

MINUTES

SOUTH CAROLINA CONSERVATION BANK

Wednesday, September 27, 2023 - 10:00 am
SC Forestry Commission Headquarters, 5500 Broad River Road, Columbia, SC

The South Carolina Conservation Bank Board (SCCB) held its quarterly meeting on Wednesday, September 27, 2023, at 10:00 am at SC Forestry Commission Headquarters, 5500 Broad River Road Columbia, 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 as have requested such notification. Chairman Michael McShane presided at the meeting and members present included Rob Howell, Peter King, Charles Lane, Thomas Lavender, Pamela S. Porter, Thomas Mullikin, Curtis Spencer, Jared Thompson, Richmond Wilhoit, Jr.; and Ex-Officio members Russell Hubright for Dr. Walt McPhail, SC Forestry Commission Chairman, Norman F. Pulliam, Chairman SCDNR, and Justin Hancock for Duane Parrish, Chairman SCPRT. Board Member absent was Dr. Brent McLaurin.

1) WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

Chairman McShane called the meeting to order, welcomed and thanked everyone for their attendance.

2) ROLL CALL

Chairman McShane called roll and a quorum was established with 9 Board Members and 3 Ex-Officio members in attendance. Chairman McShane stated that proper public notice had been given for the meeting. Chairman McShane reminded Board members to state any conflicts of interest during the meeting and recuse themselves from discussion or voting on those matters.

3) CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Chairman McShane began the day's proceedings by recognizing special guests in attendance. Nina and Chris Yonce, wife and son of former Board member Larry Yonce, were presented with a Resolution honoring Mr. Yonce for his years of service to his family, community, and state. The Resolution was read and adopted by the Board with unanimous consent and is included with the minutes of this meeting. The family was also presented with a book entitled Rice & Ducks, written by Virginia Beach. Next, Chairman McShane recognized and thanked former Board member and Vice-Chairman Keith Williamson who recently rotated off the Board at the end of his appointment. Mr. Williamson expressed his pride in being a part of the Bank's growth and encouraged all those in attendance to continue the important work of land conservation. Chairman McShane also presented Mr. Williamson with Virginia Beach's Rice & Ducks book. Chairman McShane then introduced the four new Conservation Bank Board members: Mr. Rob Howell, Dr. Peter King, Mr. Jared Thompson, and Dr. Thomas Mullikin. Chairman McShane requested nominations for interim vice-chairman due to the vacancy created at the end of Mr. Williamson's tenure. Mr. Lane made a motion to nominate Curtis Spencer, Mr. Lavender seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. Chairman McShane reminded the Board that Executive Committee serves for two years and elections will take place at the December Board meeting for terms beginning January 1, 2024.

4) PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. McShane opened the floor to anyone who would like to address to the Board. Bob Perry spoke to the Board regarding the importance land conservation and encouraged continuation of efforts toward that goal. Chairman McShane thanked Scott Phillips of the SC Forestry Commission for hosting the meeting and asked him to give a brief history of the SC Forestry Commission. There being no other public comments, Mr. McShane called for the next agenda item.

5) ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Mr. McShane stated the Board was sent a draft copy of the 06/21/2023 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) **Director's Update**

Director West informed the annual audit of the Bank's financial statements has been completed with the Bank again receiving a favorable report. He then stated that the Technical Advisory Committee is examining the practicality of continuing to require the Match Agreement in the Grant Application and plans to bring a recommendation to the Board at the December meeting. Next, he presented a new sign to be installed on Bank funded conservation properties with permission from the landowner. Land Trusts are asked to help identify sites and obtain necessary permissions.

b) **Budget Update**

Chairman McShane described the FY25 budget request and reminded Board members of the budget process and strategic goals for FY25. The Bank will have its first budget hearing on 09/28/2023 with the Executive Budget Office. The Bank is requesting an increase in recurring dollars, offset by a reduced non-recurring request.

c) **SC Office of Resilience**

Chairman McShane asked Mr. Ben Duncan, SC Office of Resilience (SCOR) Chief Resilience Officer, to address the Board. Mr. Duncan described the agency vision and its mission to "lessen the impact of disasters on the communities and citizens of South Carolina by planning and coordinating statewide resilience, long term recovery and hazard mitigation". This mission is defined in the Strategic Statewide Resilience and Risk Reduction Plan and is being achieved through multiple avenues, with land conservation of wetlands a large part of the strategy. SCOR and SCCB have a tremendous opportunity to work together in support of both SCOR's and SCCB's missions. Mr. Duncan informed the Board that the first SCOR-SCCB collaboration involves SCOR's commitment to contribute \$1,000,000 to the prior Bank-approved North Island project, and he looks forward to continuing these partnerships.

d) **Project Updates**

Director West informed the Board about several project updates:

Clemson Forest. Due to a potential conflict of interest, Mr. Lavender recused himself from discussion or voting on this project. Naturaland Trust submitted a request to amend the prior approved grant award for the George Aull Clemson Forest project from \$800,000 to \$1,200,000 of which up to \$400,000 of the grant award issued as a reimbursable grant. The Grants Review Committee (GRC) recommended approving the amendment, Mr. Curtis seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Hazelwood Farm 2 Due to potential conflicts of interest, Mr. Lane and Mr. Lavender recused themselves from discussion or voting on this project. Katawba Valley Land Trust (KVLV) and South Carolina Farm Bureau Land Trust (SCFBLT) submitted a request to transfer the prior approved Hazelwood Farms 2 project from KVLV to SCFBLT. Michelle Evans of KVLV and Richard Carr of SCFBLT explained the request and stated that all parties involved are in favor of the transfer. Mr. Spencer made a motion to approve the transfer, Mr. Wilhoit seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

e) **Financial Report**

A summary of the Bank's financial position was included within the Board member handouts. Director West reported that the Bank has \$39,302,308.03 available for new grants. Director West also stated that several reimbursable grants are forecast to close this year which, once received, will increase the amount of funds available for new grant applications.

f) **Grants Review Committee Recommendations**

Chairman McShane asked Jen Howard of the SC Land Trust Network to speak. Ms. Howard described the SC Land Trust Network as a cohesive voice for the land trusts, education, outreach, and collaboration on resources. Ms. Howard pointed to their advocacy and policy issues with the goal of increased land protection. Ms. Howard said that the Network exists to serve the Board, landowners, and the public and encouraged those in attendance to contact the Network with any questions. Chairman McShane then yielded the floor to Director West to present for a review of pending applications and the Grants Review Committee's funding recommendations for the current cycle:

Catawba-Nisbet Tract

Open Space Institute applied for a \$3,800,000 grant to acquire 596.36 acres in fee simple in Lancaster County. Maria Whitehead of Open Space Institute, Wenonah Haire of the Catawba Nation, and Paul McCormack of SC State Parks spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #1 and a funding level of \$3,800,000 with a reimbursement of up to \$1,900,000. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Spencer seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Andrews Black River State Park

Due to a potential conflict of interest, Mr. Lane recused himself from discussion or voting on this project. Open Space Institute applied for a \$5,800,000 grant to acquire 1,812 acres in fee simple in Georgetown County. Andrews Mayor Frank McClary and Maria Whitehead of Open Space Institute spoke favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #3 and a funding level of \$5,800,000 with a reimbursement from the grantee of up to \$4,400,000. Mr. Spencer made a motion to amend the GRC recommendation to a funding level of \$5,800,000 with a total reimbursement of up to \$5,100,000. Mr. Wilhoit seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Saluda Bluffs

Naturaland Trust applied for a \$9,000,000 grant to acquire 1,092 acres in fee simple in Pickens County. Mac Stone of Naturaland Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #2 and a funding level of \$9,000,000 with a reimbursement of up to \$7,000,000. Mr. Lavender made a motion to amend the recommendation to a funding level of \$9,000,000, subject to the grantee reimbursing the Bank in an amount up to \$9,000,000. Mr. Spencer seconded the amended recommendation and the motion passed unanimously.

Brown Mountain

Naturaland Trust applied for a \$2,145,610 grant to acquire 572 acres in fee simple in Pickens 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 \$2,145,000 subject to the grantee reimbursing the Bank in the amount of up to \$1,900,000. Mr. Lavender made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Spencer seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Shaws Creek Preserve

Aiken Land Conservancy applied for a \$1,900,000 grant for a 2,657.63-acre conservation easement in Aiken County. Peter Kleinhenz of Aiken Land Conservancy and Mary Tilden of the City of Aiken spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #5 and a funding level of \$1,900,000, contingent on approval of the Joint Bond Review Committee. Ms. Porter made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Lane seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. Mr. Lavender disclosed a professional relationship with the City of Aiken and stated that no conflict of interest exists requiring a recusal.

Limehouse

Dorchester County applied for a \$3,000,000 grant to acquire 102.88 acres in fee simple in Dorchester County. Jason Ward of Dorchester County spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #6 and a recommended deferring the project pending Director West's review of the appraisal and consultation with the applicant. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Lavender seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Camp Awanita

The Nature Conservancy applied for a \$950,000 grant for a 542-acre conservation easement in Greenville County. Kristen Austen of The Nature Conservancy spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #7 and a funding level of \$950,000. Mr. Spencer made a motion to approve the recommendation, Ms. Porter seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. Chairman

McShane will inform Joint Bond Review Committee (JBRC) of this grant award, although the funding threshold does not require formal JBRC approval.

Joanna Park Tract

The Nature Conservancy applied for a \$700,000 grant to acquire 334.9 acres in fee simple in Laurens County. Kristen Austen of The Nature Conservancy and Andy Howard of Laurens County spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #8 and a funding level of \$700,000. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Spencer seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Hereford Hill Farm

Upstate Forever applied for a \$170,000 grant for a 101-acre conservation easement in Greenville County. Andrea Cooper of Upstate Forever spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #9 and a funding level of \$170,000. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Wilhoit seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Betsy Kerrison Nature Trail Phase 2

Kiawah Island Conservancy applied for a \$300,000 grant to acquire 15 acres in fee simple in Charleston County. Collie Farah and Sean Cannon of Kiawah Island Conservancy spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #10 and a funding level of \$250,000. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Spencer seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Betsy Kerrison Nature Trail Phase 3

Kiawah Island Conservancy applied for a \$155,000 grant to acquire 3 acres in fee simple in Charleston County. Collie Farah and Sean Cannon of Kiawah Island Conservancy spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #11 and a funding level of \$145,000. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Wilhoit seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Beefield Community Park

Lowcountry Land Trust applied for a \$200,000 grant to acquire 4 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 #12 and a funding level of \$150,000 subject to the grantee retaining title to the property. Mr. Wilhoit made a motion to amend the recommendation to a funding level of \$150,000 with the grantee retaining title until Bank Executive Director approves a transfer of ownership once park improvements have been completed, and conditioned on a reimbursement of funds in the event the grantee secures a surplus of match funds from the Charleston County Greenbelt Program. Mr. Lavender seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Gin Branch Farms

Congaree Land Trust applied for a \$150,000 grant for a 591-acre conservation easement in Lee County. Stuart White of Congaree Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #13 and a funding level of \$150,000. Ms. Porter made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Lane seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. Mr. Thompson disclosed that he occasionally works with the current owner. Mr. Spencer disclosed that he is friends with the current owner.

Blue Branch Farm

Nation Ford Land Trust applied for a \$400,000 grant for a 373-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 \$400,000. Mr. Spencer made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Lane seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Gateway Village

Upstate Forever applied for a \$65,000 grant for a 37.7-acre conservation easement in Greenville County. Andrea Cooper of Upstate Forever spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #15 and a funding level of \$65,000. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Ms. Porter seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Culler 3

Congaree Land Trust applied for a \$50,000 grant for a 115.8-acre conservation easement in Orangeburg County. Mary Crockett of Congaree Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #16 and a funding level of \$50,000. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Spencer seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Possum Holler

Upstate Forever applied for a \$106,500 grant for a 79.4-acre conservation easement in Pickens County. Andrea Cooper of Upstate Forever spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #17 and a funding level of \$106,500. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Howell seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Warren Hooper

Oconee Soil and Water Conservation District (OSWCD) applied for a \$85,000 grant for a 52.7-acre conservation easement in Oconee County. Mark Fisher of OSWCD spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #18 and a funding level of \$85,000. Mr. Spencer made a motion to approve the recommendation, Ms. Porter seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Bob McCartney - Rossdhu Longleaf Preserve

Upper Savannah Land Trust applied for a \$81,000 grant for a 61-acre conservation easement in Aiken County. Wade Harrison of Upper Savannah Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #19 and a funding level of \$81,000. Mr. Howell made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Spencer seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Seawright-Drake Homestead (Fleming)

Upper Savannah Land Trust applied for a \$50,000 grant for a 75.74-acre conservation easement in Abbeville County. Wade Harrison of Upper Savannah Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #20 and a funding level of \$50,000. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Lavender seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Logger Court

Naturaland Trust applied for a \$140,000 grant to acquire 21 acres in fee simple in Pickens County. Mac Stone of Naturaland Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #21 and a funding the total acreage (23.32 acres) at \$290,000 with subject to removal of the existing structure unless a useful purpose for the structure is determined. Mr. Spencer made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Lavender seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Battle of Hobkirk Hill – SC Liberty Trail

SC Battleground Preservation Trust applied for a \$15,000 grant to acquire .35 acres in fee simple in Kershaw County. Rick Wise of SC Battleground Preservation Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #22 and a funding level of \$15,000. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Spencer seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Camden Gaol Site – SC Liberty Trail

SC Battleground Preservation Trust applied for a \$123,500 grant to acquire .87 acres in fee simple in Kershaw County. Rick Wise of SC Battleground Preservation Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants

Review Committee recommended a rank of #23 and a funding level of \$123,500. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Spencer seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Hanna Farm

Pee Dee Land Trust applied for a \$40,000 grant for a 129-acre conservation easement in Florence County. Seth Cook of Pee Dee Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #24 and a funding level of \$40,000. Mr. Spencer made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Wilhoit seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Bay Farm

Pee Dee Land Trust applied for a \$100,000 grant for a 347-acre conservation easement in Marion County. Seth Cook of Pee Dee Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #25 and a funding level of \$100,000. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Ms. Porter seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Pleasant Grove

Pee Dee Land Trust applied for a \$40,000 grant for an 80-acre conservation easement in County. Seth Cook of Pee Dee Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #26 and a funding level of \$40,000. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Ms. Porter seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Sleepy Prong

Pee Dee Land Trust applied for a \$60,000 grant for a 136.97-acre conservation easement in Williamsburg County. Seth Cook of Pee Dee Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #27 and a funding level of \$60,000. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Spencer seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Willow Oak

Lowcountry Land Trust applied for a \$925,000 grant to acquire 13.07 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 #28 and a funding level of \$830,000 subject to the grantee placing a conservation easement on the adjacent Simmons Creek tract (approximately 53 acres) prior to the release of grant funds. Mr. Lane made a motion to approve the recommendation, Mr. Lavender seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

At the end of the GRC project review, Chairman McShane stated that these application approvals represent an obligation of \$27, 896,610 of available Bank funds, with up to \$18,300,000 in possible reimbursements returning to the Bank for future grant approvals.

8) BOARD MEMBER OPEN DISCUSSION

During the Board member open discussion, several members expressed their gratitude to Board leadership and Bank staff.

9) TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chairman stated that the next Board meeting will be on Wednesday, December 13th, 2023, at the Anne Springs Close Greenway. The Grants Review Committee will meet in Columbia on 11/29/2023.

10) ADJOURN

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