**NORTH CAROLINA**

**SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION**

**BUSINESS MEETING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES**

**May 21, 2025**

 Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services

Division of Soil & Water Conservation

Virtual through Microsoft Teams

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| **Commission Members**  | **Guests** | **Guests Online** |
| Barbara Bleiweis, Chair | Tinesha McNeil | Lorien Deaton |
| Billy Kilpatrick | Allie Dinwiddie | Stephanie Alston |
| James Lamb | Bryan Evans  | Aaron Franks |
| Brian Parker | Michael Shepherd | Lisa Fine |
| Porche Spence | Elise McLaughlin | Chris Love |
| Gail Hughes | Brandy Myers | Robert Moore |
| Patrick Baker | Ken Parks | Amy Cook |
| **Commission Counsel** | Steven Porson | Starr Silvis |
| Brian McGinn | Tim Beard | Medeline Loman |
| **Guests** | Chris Sigmon | Jessica Wilson |
| David Williams | Renee Ray | Charles Bass III |
| Kristina Fischer | Mark Byrd | Daniel McClellan |
| Matt Safford | Jonathan Wallin | Darren Layton |
| Taryn Thompson | Regina Kilpatrick | Paula Day |
| Matt Safford | Scott Thomas | Shelby Kaplan |
| Kristina Fischer | Taryn Thompson | Payton Lane |
| Rick McSwain | Mike Willis | Heather Reichert |
| Josh Vetter | **Guests Online** | Rachel Smith |
| John Beck  | Julie Henshaw | Taylor Fair |
|  | Sam Edwards |  |

**I. CALL TO ORDER:** Chair Bleiweis called the meeting to order at 9:02a.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.

Chair Bleiweis asked all of the Commission members and attendees to introduce themselves and reminded everyone to sign the registration sheet and silence their cell phones.

Chair Bleiweiss recognized Yancey County Planning Director Chris Sigmon who welcomed the Commission to Yancey County and expressed appreciation for the attention the Commission is giving to help meet the needs in Western NC. He shared a brief overview of some of the impacts of Helene in Yancey County.

**III. BUSINESS:**

1. **Approval of Agenda:** Chair Bleiweis asked for approval of the agenda. Commissioner Brian Parker moved to approve the agenda, and Commissioner Porche Spence seconded. Motion carried.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Chair Bleiweis asked for approval of the minutes. Commissioner Gail Hughes moved to approve the minutes, and Commissioner James Lamb seconded. Motion carried.
	1. March 11, 2025, Work Session Meeting Minutes
	2. March 12, 2025, Business Session Meeting Minutes

**INFORMATION ITEMS**

1. **Division Report:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Director David Williams to present. Director Williams shared his appreciation for Mr. Chris Sigman presentation and his service to the community. Director William shared the passing of the Western Regional Coordinator Cayle Aldridge and announced a Mentorship Award in Cayle Aldridges’ Honor to be presented in August. A moment of silence was held in remembrance of Cayle. Director Williams shared staffing new hires – Casey Turlington-King returning and Jonathan Murry as CREP Env. Spec. II.

Director Williams spoke on Disaster Funding diverting from Matthew Disaster to provide disaster BMP funds for Helene. Technical assistance funding is proposed for several positions in the Helene counties. The Department of Agriculture is working with USDA to negotiate for block grant requesting for over $560M to possibly be used to cover losses/repairs not covered under other USDA programs.

Upcoming training:

* EWP in Smithfield on May 29.
* Conservation Employee Training in Cherokee August 11-14.

Additionally, there will be an in-depth decussion and information sharing on our statutory authority and rules that are in place for clarity on how we make decision held on July 22 the day prior to the July Commission meeting.

**Up coming Commission Meeting.**

* **July 23, Raleigh**
* **September 17, TBD**
* **November 19, TBD**
* **January 4, Cherokee**
1. **Association Report:**
2. Chair Bleiweis recognized Executive Director Bryan Evans to present President Report and Executive Directors Report. Mr. Evans shared upcoming events as follows
* Davie SWCD to host the Conservation Farm Family celebration of D&M Farms – May 23, 2025
* Grow More outreach training – June 3, 2025
* Advanced Training for SWCD Supervisors in Greenville – July 15, 2025
* SENACD meeting in Louisville, KY– August 3-6, 2025

Mr. Evans also shared the Associations’ appreciation to those who have volunteered to assist western NC and the District Boards who have supported them doing this. Futhermore he stated that a letter was sent to NRCS leadership for disaster EQIP funding to support the use of biochar.

Mr. Evans gave an update on the current status of funding budget from the House and Senate with hopes that our State would receive something in the end. They will continue following North Carolina and work with our national leaders to get the funding in North Carolina that we need. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes

1. **NRCS Report:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Tim Beard. Mr. Beard gave an update of changes within NCRS involving federal funding that has lead to losing key employees as well as other changes such as office attendance and travel restrictions. Program updates for EQIP and CSP applications are 2,660 and 1,394 respectively. NC NRCS requested an additional $10 million in funding that will be used to implement conservation practices throughout the state. On April 14, Secretary Rollins announced the cancellation of the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities (PCSC). It is being re-launched as the Advancing Markets for Producers (AMP) Initiative. USDA will review existing grant agreements based on three policy priorities:

• A minimum of 65% of federal funds must go to producers;

• Grant recipients must have enrolled at least one producer as of 12/31/2024; and

• Grant recipients must have made a payment to at least one producer as of 12/31/2024.

USDA will honor all eligible expenses incurred prior to April 13, 2025. This reform effort will utilize existing funding, with no new funding made available for these partnerships.

 The EWP deadline for areas that were affected by TS Helene ended on April 11, 2025. NRCS NHQ has approved an extension with a deadline to be finalized later, tentatively scheduled for May 30. A copy of the report is an official part of the minutes.

**ACTION ITEMS**

1. **Consent Agenda:** Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion for the consent agenda. Commissioner James Lamb moved to approve agenda as presented. Commissioner Billy Kilpatrick seconded. Motion carried. Copies of the reports are included as an official part of the minutes.
	1. **Supervisor Appointments:**
		* Brad Smith, Avery SWCD, filling the unexpired elected term of Chales Ballard for 2022 through 2026.
		* Eliseo Pascual, Mecklenburg SWCD, filling the expired appointed term of Morgan Rinehart for 2024-2028
		* George Pegram, Vance SWCD, filling the unexpired appointed term of Rodney Dickerson for 2022-2026
	2. **Supervisor Contracts:**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **County** |  **Contract****Number** | **Supervisor Name** |  **BMP** |  **Contract** **Amount** |  **Comments** |
| Ashe | 05-2025-004 | Terry Munday | Spring Development, Watering Tanks, Fencing,HUAPs | 13,661 |  |
| Caldwell | 14-2025-009 | Michael Willis | Non-field Farm Road Repair | $16,312 | Pending JAA approval Hurricance Helene funding |
| Caldwell | 14-2025-010 | Russell Dellinger | Emergency Access Restoration | $6,670 | Hurricance Helene funding |
| Gates | 37-2025-101 | Rick Morgan | Water Supply Well | 10,500 |  |
| Hertford | 46-2025-002 | C. Gray Pierce | Cover Crop | $4,211 | Applicant: C. Pierce Farms IncImpaired & Impacted Streams Initiative funded |
| Iredell | 49-2025-801 | Tracy Jenkins | Water Supply Well | $1,625 | Applicant: Westward Farms LLC Supplement to 49-2023-803 |
| Mecklenburg | 60-2025-002 | Daniel Austin | Water Supply Well | $457 | Applicant: Austin-Kidd Farm Supplement to 60-2024-004 |
| Orange | 68-2025-009 | Richal Vanhook | Heavy Use Area Protection, Livestock Exclusion Fencing, Tanks, StreamCrossing | $13,087 |  |

 **Total** $66,523

**Total Number of Supervisor Contracts: 8**

1. **Job Approval Authority Applicants:**

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| JAA APPLICANTS FOR CONSIDERATION AT THE MAY 2025 NC SWCC MEETING |
| **APPLICANT NAME** | **EMPLOYER** | **TYPE OF JAA REQUESTED** | **JAA RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL** |
| Chuckie Bass | Cabarrus SWCD | Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills | Cropland Conversion - Grass |
| Amy Cook | Cabarrus SWCD | Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills | Cropland Conversion - Grass |
| Byron Currin | Granville SWCD | Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills | Agricultural Pond Sediment Removal |
| Dillan Howard | Wilson SWCD | Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills | Cover Crops |
| Cameron Knudsen | Sampson SWCD | Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills | Cropland Conversion - Grass |
| Payton Lane | Johnston SWCD | Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills | Critical Area Planting |
| Darren Layton | Alamance SWCD | Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills | Heavy Use Area Protection |
| Mikey Woodie | Wilkes SWCD | Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills | Agricultural Road Repair/Stabilization |
| Rodney Wright | Rockingham SWCD | Submission of completed designs, certifications and skills | Heavy Use Area Protection |

1. **Technical Specialist Designation: :** Chair Bleiweis recognized Mr. Michael Shepherd to present. Mr Shepherd explained that The Soil and Water Conservation Commission has authority to designate water quality technical specialists based upon specific criteria and procedures (02 NCAC 59G). Mr. Mark Seibert, Division of Soil and Water Conservation, has requested to be designated technical specialist for the Waste Utilization Planning/Nutrient Management (WUP/NM) category. He has successfully completed the required training and technical proficiency has been verified by DSWC staff. Therefore, the Division recommends this designation for approval**.**
2. **Overview of Emergency Watershed Program/Helene Site Assessment Tool:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Mr. Steven Porson to present. Mr. Porson presented an overview of the EWP & StRAP reporting tool, what it is, it’s need, its use, the information collected and forms that can be produced. A copy of the power point and report is included as an official part of the minutes.
3. **Approval for Helene-affected Districts to use Remaining 2022 STrAP funds on Different Project Types:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Mr. Matt Safford to present. Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion to approve the Helene affected Districts to use Remaining 2022 funds on Different Projects Types. Commissioner Brian Parker moved to approve. Commissioner Gail Hughes seconded. Motion carried. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes.
	* + StRAP Program Updates included 750.5 Miles of work completed. $31,363,742.44 paid in reimbursements and 87 contracts closed out, 23 ongoing for Fy22. FY24 Contacts included 90.4 miles of work completed, $3,316,272.26. Correction of 10 contacts closed out, with 96 contract still in effect.
		+ Asking for approval for Helene-affected Districts to use remaining 2022 funds on different project types. Of the 23 remaining organizations that have funding remaining from the FY22 contracts 14 Grantees have expressed interest in using remaining funds for streambank stabilization projects and potentially other projects as necessary following Helene. They have cited needs based on higher priority. At this time Madison, Macon and Buncombe SWCD have requested to use their remaining funds for bank stabilization instead of debris removal. This would be a Scope of Work change and not a contract amendment.
4. **Agriculture Cost Share Program (ACSP) Best Management Practices and Policy Revisions:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Mr. John Beck to present. A copy of all reports are included as an official part of the minutes.
5. **Manure Composting Facility:** Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion for the Manure Composting Facility . Commissioner Gail Hughes moved to approve as presented. Commissioner Porche Spence seconded. Motion carried.
6. **Waste Impoundment Closure:** Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion for the Waste Impounment Closure. Commissioner Porche Spence moved to approve. Commissioner James Lamb seconded. Motion carried.
7. **Retrofit of On-going Animal Operations:** Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion for the Retrofit of On-going Animal Operations. Commissioner Patrick Baker moved to approve. Commissioner James Lamb seconded. Motion carried.
8. **Use Exclusion Fencing:** There was much discussion on this item about the number of days for flash grazing, spring and fall season, zoning, as well as clarifying language for including the 20 foot minimum setback requirement. Mike Willis of Caldwell and Renee Ray of NRCS spoke suggested a 10 footsetback, consistent with NRCS. After much discussion, Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion for Use Exclusion Fencing. Commissioner Brain Parker moved to approve with the change to a 10-foot setback. Commissioner Patrick Baker seconded. Motion carried.
9. **Supervisor Failure to Attend - Forsyth :** Chair Bleiweis recognized Kristina Fischer to present. Forsyth Supervisor Edward Jones has missed three consecutive meetings since January 2025. The Division recommends sending Supervisor Jones to the Inquiry Committte established under 02 NCAC 59A.0302 for consideration of neglect of duty. Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion for the Supervisor Failure to Attend. Commissioner Brain Parker moved to approve. Commissioner Gail Hughes seconded. Motion carried. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes.
10. **Inquiry Committee Findings:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Ms. Kristina Fischer to present. For the 2020-2024 terms, two supervisors were considered due to failure to meet training requirements – Daniel McConnell (Henderson) and Trent Talbert (Pender). After deliberation, the Inquiry Committee voted that 1.5 STC hours achieved in March 2025 will be applied to deficit for the previous term for Supervisor McConnell. For Supervisor Talbert, the Inquiry Committee voted that evidence of neglect of duty has occurred and he is referred to a hearing by the Commission. The Inquiry Committee considered supervisor Cody Waters who had failed to attend three consecutive regularly schedule meetings between December 1, 2023, and November 30, 2024. After deliberation, the Inquiry Committee voted that evidence of neglect of duty had occurred and he is referred to a hearing by the Commission. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes.
11. **Request for Exception to Criteria for Extension of Previous Program Year Contracts Policy:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Ms. Julie Henshaw to present. Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion for the Request for Exception to Criteria For Extension of Previous Program Year Contracts Policy. Commissioner Gail Hughes moved to approve. Commissioner Brain Parker seconded. Motion carried. Ms. Henshaw presented the current policy for extension with the common reasons for extension request. The proposed revised method for consideration being:
* Policy exception of the District Supervisorrequirement to attend the first Commission meetingof the new fiscal year.
* Delegation of extension authority to the DivisionDirector. Contracts not approved by the Director mayrequest extension to the Commission.

A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes.

1. **Nutrient Sensitive Water (NSW)- Strategies Update:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Ms. Allie Dinwiddle to present. Ms. Dinwiddie, the Nonpoint Source Planning Coordinator with the DSWC, gave an informational presentation covering Nutrient Sensitive Waters (NSW) strategies and implementation of Agriculture Rules in North Carolina. In the first half of her presentation, Ms. Dinwiddie shared background information about NSW strategies and results from Crop Year (CY) 2023 agricultural reporting activities on nutrients. North Carolina has four existing NSW strategies that are all in the eastern/central part of the state. An NSW strategy is also under development in the western part of the state in the Yadkin Pee Dee Basin. All the existing strategies require an annual report on agriculture’s collective activity to reduce nitrogen losses and phosphorus loss risk from agricultural land. According to CY2023 reporting, the conservation partnership spent approximately $1.4 million of Agriculture Cost Share Program (ACSP) funding and $4.1 million of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) dollars in watersheds and basins under NSW strategies. Nitrogen load tracking demonstrated the agriculture sector met and largely exceeded all nitrogen reduction goals set for the sector. Assessment of phosphorus loss risk from agricultural lands found there was a reduced phosphorus loss risk from baseline for most of the monitored parameters. In the second half of her presentation, Ms. Dinwiddie shared updates on nutrient-related rulemaking revisions and development that will impact the agricultural sector. The Jordan Lake and Falls Lake NSW strategies are undergoing revision and readoption and the High Rock Lake NSW strategy is undergoing development. Several new rule concepts are proposed in one or more of these watersheds that could impact the agricultural sector by revising reporting processes, setting new collective compliance targets for cattle exclusion from surface waters, and creating new requirements for management of dry litter poultry waste. Among other rule concepts, all the strategies are also anticipated to move forward an existing development stormwater rule concept that local governments can comply with by contributing investments to a funding pool. As drafted, funds from the pooled monies could be used to finance nutrient reduction projects across the watershed, including nutrient-reduction projects on agricultural land. Rule concepts for all NSW strategies under readoption and development are still undergoing drafting and the DSWC (and other members of the conservation partnership) are actively participating in stakeholder meetings and providing feedback on rule concepts and language drafts. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes.
2. **District Items:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Mr. John Beck and Ms. Kristina Fischer to present respectively:
	1. **Rowan Supervisor Contract 80-2024-001:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Mr. John Beck to present the additional supervisor contract that was not part of the consent agenda due to being submitted after the work session. Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion for the Supervisor Contract. Commissioner Patrick Baker moved to approve. Commissioner Billy Kilpatrick seconded. Motion carried. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes.

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| **County** | **Contract****Number** | **Supervisor Name** | **BMP** | **Contract****Amount** | **Comments** |
| Rowan | 80-2024-001 | Bruce Miller | AgWRAP Water SupplyWell | $9,989 |  |

* 1. **Supervisor Appointments:** Chair Bleiweis recognized Ms. Kristina Fischer to present the additional nominations for supervisor appointment that wer not included on the consent agenda due to being submitted after the work session. Chair Bleiweis asked for a motion for the Supervisor Appointments. Commissioner James Lamb moved to approve. Commissioner Billy Kilpatrick seconded. Motion carried. A copy of the report is included as an official part of the minutes. Ms. Fischer stated the following:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| District | Name of Nominee | Replacing Name | Term | Willing to attendBasic Training | Willing to attendother meetings | Number of GuidingPrinciples met (outof 11) | Reason for Vacancy | Notes |
| Buncombe | Virginia Hamilton | vacant | Appointed (24-28) | Yes | Yes (local, area,state) | 10 | term expired | Young female farmer from anarea in the county notcurrently represented.Connected to non-profitfarms that increase foodaccess, and introduceagriculture to a diverse andunderseved audience. |
| Madison | Jimmie Ramsey | Mark Cody | Appointed (22-26) | Yes | Yes (local, area,state) | 7 | Professional timeconstraints | Active farmer; strong ties tocounty leadership.Emergency managementexperience will supportdistrict efforts. |

**IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS:** Chair BlMayeiweis asked for any public comments.

**V. ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting adjourned at 12:15p.m.

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David B. Williams, Director Tinesha McNeil, Recording Secretary

Division of Soil & Water Conservation, Raleigh, N.C.

***These minutes were approved by the North Carolina Soil & Water Conservation Commission on July 23, 2025.***