, our world, our communities, and our families and where it all begins in soil and in water and management of the soil and the water. Chairman Langdon inquired whether any Commission members need to declare any conflict of interest, or appearance of conflict of interest, that may exist for agenda items under

consideration, as mandated by the State Ethics Act. Chairman Langdon welcomed everyone and stated the meeting guidelines.

1. **Approval of Agenda:** Chairman Langdon asked for approval of the agenda. Commissioner Potter moved to approve the agenda and Commissioner Parker seconded. Motion carried.
2. **Approval of Meeting Minutes:** Chairman Langdon asked for approval of the minutes. Commissioner Hughes moved to approve the minutes and Commissioner Potter seconded. Motion carried.
 - 2A. November 14, 2023, Work Session Meeting Minutes
 - 2B. November 15, 2023, Business Session Meeting Minutes
3. **Division Report:** Chairman Langdon recognized Director David Williams to present. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes. Director Williams stated the following:
 - Personnel Update
 - Labor Market Adjustment (LMA) Reserve
 - Legislature included an LMA Reserve to recruit and retain employees
 - Department prioritized Engineers and Engineer Tech position classes for adjustments to attract candidates
 - No posting yet to determine benefit
 - Opportunity for additional adjustments in FY 2025
 - New Division Website
 - February Division Meetings across the State
 - Basic Training and Cost Share Training
 - Future Meeting Dates
 - March 26-27; location TBD
 - May 14-15; location TBD
 - July 23-24; location TBD

4. **Association Report:** Chairman Langdon recognized President Teague to present. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes. President Teague thanked everyone for attending the 80th Annual Meeting. President Teague stated the following:
 - 2023 Association Accomplishments
 - Five Basic Trainings were conducted in 2023 and one training yesterday

Chairman Langdon asked for all partners, Division staff, and supervisors to stand and identify themselves.

5. **Executive Director's Report:** Chairman Langdon recognized Mr. Bryan Evans to present. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes. Mr. Evans stated the following:
 - 2024 Legislative Items
 - Short session for the General Assembly
 - Looking at different areas for funding: PL-566 and technical assistance

- Basic Training for Soil and Water Conservation Supervisors offered yesterday and three in February
 - Grow More
 - Partnering with the National Wildlife Federation and working on a grant through NWF for Outreach Training this year with four meetings across the State
- 6. NRCS Report:** Chairman Langdon recognized Mr. Tim Beard to present. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes. Mr. Beard stated the following:

- Operating under a Continuing Resolution (CR) until January 19 and restricted from traveling or training staff
- Personnel Update
 - Ms. Odessa Armstrong is working at the National level
 - Mr. Ruben Torres is working at the National level
 - Mr. Michael Jones is out of office due to a health issue
 - Ms. J'Nay Domineck joined NRCS from Mississippi and is working as the Assistant State Conservationist in Area 3 Field Operations
- Fiscal Year 2024 Program Updates
 - \$8.2M has been allocated in IRA funds
 - \$13M has been allocated in Classic CSP
 - Sign-up for EQIP was by November 3
 - EQIP Classic - 2,400 applications received
 - IRA EQIP – 434 applications received
 - \$55M of EQIP funding for both programs
 - Breakdown of EQIP by Area
 - Area 1 – 671 applications
 - Area 2 – 1,026 applications
 - Area 3 – 1,134 applications
 - Proposed second EQIP sign-up is for early March
 - An Urban ACT Now pool was added to address applications in urban areas as part of the IRA funding opportunity with funding pools including both Classic and IRA
- General Fiscal Year 2024 Updates
 - National Office must identify first-time customers who have not worked with NRCS before and never received direct assistance from NRCS and must be reported in the application process
 - FSA staff are now required to input all HEL and Wetland determination requests into the Conservation Desktop (CD)

- 7. Consent Agenda:** Chairman Langdon asked for approval of the consent agenda. Commissioner Teague moved to approve the consent agenda and Commissioner Potter seconded. Motion carried.

7A. Supervisor Appointments:

- Mitchell Haigler, Cabarrus SWCD, filling the unexpired appointed term of Kevin May, Jr. for 2022-2026 with an attached resignation letter from Mr. May

7B. Supervisor Contracts: 6 contracts; totaling \$42,808

Copies of the reports are included as an official part of the minutes.

8. Job Approval Authority: Chairman Langdon recognized Mr. Josh Vetter to present. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes.

8A. Applications: Mr. Vetter stated there are three applications that have been submitted and the practices have been verified. The Division staff and the Job Approval Authority Committee recommend approving these applications.

Chairman Langdon asked for approval of the applications. Commissioner Potter moved to approve the applications and Commissioner Hughes seconded. Motion carried.

9. Technical Specialist Training Update: Chairman Langdon recognized Mr. Michael Shepherd to present. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes.

9A. Audit Results: Mr. Shepherd stated Technical Specialists are required to receive six hours of training. This year 57 courses were submitted for credit by 34 Technical Specialists. The information was reviewed by a 10% random audit of all Technical Specialists that submitted training credits. All the results were in compliance.

9B. Training Fulfillment Report: Mr. Shepherd stated during the three-year window there were four Technical Specialists subject to completing training, but Mr. Ronald Zurlinden decided to not fulfill his Technical Specialist training requirement by December 31, 2023 and has agreed to have his designation rescinded.

Chairman Langdon asked for approval of the report. Commissioner Lamb moved to approve the report and Commissioner Parker seconded. Motion carried.

10. StRAP Progress Update: Chairman Langdon recognized Mr. Matt Safford to present. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes. Mr. Safford stated the following:

- As of December 19, 2023
 - Division has paid out \$19.3M in reimbursements
 - 88 grantees have submitted request for payment
 - 220 requests for payment processed
 - Completed work:

Region	Linear Feet of Debris Removal Completed	Beaver Dams Removed
Statewide	2,598,624	629
Coastal Plain	1,812,323	439
Piedmont	470,389	124
Mountains	315,912	66

- 29 PL-566 watershed structure repairs
- Total planned work: 4.9M linear feet of stream debris removal

- 740 different stream segments, which has increased since grantees have projects that have come in under budget
 - Twenty-three contracts closed out with three contracts pending close out
 - Current contracts remain in effect until December 31, 2024
 - Next deadline is January 31, 2024, when the 4Q2023 report is due
- Received \$20M from the Legislature
- FY 2024 Application Window is November 27, 2023 – February 9, 2024
- Timeline Updated
- Contracts will last until December 31, 2026
- Application Q&A Sessions took place in December and will take place tomorrow at the Annual Meeting plus a virtual session this month
- Current Application Status
 - Forty-one new applications
 - Three applications completed and submitted

11. Engineering Services Workload Report: Chairman Langdon recognized Mr. Scott Melvin to present. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes. Mr. Melvin stated the following:

- Reporting Process
 - Projects are entered in Teamwork where you see incoming and outgoing work and the milestones of a project
 - Regional Engineering Map the East and West projects was highlighted with two team leads
 - 124 projects in the West and 94 projects in the East
 - List of engineers in the Division
 - Pursuing Statewide workload imbalances
 - Map of Spatial Distribution of Projects by Area and by project count was shown
 - Project Type Distribution by Area for Professional Engineers (PE) was shown
 - Approximately 10% of projects are waiting for construction
 - Project Type Distribution by Area Eligible for SWCC JAA Projects Expanded was shown
- Engineering Services Section Overview
- Workload Data Graph was shown with the sum of milestones completed and created
- Addressing the Backlog for Engineering wait times includes several contributing factors
 - Always been a backlog; never quantified in the past
 - Staffing due to loss of experienced engineers, district staff, hiring difficulties
 - Regional workload imbalance
 - Natural disasters
 - Reducing the Backlog
 - Increase efficiency and decrease the workload by training staff, hiring private consultants, assign Raleigh engineers to more western projects, and JAA Program needs more self-sufficient districts

There was much discussion about the Division requesting additional funding for engineering services and StRAP by submitting a proposal to the Legislature to request non-recurring StRAP funding one-time for engineering consultants.

Director Williams stated we can use 5% of funds for StRAP for administration and engineering. Chairman Langdon challenged all districts to get involved and achieve what we need to get done. Director Williams stated district staff are eager to get trained.

IV. Public Comments: Chairman Langdon asked for public comments.

Mr. Randy McDaniel with Cleveland SWCD stated engineers are great, and we need to have them, but there are a lot of buildings, ponds, drainage, and no common sense. Mr. McDaniel stated his disappointment as a part-time supervisor working for an entity or the State and that he must travel for work, he should not be penalized for the money he receives from the State.

Director Williams stated there are many people that work part-time for the state. Mr. Bill Yarborough was a full-time state employee working as a district supervisor and Mr. McDaniel is being treated the same as a full-time, salaried employee but is a part-time employee. It is a state law.

Director Williams stated reimbursements have been delayed. The State switched to a new payment system in October and Accounting did not make a single payment in October. Cost share payments are behind. The Division will push the reimbursements through for this meeting as quickly as possible. Director Williams stated the mileage reimbursement rate for supervisors is 25 cents per mile as well as for other Commissions including the Legislators, but the Federal government is 67 cents per mile. The General Assembly must act to approve the rate increase.

Ms. Beth Farrell, Wake SWCD supervisor, stated it was brought to her attention that the staff was not made aware of staff in other districts with Job Approval Authority (JAA). It would be beneficial if there was a portal somewhere for the district staff to reach out and collaborate.

Mr. Josh Vetter stated that there is an on-line database, but it is not publicly available. We do need to let districts see the information. We do provide the information when it is requested. One way to address this is to collaborate with each other. Many district staff members have JAA, and we must figure out how to share the information, but there are licensing issues.

Commissioner Hughes stated it is already a public record because everyone is listed that attends these meetings. There is no reason legally why we cannot put the JAA information on the website where it is easier for people to find and is a public record.

Mr. Mike Willis stated a few years ago the Commission passed a resolution called A Good Neighbor Policy. This policy is for emergency situations and could be tied in and utilized more and let our engineering staff stay more on the technical assistance side and stream restoration side and harder projects. We need to share this information with district staff and stay on task.

Chairman Langdon stated we need to have a monitor in front of us instead of using our personal device.

Chairman Langdon recognized Commissioner Chris Hughes with a well-deserved plaque and thanked him for representing his district and for all his contributions as our president and past president.

Chairman Langdon recognized Commissioner Derek Potter with a well-deserved plaque for his appreciation for all his contributions, wisdom, and advice.

Chairman Langdon thanked everyone for their attendance and participation.

V. Adjournment: Chairman Langdon passed the gavel to Vice Chairman Potter to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned at 4:52 p.m.

David B. Williams, Director
Division of Soil & Water Conservation, Raleigh, N.C.

Helen Wiklund, Recording Secretary

These minutes were approved by the North Carolina Soil & Water Conservation Commission on March , 2024.