



WaterSC Working Retreat Summary

August 4-5, 2025

The WaterSC Working Group held a Working Retreat on August 4-5, 2025 at the Downtown Courtyard Marriott in Greenville, SC.

This retreat was designed to build from the information presented in previous meetings of WaterSC, to highlight recommendations from River Basin Councils that may have statewide applicability and to provide an opportunity for the Working Group to identify and discuss priorities while working towards development of its own recommendations.

Representatives serving on WaterSC who attended the retreat included:

<div>State Government Agencies</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">●Myra Reece, SCDES and Chair of WaterSC●Alex Butler, SCOR●Annie Caggiano, SC Department of Commerce●Buddy Jennings, SC Department of Agriculture●Bill Marshall, SCDNR</div>	<div>Water Utilities</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">●David Baize, SC Water Associations●Christy Holder, Grand Strand Water & Sewer●Jill Miller, SC Rural Water Association●Craig Sorensen, SC Water Utilities●Scott Willette, Anderson Regional Joint Wate System</div>	<div>Conservation & Cultural Resources</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">●Aldon Knight, Upstate Forever●Queen Quet, Gullah/Geechee Nation●Bill Stangler, Congaree Riverkeeper●Clay Word, The Nature Conservancy</div>	
<div>Agriculture & Forestry</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">●Melanie Shull, Shull Ag●Landrum Weathers, Buck Branch Farms●Chares Wingard, Walter P. Rawl & Sons</div>	<div>Industry</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">●Tommy Lavender, SC Chamber of Commerce●Nick Odom, SC Manufacturers Alliance●Jeff Uphues, DC Blox</div>	<div>Energy Utilities</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">●Mike Ruhe, Duke Energy●Marc McKenna, Dominion Energy●Brian Lynch, Santee-Cooper</div>	<div>Academia</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">●Josh Eagle, USC School of Law●Dr. Dawoon Jeong, Clemson University</div>

Kristy Ellenberg and Lisa Brownlee served as facilitators during the retreat. Others attending in support roles included: Jimmy Bagley, John Boyer, Rob Devlin, Joe Koon, Lisa Gibson, Rupi Grewal, Quami Quet, Tye Price and Rebecca Wade.

Goals & Outcomes for the Retreat: State Water Plan Process

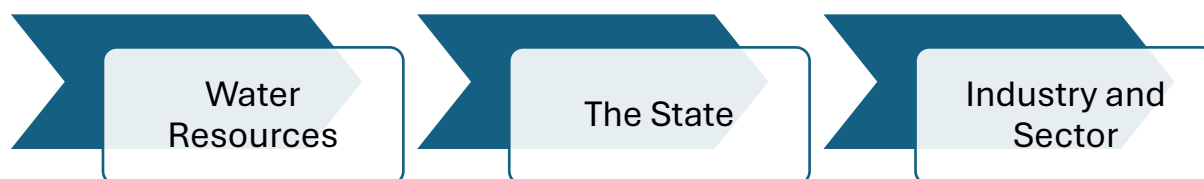
SCDES is responsible for updating the State Water Plan by December 31, 2025.

In January 2025, Governor McMaster offered [guidance on the application of Executive Order No. 2024-22](#) which stated:

“DES shall consider the perspectives and recommendations of WaterSC and its participants in developing the updated State Water Plan, which shall include or be accompanied by a summary of the activities of WaterSC and identify any relevant issues, recommendations, or other related matters on which the participants of WaterSC reached a consensus.”

In this framework, the group discussed how the State Water Plan will be seen as an actionable plan and living document, which can be proactive and adaptable to changing water use needs over time. They envision the State Water Plan providing the structure and a continued path forward, lending an eye to the future and understanding of the past.

When discussing goals of the retreat, the Working Group discussed how they will work together, noting the value of their relationships and their commitments to being here, bringing voices and diverse viewpoints to the table. Several guiding principles were reaffirmed, including **how water is a shared resource with shared responsibilities** and how in this room, WaterSC representatives need to be considering the water resources first, the state’s needs second and the individual sector or industry they represent third.



They shared the need to work together on recommendations and tough decisions that would lead to positive outcomes.

Others remarked on topical considerations:

- recognizing the nexus between water and energy;
- the connections between water quantity and water quality;

- the need to balance supply and demand and have tools that are consistent with plan;
- the ways that water planning focuses on conservation, efficiency and technology; and
- the importance of stewardship and shared decision-making.

Working Session Summary: WaterSC Priorities & Consensus-Based Recommendations

Throughout the working sessions, the group began to identify key priorities for further discussion and consideration. The group was reminded of topics presented at previous WaterSC meetings, and concepts from RBC recommendations were shared as a reference. The summary below captures those discussions which led to consensus-based recommendations during the Retreat.

Topic 1: Continued support for water planning in SC after publication of the updated State Water Plan.

The group noted that the State Water Plan needs to be a living document supported by RBCs and WaterSC as active entities. Continuity of planning and implementation would allow tracking of accomplishments, provide for on-going collaborative efforts, be adaptable to changing dynamics, and can provide the avenue to expand the focus incorporating both water quality with water quantity.

SCDES will need to seek sustainable funding for ongoing state and regional water planning with a business case approach. WaterSC encouraged multi-agency coordination to prevent duplicative actions. Diversified avenues of funding availability could be pursued, offering both flexibility and/or “restricted use” funding for specific needs. A question was raised if investor-owned utilities would have eligibility for funding and project implementation.

RBCs would benefit from grant-type funding programs to support implementation of projects, and there would need to be continued dedicated stakeholder facilitation support to maintain regional and statewide efforts.

Additional needs for stream gauges, data collection and modeling updates for both groundwater and surface water were identified.

These discussions led to the following consensus-based recommendations.

Recommendation #1: The State of South Carolina should continue this working group beyond the State Water Plan updating process, and should continue to support ongoing state water planning.

Recommendation #2: SCDES should request and encourage the Legislature to continue funding for state water planning activities, including planning, administration, data collection and research and grants for implementation of water projects.

Recommendation #3: SCDES should also pursue additional funding sources or opportunities from both public and private sectors.

Topic #2: Interstate or Multi-State Water Management Strategies

As South Carolina and neighboring states continue to grow, there is a strong need to proactively coordinate with neighboring states of North Carolina and Georgia.

The Catawba-Wateree Water Management Group does provide a basin-wide approach in for its given area, but that is not a comprehensive coordination with North Carolina.

Questions were raised relative to Charlotte Water's recent Notice of Intent to modify and increase its current Interbasin Transfer (IBT) certificate. IBTs are currently covered under Surface Water Withdrawal Permits as a consumptive withdrawal, lacking a dedicated regulatory structure. There are opportunities for timely review of IBT policies/practices.

There are concerns that annual updates are not occurring under the existing agreement with North Carolina, and it was noted that the Attorney General's Office could lead on addressing non-compliance.

Primarily, the group noted there can be many benefits from sharing of data with and between Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina, and using data to inform better planning and water management decisions.

These discussions led to the following consensus-based recommendation.

Recommendation #4: The State of South Carolina should increase coordination with Georgia and North Carolina on interstate water management strategies and shared water resources.

Topic #3: Needs for education and outreach promoting best practices for water efficiency

The State Water Plan is a resource which can and should inform and engage partners and citizens of South Carolina. It can and should be a tool for all, but it needs a multi-faceted,

intentional communication strategy or approach with channels to reach different water resource users and audiences.

SCDES should be the coordinator of education and outreach efforts, working in partnership with utilities, universities, state and local government and other entities.

The content of the education and outreach efforts can highlight voluntary and incentive-based opportunities which can tie in with recommendations from River Basin Councils and the 2004 State Water Plan. It also can provide regulatory-based content.

These discussions led to the following consensus-based recommendation.

Recommendation #5: Develop and implement an intentional Education and Outreach Communication Plan on efficiency of water usage throughout the State.

Working Session Summary: WaterSC Topics Needing Further Discussion

The Retreat also offered an opportunity for the working group to revisit a several other topics needing further discussion and consideration. These topics were also among those presented at previous WaterSC meetings and/or included among one or more River Basin Council recommendations. The summary below summarizes some of the ongoing considerations for topics needing further discussions that have not been formalized into any WaterSC recommendation.

Topic #4: Discussion on water reuse as a water management strategy

During previous WaterSC meetings, there have been presentations and discussions on water reuse as a water management strategy. Questions remain on what regulatory and non-regulatory obstacles would need to be addressed for a strategy to be appropriate for South Carolina.

Several questions revolve around what, if any, existing laws and/or regulations which would need to be amended. Alternatively, members of the group asked if it could be more beneficial to consider a new water reuse statute.

Other technical considerations were also discussed. For example, if water reuse strategies include Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) projects, how would the water quality be measured when the Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) from drinking water standards could change from current standards in future years and could have impacts on the water quality of the aquifer.

SCDES noted that its Office of General Council had begun to conduct a legislative review or analysis of beneficial reuse, and this information could help guide and inform further WaterSC discussion.

Action Item: Invite SCDES Office of General Council to coordinate with others and share updates on the current state of water reuse in SC and possible strategies to inform further discussions at an upcoming WaterSC Working Session.

Topic #5: Reasonable use discussion

The topic of incorporating reasonable use criteria into the Surface Water Management Act has been discussed during previous WaterSC meetings, and this issue has been referenced in several River Basin Plans. This topic was again explored at the Retreat without reaching consensus or full agreement.

WaterSC members noted the benefits of discouraging waste, balancing efficiency and conservation with economic sense. There were questions on the lack of equity in current applications of the act. One member said this is the time for change and to move forward, fixing this now rather than when challenges grow.

From a technical perspective, there are models that are helpful in informing decisions. Localized impacts can be seen from current allocations, and it was noted that 97% of current surface water withdrawers and registrations do not have a reasonableness standard currently applied.

Ultimately this discussion can impact riparian rights.

The discussion noted statutory implications for existing surface water withdrawers and agricultural registrations. Water supply infrastructure planning is on a 50-year projected timeframe so a shorter timeframe could lead to uncertainty. Impacts of agricultural withdrawals of the Edisto River Basin were mentioned.

There were questions on the state's current ability to review, and/or require review or resubmittal of grandfathered applications. It was suggested that clarification was needed on the ability to have a permit or registration expire when it is not being used.

The relationship to other acts were also noted, asking if the Drought Act could be more effective in practice at earlier stages.

Some suggested connecting to the reasonable use standard of the Groundwater Management Act and noted it is part of prior IBT determinations. Others shared concerns

that if the Surface Water Act is not addressed, there could be potential impacts on groundwater withdrawals by limiting applications of conjunctive use.

In checking in with members of the group, the majority (14) were in favor of reasonable use, with comments noting that reasonable use solves a problem, adds consistency, is responsive to the Governor's charge, is in the best interest of and allows management of the resource, has a long-term perspective benefitting growth and the resource, and that there is a duty to all to use water reasonably and efficiently.

Several members (7) noted concerns or limitations, including that that they could not speak in favor of this type of recommendation on behalf of their sector at this time, there could be risks to industry, matching a 5-year groundwater permitting timeframe would not be an option considering infrastructure planning timeframes, and that ultimately this is a decision for the General Assembly.

Some advocated for presenting questions relative to this law and its application to the Attorney General. Others noted it is the role of the General Assembly to consider and determine whether policy changes are beneficial.

The group decided these legal-focused discussions would be best addressed by a small expert subcommittee convened by SCDES and its Office of General Council. There were questions on current applications

This group could then report back to WaterSC.

Action Item: Recommend SCDES convene a sub-group of legal and technical experts to discuss differing opinions of the agency's authority/lack of authority to make decisions related to reasonable use. Small group will report back on progress and findings at an upcoming WaterSC Working Session.

Topic #6: Drought response discussion

WaterSC began discussing a possible recommendation that would explore opportunities to improve drought response, recognizing that the [South Carolina Drought Response Act](#) is critical to water management in the state.

The group discussed what technology is currently used and available, noting that action steps and predictive indicators could be improved as technology and information continue

to improve. The group asked how further investments may result in availability of better information, monitoring data and predictive indicators.

They also suggested revisiting the types of drought, having defined triggers and consistent mandatory actions. For example, the Catawba-Wateree area has defined triggers set by licenses at Keowee/Toxaway; however, these do not apply to other areas of the state. Current actions are not consistent, are more subjective at higher levels and there can be challenges to enforcement.

It was also noted that timing of drought status can be disconnected for certain sectors, such as agriculture, where impacts of drought are felt first.

Other challenges noted included the timing of meetings, limits to having full representation and membership on committees, various levels of experience and expertise on committees, and lack of uniformity in voluntary actions as drought stages are declared.

Additionally, there were ideas of how to improve communications.

The group noted the significance of this topic and requested having the State Climatologist, Dr. Hope Mizzell be invited to a future WaterSC Working Session for continued discussions.

Action Item: Invite SCDNR State Climatologist Dr. Hope Mizzell, to attend the September WaterSC Working Session to inform the work group's discussion on possible improvements and coordination between the SC Drought Management Act and the SC Surface Water Withdrawal Act.

Working Session Summary: Other Concepts Mentioned in Discussions

During the WaterSC Retreat, several other concepts were part of discussions but did not have full recommendations or immediate follow-up actions. These are summarized below as reference for the group to determine when and if further discussion could be beneficial.

- Water Management Strategies
 - Revisit the conjunctive use strategies of the 2004 State Water Plan for ASR and Conjunctive Use
 - Encourage recharge of groundwater in identified areas
- Developing incentive-based approaches
- Look forward at the connections between the State Water Plan and other resources, such as the State Resilience Plan and local planning and zoning Comprehensive Plans.

The State Water Plan and WaterSC Processes

SCDES is working to produce draft chapters of the updated State Water Plan, which can be shared with WaterSC, broader stakeholders and citizens in the Fall of 2025. There will be opportunities for comment prior to finalizing the plan, and the working group noted the need to develop materials, share inform and engage others, including local government, in the State Water Plan.

As noted in earlier recommendations, there need to be continued discussions, with an implementation focus after the publication of the updated State Water Plan. These could include development of grant programs, business cases and tracking of projects and improvements.

Future WaterSC Meetings

Prior WaterSC Working Group Meetings, from October 2024 to June 2025, were focused on sharing information on a broad range of topics from the State of Surface Water, the State of Groundwater and numerous water management questions strategies.

For future meetings following this retreat, the group recommended reconvening for longer working sessions with more time to focus on recommendations and review of the draft chapters of the State Water Plan. Meeting dates and locations, summaries and resources will continue to be shared on the WaterSC webpage, and there may be additional communication tools to help share updates more broadly.

The group will reconfirm meeting dates for September, October and November, and SCDES will offer updates on plans for a future listening session and opportunities for broader engagement and participation in keeping with the WaterSC Stakeholder Engagement Plan.