

**NORTH CAROLINA  
 SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION  
 WORK SESSION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
 January 4, 2026**

Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services  
 Division of Soil & Water Conservation  
 Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort  
 Locust/Maple Rooms  
 777 Casino Drive  
 Cherokee, NC 2819

<b>Commission Members</b>	<b>Guests</b>	<b>Guests</b>
Barbara Bleiweis, Chair	Regina Kilpatrick	Jack B
Billy Kilpatrick	Bryan Evans	Elicia Seniff
Porche Spence-online	Ken Parks	David Harris
Brian Parker	Donna Vanhook	Josh Myers
Patrick Baker	Taryn Thompson	Bill Yarborough
James Lamb	Keith Larick	Amanda Sand
Gail Hughes	Mike Willis	Jeffrey Autry
<b>Commission Counsel</b>	Aaron Franks	Arnold Weatherman
Brian McGinn-online	Jim Burns	Thomas Sledge
<b>Guests</b>	Richard Smith	Ken Morris
David Williams	Sherry S	Rob Morris
Julie Henshaw	Lynn Lambert	
Kristina Fischer	Reese W	
Michael Shepherd	Andrew Ward	<b>Guests Online</b>
Matt Safford	W Chester Lowder	Lorien Deaton
Kristina Fischer	Henry Faison	Anne Coan
Josh Vetter	Melanie Harris	Shelby Kaplan
Rachel Smith	Eddie C	Amber Rights
Tinesha McNeil	Donna Mills	
John Beck	Mitchell Womack	
Brandy Myers	Mark Waller	
	Lisa Marochak	

**I. CALL TO ORDER:** Chair Bleiweis called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.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 stated that approval of agenda will take place at the business meeting.

2. **Approval of Minutes:** Will take place at the business meeting.

**INFORMATION ITEMS**

3. **Division Report:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Director David Williams to present. Director Williams will provide an update to the division at the business meeting. Although he had not initially planned to speak, he chose to share several remarks. He expressed appreciation as he approaches his 28th year with the division and thanked Vice President Hughes for declining recruitment efforts from Orange District leadership, noting that had she accepted, he might not have had the opportunity to serve in his current role. Williams announced his planned retirement at the end of August, indicating that this would likely be his final annual meeting as Director and possibly his last as a division employee. He clarified that the announcement was shared for planning purposes rather than recognition. Reflecting on his career, he highlighted the meaningful relationships he has built, particularly within the Soil and Water Conservation District network, and expressed gratitude for the professional and personal support system he has developed across North Carolina. He concluded by thanking colleagues for their leadership, partnership, and camaraderie.

4. **Association Report:**

5. **NRCS Report:**

**ACTION ITEMS**

6. **Consent Agenda:** Kristina Fisher, John Beck, and Micheal Shepard presented the following in succession. Items 6A, B, & C were approved by consent.

**A. Supervisor Appointments:**

- Elizabeth Tucker, Forsyth SWCD, filling the position of Edward Jones for remaining 2026 -2028.
- Van Hemrick, Yadkin SWCD, filling the appointed position of Lenuel Chamberlain due to retirement for 2022-2026
- Danielle Venable, Yadkin SWCD, filling the elected position of Van Hemrick who is moving to an appointed seat, for 2022-2026

**B. Supervisor Contracts:**

County	Contract Number	Supervisor Name	BMP	Contract Amount	Comments
Greene	40-2026-004	Brad Harrison	Cropland Conversion to Grass	\$16,172	Applicant: Harrison Farms, LLC

Johnston	51-2026-005	John Langdon	Grade Stabilization Structure	\$22,332	
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**Total \$38,504**

**Total Number of Supervisor Contracts:12**

**C. Job Approval Authority Applicants for Consideration:**

<b>Applicant Name</b>	<b>Employer</b>	<b>Type of JAA Requested</b>	<b>JAA Recommended for Approval</b>
Blaire King	Jones SWCD	Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills	Nutrient Management
Brody Brown	Craven SWCD	Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills	Cropland Conversion-Grass
Dustin Brewer	Durham SWCD	Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills	Cropland Conversion-Grass
Elizabeth Spence	Lenoir SWCD	Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills	<u>Cover Crop</u> Cropland Conversion - Grass
Emily Bateman	Wake SWCD	Submission of comparable NRCS JAA	Rooftop Runoff Mgmt System
Joe Trimnal	Chatham SWCD	Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills	<u>Cover Crop</u> Livestock Exclusion Fence
Shannon Bidy	Lee SWCD	Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills	Cover Crop

Additionally, Aaron Franks, Caldwell Co. for tank control.

**7. Additional Items Submitted Since Work Session:**

**8. Cost Share Programs Annual Report:**

9. **Technical Specialist Training Update:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Mr. Micheal 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)

10. **Community Conservation Assistance Program Regional Application Recommendations: Action on Jan 15<sup>th</sup>** Chair Bleiweis recognized Ms. Julie Henshaw to present. Ms. Henshaw announced that Renee Sam Albee will assume leadership of the program, beginning the following day. Appreciation was expressed to Tom Hill and the engineering team for their assistance in reviewing applications. Ms. Henshaw gave an overview of the programs purpose and shared the following information:

**Application Summary**

- Over 40 applications were received from 21 districts.
- Total funding requested: approximately \$1.3 million.
- Funding available for allocation: \$500,000 (approximately \$160,000 per region).

**Regional Breakdown of Proposed Allocations:**

- **Eastern Region:** Approximately \$160,000 (primarily marsh sill projects)
- **Central Region:** Approximately \$160,000 (projects in Durham, Chatham, Guilford, and Wake Counties)
- **Western Region:** Approximately \$160,000 (projects in Henderson, Mitchell, and Wilkes Counties)

If approved projects do not move forward, staff will allocate remaining funds to the next highest-scoring applications based on available funding and district willingness to proceed.

**11. Technical Assistance Allocations for FY2027-2029**

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

Under 02 NCAC 59A .0202(a) and .0202 (b), all supervisors are required to complete Basic Training within their first year of service as an elected or appointed supervisor.

The following individuals have not met this requirement in 2025:

Fishing Creek, James W. Short II, Elected 22-26, started term March 2024  
 Hoke, Patricia Lyons Elected 22-26, started term September 2024  
 New Hanover, Roger Shew Appointed 24-28, started term December 2024  
 Warren, Shane Harris Appointed 22-26, started term November 2024

Correspondence has been received from Supervisors Short, Lyons and Shew. The Division recommends reviewing these details along with the Basic Training report that will be provided, by rule, at the March 2026 Commission meeting. If these individuals do not attend February 2026 training sessions, the Division recommends sending them to the Inquiry Committee established under 02 NCAC 59A .0302 for consideration.

There are 15 mid-term supervisor appointments from 2025 that will need to attend Basic Training in 2026. In compliance with your rule, a report will be provided at your March meeting outlining progress.

- 13. Inquiry Committee Findings:**

**14. Special Requests –**

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

Mr. John Beck introduced a project currently under contract on government property and advised that the district and property representative will formally present the request at the January 15<sup>th</sup> business meeting. Total amount needed to complete the project is \$3,392. The Commission discussed whether to: Approve the full funding request at the January business meeting, contingent upon anticipated supplemental funds; or require a subsequent request once supplemental funds are secured. The District Board supported presenting the full request at the upcoming business meeting for efficiency, rather than requiring multiple approvals.

**IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS:** Comments from Bill Yarborough, Rob Baldwin, and Derrick Potter.

Bill Yarborough requested Commission support on two federal program matters related to disaster recovery efforts.

EQIP (NRCS):

Requested consideration of a letter to USDA seeking an extension of the January 15 EQIP application deadline for the affected region, or specifically for the biochar-related practice.

Emergency Reforestation Program (FSA):

Requested advocacy for increasing the current 85% cost-share to 100%, similar to NRCS's Emergency Watershed Protection Program, citing significant storm-related forest damage and financial barriers for landowners.

Bryan Evans reported that prior correspondence has been sent to FSA and discussions have occurred with agency leadership. It was noted that ERP cost-share levels are set by statute and may require Congressional action to modify. Commissioners discussed potential continued advocacy and coordination with federal partners.

No formal action was taken.

Mr. Rob Baldwin addressed the Commission. He expressed appreciation to Division leadership for past professional opportunities and provided an update on agricultural disaster assistance efforts related to Hurricane Helene and other events.

Derek Potter emphasized that eastern North Carolina should not be overlooked in next year's funding allocations. He suggested allowing multiple staff to work on the same project across counties to accelerate progress. Potter highlighted the ongoing need for additional training staff, noting that a prior request for three new positions was unfunded. He stressed the importance of continued collaboration with USDA NRCS to train both district and federal staff, pointing out that North Carolina's conservation planning training has gained national recognition. Potter also noted that recent JAA project approvals are helping to build capacity and experience, improving efficiency in project processing.

No further public comments.

**V. ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting adjourned at 3:54p.m.

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

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Tinesha McNeil, Recording Secretary

***These minutes were approved by the North Carolina Soil & Water Conservation Commission on January 4, 2026.***