

**NORTH CAROLINA
 SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION
 BUSINESS MEETING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
 January 15, 2026**

Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
 Division of Soil & Water Conservation
 Virtual through Microsoft Teams

Commission Members	Guests	Guests Online
Barbara Bleiweis, Chair	Charles Bass III	Shannon Bidby
Billy Kilpatrick	Edward Long	Grady Holleman
Porche Spence	Nicole Warren	Mb(Unverified)
Gail Hughes	919-707-3766(unverified)	Mark Byrd
Patrick Baker	Keith Davis Starke	Brian(unverified)
James Lamb	Bryan Evans	Heather Reichert
	Jane Humphrey	Paula Day
Commission Counsel	Rachel Smith	Sam Edwards
Brian McGinn	Samantha Allbee	Mark Seibert
Guests	Kayla McCoy	Anne Coan
David Williams	Brian(Unverified)	Levi Preston
Julie Henshaw	Madeline Loman	Christopher Bordeaux
Kristina Fischer	Darren Layton	Marika Lapham
Michael Shepherd	Amber Rights	Belinda Smith
Matt Safford	Rick McSwain	Mitch Peele
Kristina Fischer	Timothy Beard	Michael Bowman
Josh Vetter	Lisa Fine	Blaire
Rachel Smith	Shelby Kaplan	Keith Larick
Tinesha McNeil	Lane Payton	Morgan Elkin-Col
John Beck	Elise McLaughlin	Alexandra Dinwiddie
Brandy Myers	Taryn Thompson	252-448-2341(unverified)
Lorien Deaton	Stephanie Alston	Taylor Fair
Frankie Singleton	Aaron Franks	Jessica Wilson
Morgan Elkins	Betsy Gerwig	

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Bleiweis called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

II. PRELIMINARY: Chair Bleiweis charged the Commission members 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.

III. BUSINESS:

- 1. Approval of Agenda:** Chair Bleiweis asked for approval of the agenda. Commissioner James Lamb moved to approve the agenda, and Commissioner Gail Hughes seconded. Motion carried.

2. **Approval of Minutes:** Chair Bleiweis asked for approval of November 10, 2025, Work Session Minutes. Commissioner Gail Hughes moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner James Lamb second. Motion Carried.

Chair Bleiweis asked for approval of November 19, 2025, Business Minutes. Commissioner Patrick Baker moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Porche Spence second. Motion Carried.

INFORMATION ITEMS

3. **Division Report:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Director David Williams to present. Director Williams provided a division update that included current staffing levels and vacancies, progress related to the USDA Block Grant due to the federal shutdown, and the status of state and federal funding for disaster recovery, technical assistance, and infrastructure repair programs. The report also noted ongoing planning efforts for agricultural water resource initiatives. He reviewed the original AgH2O Program of 2011, which was initiated following a historic drought. That program focused on water access, long-term storage, and water conservation and reuse practices, and it provided cost-share assistance to incentivize construction of water infrastructure.
- The current update of the program was presented. The focus includes ensuring farmers' access to water, expanding long-term storage capacity, evaluating and improving water conservation and reuse practices, and continuing cost-share incentives. A new emphasis on flood mitigation was discussed, including reducing downstream flooding impact on agricultural lands, identifying agricultural practices that help mitigate flooding, and designing incentive programs to compensate landowners participating in flood mitigation efforts.

Upcoming Commission Meetings

- March 18, Kinston (Virtual WS 3/10, Tour 3/17)
 - May 20, Salisbury (Virtual WS 5/12)
 - July 29, Raleigh (Virtual WS 7/21)
 - September 16, Orange Co. (Virtual WS 9/8)
 - November 18, Location TBD (Virtual WS on 11/10)
4. **Association Report:** Chair Bleiweis asked newly appointed NCASWCD President Gail Hughes to share. President Gail Hughes commented that the recent meeting was well organized, with strong attendance and relevant subject matter. She noted the importance of topics such as HB 907 and the Agricultural Waters Program, and confirmed she will attend the upcoming program kickoff. Gail provided an update on the Southeastern NACD meeting, which the association will host August 9–12 in Cherokee. A committee is organizing the event, which will focus on biochar products and include tours. Further details will be shared in the coming weeks. She also announced that next year's January 2027 meeting will be postponed by one week to January 10, due to the New Year holiday, and will be held at the Koury Convention Center in

Greensboro. Gail confirmed logistics are finalized and invited Bryan Evans to add any comments regarding the association. Bryan had no comments.

5. **NRCS Report:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Mr. Tim Beard to present. Mr. Beard provided a brief update on several NRCS initiatives. He announced that the Eastern Tech Center, previously scheduled to close during the lockdown, will reopen with a skeleton staff, providing key training and services on the North Carolina campus. Beard noted that today, January 15, is the cut-off date for program applications, which have increased significantly, partly due to the recently announced regenerative agriculture pilot program. This program, supported with \$700 million nationwide, requires that North Carolina dedicate 25% of its existing financial assistance funding for EQIP and CSP toward the initiative. Contracts will be five years in length, include at least one existing regenerative practice, and require reporting in years one and five. Beard shared that Chief Bettencourt has established five priorities in writing, which will guide program direction, and noted a national leadership restructuring. Ken White has been appointed Assistant Chief of the South Region, now encompassing nine states, with Arkansas and Louisiana reassigned to the Central Region. Beard highlighted White's experience with streambank projects and familiarity with NRCS operations. Regarding the biochar pilot, Beard indicated discussions are ongoing to potentially extend sign-up for participants in the western part of the state. Staff will coordinate to assess the impact and feasibility of this extension under the new guidance from the national office. Overall, the team is preparing to manage the increasing applications and program requirements with available staff.

ACTION ITEMS

6. **Consent Agenda:** Chair Bleiweis noted that these items were previously discussed in the work session and could be voted on together. Commissioner Gail Hughes made a motion to approve items 6A, B, and C. them, which Commissioner Patrick Baker seconded. The motions passed.
- A. Supervisor Appointments
 - B. Supervisor Contracts
 - C. Job Approval Authority Applicants for Consideration

7. Additional Items Submitted Since Work Session: Chair Bleiweis recognized Ms. Kristina Fischer to present. Ms. Fischer presented the additional supervisor appointment. Commissioner James Lamb made a motion to approve, which Commissioner Patrick Baker seconded. The motion passed.

A. Additional Supervisor Appointments

District	Name of Nominee	Replacing Name	Term	Willing to attend Basic Training	Willing to attend other meetings	Number of Guiding Principles met (out of 11)	Reason for Vacancy	Notes
Richmond	Kenneth Hill	Jerry Mac Snead	Elected (22-26)	Yes	Yes (local, area)	8	Moved to appointed seat in November 2025	Young third generation farmer; chickens, cattle, and hay production. Involved in forestry and timber

B. Additional Supervisor Contracts: Chair Bleiweis recognized Mr. John Beck to present. Mr. Beck presented the additional supervisor contract. Commissioner Dr. Porche Spence made a motion to approve, which Commissioner Gail Hughes seconded. The motion passed.

County	Contract Number	Supervisor Name	BMP	Contract Amount	Comments
Anson (Brown Creek)	04-2026-801	Nichole Carpenter	Water Supply Well and Pump	\$9,499	Applicant: Steve Carpenter
Harnett	43-2026-010	John Gross	Cover Crops	\$8,499	Applicant: Gross Farms Enterprises LLC; Lee SECD Supervisor

C. Job Approval Authority Applicant for Consideration: Chair Bleiweis recognized Mr. John Beck to present. Mr. Beck presented the additional supervisor contract. Commissioner Patrick Baker made a motion to approve, which Commissioner James Lamb seconded. The motion passed.

Applicant Name	Employer	Type of JAA Requested	JAA Recommended for Approval
Aaron Franks	Caldwell SWCD	Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills	Tank/Trough

8. Cost Share Programs Annual Report: Chair Bleiweis recognized Ms. Lorien Deaton to present. A copy of the report will be on each program’s page. Ms. Deaton provided an overview of the

annual report, which consists of three main sections. The first section covered the programs and conservation partnerships. CCAP offered all seventeen of its Best Management Practices (BMPs) across the state in fiscal year 25, receiving recurring funds of \$136,000 plus a one-time allocation of \$500,000. This funding allowed CCAP to support 14 new contracts through its regional application process, totaling \$636,000. Districts requested an average of \$4.2 million annually, leaving an 86% average funding shortfall. Data on soil, nitrogen, and phosphorus reductions were also tracked.

The second section highlighted the Agricultural Water Resources Assistance Program (AgWRAP), which offered eight BMPs statewide and allocated over \$1 million through local and regional processes. In fiscal year 25, 61 contracts were approved and 74 completed, providing irrigation to over 500 acres and creating 2.8 million gallons of water storage. Since the program began, over 18,400 acres of cropland have received irrigation, with more than 1.6 billion gallons of storage created. Districts have requested an average of \$5.4 million annually, resulting in a consistent funding shortfall.

The report also included a spot-check review of cost-share contracts. Supervisors inspected 5% of active contracts in fiscal year 25, reviewing 935 contracts. Compliance was high, with 98.5% of contracts meeting requirements, 4.5% needing maintenance, and 1.5% found out of compliance. Despite challenges from Tropical Storm Helene, Tropical Storm Debbie, and COVID, districts successfully implemented all three cost-share programs at levels consistent with prior years. Deaton noted that while North Carolina has experienced nearly a 10% population increase, a 3.4% loss of farmland, and a 33% increase in agricultural project expenditures, districts have maintained strong program implementation.

The third section focused on StRAP annual reports, detailing eligible practices and funding assistance. Since 2022, StRAP awarded nearly \$63 million across 87 counties, with 60% reimbursed and 44% of 218 contracts completed and closed out. In fiscal year 25, StRAP received Commission approval for \$38 million to assist counties impacted by Hurricane Helene, funding debris removal, streambank stabilization, and sediment removal projects. Applications for fiscal year 25 funding are currently under review, with contracts expected to be reported in the 2026 annual report.

Deaton concluded by inviting questions from participants.

9. Technical Specialist Training Update: Chair Bleiweis recognized Mr. Michael Shepherd to present.

A. Audit Results

Mr. Shepherd reported that the Division is required to audit 10% of Technical Specialists annually for training compliance. For the reporting period: 74 training credits were submitted by 36 Technical Specialists. All audited submissions were compliant. No action was required.

B. Report and Action on Training Fulfilment

Technical Specialists must complete six (6) hours of continuing education every three (3) years.

Eleven (11) specialists reached the end of their reporting cycle on December 31, 2025. Eight (8) completed the requirement and will begin a new three-year cycle. Three (3) did not complete the required hours and will be presented for rescission of designation:

Josh Parker (formerly Pitt County District)

Stephen Bishop (formerly Cleveland County District)

Tori Coggins (formerly Davidson County Cooperative Extension)

Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion. Commissioner Patrick Baker motioned to remove their technical specialist designation. Commissioner James Lamb seconded. Motion carried.

10. Community Conservation Assistance Program Regional Application Recommendations: Chair Bleiweis recognized Ms. Julie Henshaw to present.

Julie Henshaw presented the Community Conservation Assistance Program (CCAP) regional applications for Commission consideration and approval. She welcomed Sam to the team and noted that Sam will assist with future presentations.

Henshaw reviewed the purpose of CCAP, which is to reduce nonpoint source pollution to state waters through installation of best management practices on developed lands that have been established for at least three years. The program is voluntary and incentive-based, providing educational, technical, and financial assistance through local districts. Ranking criteria prioritize impaired or pristine waters, stormwater impacts, protection of drinking water, measurable water quality benefits, leveraging of additional resources, educational opportunities, and district priorities. Careful attention is given to site suitability, permitting, access, and overall conservation benefit.

For this funding cycle, 43 applications were received totaling just over \$1.3 million from 21 districts. Applications from western counties were lower due to Hurricane Helene recovery efforts. Available funding totaled approximately \$487,000, including recurring appropriations and remaining funds, equating to roughly \$160,000 per region. The maximum award per project is \$50,000, with a \$100,000 cap per district.

Proposed funding includes approximately \$160,000 for projects in the Eastern region (Carteret, Dare, and Pamlico counties), nearly \$159,000 for projects in the Central region (Durham, Chatham, Guilford, and Wake counties), and approximately \$160,000 for projects in the Western region (Henderson, Mitchell, and Wilkes counties). Many proposed practices are stream-related or adjacent and are expected to provide measurable water quality improvements.

Henshaw requested Commission approval of the projects that have completed required site visits and submitted signed cooperator forms. She also requested authorization to fund the next

highest-ranked project should an approved project not move forward. She concluded by inviting questions.

Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion. Commissioner Gail Hughes motioned that the CCAP is approved as presented. Commissioner Porche Spence second. Motion carried.

- 11. Technical Assistance Allocations for FY2027-2029:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Ms. Julie Henshaw to present. Ms. Henshaw provided a follow-up on the Technical Assistance allocation methodology for fiscal years 2027 through 2029. She reminded the Commission that this methodology was discussed in detail at the September meeting and confirmed that no changes are being proposed. The calculation will follow the existing methodology outlined in Rule 59D .0108, using refreshed data for the new allocation cycle.

The proposed allocations would take effect July 1 of the next fiscal year. While Commission approval will be required, Henshaw indicated she is not seeking action at this meeting. Instead, she requested authorization to share the preliminary allocation information with districts so they may prepare their upcoming budget requests and reports.

She noted that the updated calculations are structured to support every district statewide. Previously, 99 of 100 districts received funding. Districts not at the highest or lowest ends of the allocation range may see minor adjustments in funding under the refreshed data.

- 12. Basic Training Report** – Chair Bleiweis recognized Mrs. Kristina Fischer to present. Mrs. Fischer presented the following.

Commission rules require all elected or appointed supervisors to complete basic training within their first year of service. In 2025, four individuals did not meet this requirement.

Correspondence from several of those individuals has been received and made available to the Commission.

The Division recommends reviewing the submitted correspondence alongside the formal training report that will be presented at the March Commission meeting, as required by rule. Additional training sessions are scheduled for February, and several of the individuals have indicated their intent to attend. Should they fail to complete the requirement, the Division will recommend referral to the Inquiry Committee at the March meeting.

Fischer also reported that 15 midterm supervisor appointees from 2025 are required to complete basic training in 2026. A follow-up report on their status will be provided in March. She noted that several of these individuals attended the January session held in conjunction with the Association's annual meeting and expressed hope that all requirements will be met prior to the next report.

- 13. Inquiry Committee Findings:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Mrs. Kristina Fischer to present. Mrs. Fischer presented the following.

Kristina Fischer reviewed the statutory grounds for removal of supervisors as outlined in North Carolina General Statute 139-7. She noted that a supervisor may be removed by the Commission, upon notice and hearing, for neglect of duty. Under Commission rules, evidence of neglect of duty may include failure to attend three consecutive regularly scheduled district meetings, except when prevented by illness.

Fischer reported that a supervisor from the Vance District, Mr. George Pegram, was previously referred to the Inquiry Committee. The committee met on January 9 and determined there was sufficient evidence of neglect of duty to proceed with a formal hearing at the March Commission meeting. Mr. Pegram has not attended any district meetings since his midterm appointment in May 2025. District staff have not received any correspondence from him, and the Inquiry Committee likewise received no response, although confirmation was received that he signed for the certified letter notifying him of the proceedings.

A hearing will be conducted at the March Commission meeting to consider this matter.

14. Special Requests –

A. ACSP Contract on Government-Owned Property – *supplement*

Payton Lane introduced Keith Stark, Superintendent of the Central Crops Research Station representing NC State University, and thanked the Commission for the opportunity to speak. Lane expressed appreciation for past funding support that has improved waterways and overall pond water quality at the Central Crops Research Station in Clayton.

Mr. Stark presented a request for additional funding to support a rooftop runoff project. He explained that several large, consolidated equipment shelters are contributing to soil erosion and runoff issues that are impacting an irrigation pond on the property. The proposed project would reduce runoff from the affected area, minimize soil erosion, and enhance overall water quality in the irrigation pond. Stark thanked the Commission for its consideration of the funding request and concluded the presentation.

Mr. John Beck clarified that this was the contract referenced during the work session. Of the total \$3,392 needed for the project, \$980 has been secured, and all project components have been included in the contract.

It was noted that full funding has not yet been obtained; however, the intent of the Johnston District is to request approval for the full project amount, pending Commission approval. The Commission was asked to consider supporting the complete project as proposed.

Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion. Commissioner Gail Hughes moved to approve, which Commissioner James Lamb seconded. The motion passed.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS: James Lamb thanked Lorien for her presentation

V. ADJOURNMENT: Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Patrick Baker made a motion to adjourn, Commissioner James Lamb seconded. The motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 10:39a.m.

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

Tinesha McNeil, Recording Secretary

These minutes were approved by the North Carolina Soil & Water Conservation Commission on March 18, 2026.