

MINUTES

SOUTH CAROLINA CONSERVATION BANK

Wednesday, March 29, 2023 - 10:00 am
Harbison State Forest Environmental Education Center
5600 Broad River Road
Columbia, SC 29212

The South Carolina Conservation Bank Board (SCCB) held its quarterly meeting on Wednesday, March 29, at 10:00 am at Harbison State Forest Environmental Education Center. Notice of the date, time and place of the meeting was posted and mailed to the news media in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act. Chairman Michael McShane presided at the meeting and members present included Keith Williamson, Vice-Chairman, Geordy Johnson, Charles Lane, Thomas Lavender, Pamela S. Porter, Curtis Spencer, 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 Members absent were Elliott Close, Dr. Brent McLaurin, and Larry Yonce.

1) WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

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

2) ROLL CALL

Chairman McShane called roll and a quorum was established with 8 Board Members and 3 Ex-Officio members in attendance. Chairman McShane stated that proper public notice had been given for the meeting.

3) CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Chairman McShane invited Forestry Commission Director Scott Phillips to speak. Mr. Phillips welcomed Board members, staff, and attendees for attending this meeting at Harbison State Forest and gave a brief history of the state forest property. Chairman McShane then updated Board members on the hearing for the Conservation Enhancement Act at which legislators expressed favorable support for restoring dedicated funding to the Bank. Chairman McShane then reminded Board members to complete Recusal Forms for any applicable project discussions and voting.

4) PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. McShane opened the floor to anyone who would like to address to the Board. Mark Johnson of Columbia, SC shared some information regarding reducing the decline of migratory waterfowl.

5) ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Mr. McShane stated the Board was sent a draft copy of the 12/07/2022 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. Spencer seconded, and the motion unanimously passed, with Mr. Lavender abstaining.

6) NEW BUSINESS

a) Director's Updates

i. SCDNR Request for Land Trade on Prior Approved Project

Director West asked Ken Prosser of SCDNR to present a request for a no cost land trade at Stumphouse Mountain WMA (official memo and land descriptions were within Board member handouts). Following explanation and discussion, Mr. Williamson made a motion to approve the land trade, Mr. Lane seconded, and the motion unanimously passed.

ii. **Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting Updates**
Mr. Lane updated the Board on the recent TAC meeting and the updated scoring process. The Committee anticipates recommending a new application scoring methodology at the next Board meeting. The scorecard template showing proposed new scoring was within Board member handouts, and Mr. Lane asked Board members to review proposed scoring template for discussion and action at the June meeting.

iii. **Application Cycles/Timelines**
Director West presented a proposed new application cycle timeline which establishes quarterly application cycles as opposed to the current biannual application cycles. This move is designed to remediate application problems due to fiscal and year-end timing and should benefit both the applicants and the Bank; the new grant application will be evaluated for efficacy. The Grants Review Committee recommended adopting quarterly application deadlines of January 31st, April 30th, July 31st and October 31st and the motion unanimously passed.

b) **Project Updates**

Director West updated the Board on outstanding projects and closing date expectations. There are several grants outstanding from FY22: Slater Tract, the Stillwell Complex, and Ravenswood. Director West has communicated with the applicants, all of whom expect to close these projects in the next few months. Chairman McShane requested a motion that the Board accept the FY22 outstanding projects as still endorsed and extend the closing deadline to FY24. Mr. Spencer made the motion, Mr. Lane seconded, and the motion unanimously passed. Chairman McShane requested the applicants keep Director West informed on expected closing dates.

c) **Financial Report**

Director West presented the financial report, a copy of which was provided in the Board meeting handouts. Chairman McShane updated the Board on the status of the Bank's budget request for FY24.

Mr. Lane asked for an update Congaree Creek project closing and reimbursable grant timeline. Ken Prosser of SCDNR stated that the project is progressing as expected and should be finalized by the end of the fiscal year.

d) **Grants Review Committee Recommendations**

Chairman McShane yielded the floor to the Chairman of the Grants Review Committee, Keith Williamson, for a review of pending applications. Mr. Williamson then began the review of applications for the current cycle:

Cotton Hall

Mr. McShane disclosed an interest in a nearby property. Open Space Institute applied for a \$3,000,000 grant to acquire 390 total acres (232 acres fee simple & 160 acres conservation easement) in Beaufort County. Kate Schaefer spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #1 and a funding level of \$3,000,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

Black River SP – RMS North

Open Space Institute applied for a \$1,250,000 grant to acquire 535.25 acres in fee simple in Williamsburg County. Patrick Moore of Open Space Institute and Justin Hancock of SCPRT spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #2 and a funding level of \$1,250,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

Paris Mountain Forest Haven

Naturaland Trust applied for a \$375,000 grant to acquire 19.96 acres in fee simple in Greenville County. Mac Stone of Naturaland Trust and Justin Hancock of SCPRT spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #3 and a funding level of \$375,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation, with Mr. Lavender abstaining.

James Island CP -Bradham Road Addition

Open Space Institute applied for a \$1,250,000 grant to acquire 25.35 acres in fee simple in Charleston County. Patrick Moore of Open Space Institute spoke in favor of the project and stated that they will also seek a \$750,000 NAWCA grant. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #4 and a funding level of \$500,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation, with Mr. Lavender abstaining.

Savannah River and Uplands (Pauline Place) Lowlands

The Nature Conservancy applied for a \$300,000 grant to acquire a 1,205-acre conservation easement in Hampton County. Katy McWilliams of The Nature Conservancy spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #5 and a funding level of \$300,000, using funds received from the SHEP settlement. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

Hazelwood Farm 2

Katawba Valley Land Trust applied for a \$215,000 grant to acquire a 400-acre conservation easement in Chester County. Michelle Evans of Katawba Valley Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #6 and a funding level of \$215,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

The Happy Berry

Upstate Forever applied for a \$77,000 grant to acquire a 22.38-acre conservation easement in Pickens County. Chris Starker of Upstate Forever spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommended a rank of #7 and a funding level of \$77,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

North Island

Due to a potential conflict of interest, Mr. Johnson recused himself from discussion or voting on this project. Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust applied for a \$2,000,000 grant to acquire 114.66 acres in fee simple in Berkeley County. Chris Vaughn of Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust spoke in favor of the project. Representatives from Berkeley County distributed maps and other materials related to the plan for the property and lent additional support to the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #8, a funding level of \$1,000,000, and sponsorship of a \$1,000,000 Coastal Wetlands Grant. Mr. Lavender amended the motion to additionally require the applicant to clarify an easement issue and acreage discrepancy with Bank staff prior to the June Board meeting. Mr. Lane seconded the amended motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Cedar Mountain Expansion

Naturaland Trust applied for a \$160,000 grant to acquire 24.17 acres in fee simple in Greenville County. Mac Stone of Naturaland Trust spoke in favor of the project. Andrea Cooper of Upstate Forever commented on the Upstate Land Conservation Fund. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #9 and a funding level of \$160,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation. Chairman McShane informed the applicant that the grantee is expected to transfer the property to SCDNR within 12 months and asked Bank staff to note this requirement in the grant agreement.

Dalzell Bay

Due to a potential conflict of interest, Mr. Spencer recused himself from discussion or voting on this project. Naturaland Trust applied for a \$80,000 grant to acquire 61.1 acres in fee simple in Sumter County. Mac Stone of Naturaland Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #10 and a funding level of \$80,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

Nine Times Cove

Naturaland Trust applied for a \$20,000 grant to acquire 4.15 acres in fee simple in Pickens County. Mac Stone of Naturaland Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #11 and a funding level of \$20,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

Twin Ponds

Due to a potential conflict of interest, Mr. Pulliam recused himself from discussion on the project. Upstate Forever applied for a \$156,000 grant for a 91.69-acre conservation easement in Cherokee County. Richard Carr of Upstate Forever spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #12 and a funding level of \$156,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

Lee State Park (KDR/OSI)

Due to a potential conflict of interest, Mr. Spencer recused himself from discussion or voting on this project. Congaree Land Trust applied for a \$173,000 grant for 137.14 acres in fee simple in Lee County. Stuart White of Congaree Land Trust, Patrick Moore of Open Space Institute, and Justin Hancock of SCPRT spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #13 and a funding level of \$173,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation. Chairman McShane informed the applicant that the grantee is expected to transfer the property to SCDNR within 12 months and asked Bank staff to note this requirement in the grant agreement.

Four Leaf Farm

Spartanburg Area Conservancy applied for a \$250,000 grant to acquire a 170.27-acre conservation easement in Spartanburg County. Sam Parrott of Spartanburg Area Conservancy spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #14 and a funding level of \$250,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

Daus – Knights Hill

Katawba Valley Land Trust applied for a \$500,000 grant to acquire a 1010 -acre conservation easement in Kershaw County. Michelle Evans of Katawba Valley Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #15 and a funding level of \$500,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

Halfway Swamp Creek

Upper Savannah Land Trust applied for a \$175,000 grant to acquire a 279.60-acre conservation easement in Saluda County. Wade Harrison of Upper Savannah Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #16 and a funding level of \$175,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

Santee Delta Plantation

Lowcountry Land Trust applied for a \$80,000 grant for a 107.7-acre conservation easement in Georgetown County. David Ray of Lowcountry Land Trust spoke in favor of the project. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #17 and a funding level of \$75,000. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee's recommendation.

Gilstrap Mountain Amendment

Naturaland Trust applied for a \$262,500 grant amendment to this previously approved project. At the September 2022 Board meeting, the Bank awarded a \$237,500 grant for 166 acres in fee simple in Pickens County. Mac Stone spoke about the project and the amended request. The Grants Review Committee recommend a rank of #18 and a funding level of \$262,500, subject to the Grantee reimbursing the Bank in the amount of \$262,500 if the Grantee receives approval and receipt of a grant from the Department of Transportation’s Scenic Highways Program. The Board unanimously accepted the Grants Review Committee’s recommendation.

Saluda Bluffs

Naturaland Trust submitted an intent to apply for a \$9,500,000 grant to acquire 1,093 acres in fee simple in Pickens County. The Grants Review Committee does not have a funding recommendation at this time but recognizes the value of this property, encourages the applicant to continue developing the project, and invites to applicant to submit a revised application at the next funding cycle.

8) BOARD MEMBER OPEN DISCUSSION

All members thanked the Board and Staff for a great meeting and applauded the land trusts for their efforts. Chairman McShane commended Director West for visiting every one of the applicant sites.

9) TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chairman stated that the next Board meeting will be on Wednesday, June 21, 2023. Time and place to be announced at a later date.

10) ADJOURN

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