



Meeting Minutes

Santee River Basin Council Meeting No. 1 (Hybrid Format)

Date:	December 19 th , 2024
Time:	11:00 AM
Location:	Old Santee Canal Park's Learning Center (900 Stoney Landing Road, Moncks Corner, Sc 29461)
Prepared by:	CDM Smith
RBC Members Present:	Todd Biegger, W.E. Mickey Johnson, Jr., Sarah Wiggins, Mike Wooten, Michael Melchers, Brandon Stutts*, Riley Egger*, John Grego, David Wielicki, Hixon Copp, Jeff Ruble, Alicia Wilson, Allan Clum, Jason Thompson, Baker Stevens (Alternate)
RBC Members Absent:	Jeff Ruble
Planning Team Present:	John Boyer, Kirk Westphal*, Amy Shaw*, Scott Harder, Brooke Czwartacki, Alexis Modzelesky, Andy Wachob, Joe Koon*, Leigh Anne Monroe, Hannah Hartley

**Attended virtually*

1.0 Call To Order and Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 11 am, with Scott Harder welcoming the RBC members. Scott shared background information on the RBC process noting that the Santee Basin River Plan will be developed on an accelerated timeline so that recommendations can be incorporated into the statewide water plan due at the end of 2025. The Santee Basin River Plan will need to be finalized in 10 months whereas the other water basins had 2 years to be completed. Nonetheless, Scott believes that lessons learned from completing the previous 6 River Basin plans will allow for a more streamlined process in the Santee Basin. Scott also introduced John Boyer of CDM Smith as the lead facilitator.

2.0 Review of the Meeting Objectives and Approval of the Agenda

John Boyer stated the meeting objectives inviting the RBC members for approval of the agenda. The agenda was approved with no amendments. He introduced members of the Planning Team and noted that as the Lead Facilitator, he is the primary contact for the Santee RBC. The Planning team includes members from SCDES and CDM Smith.

3.0 RBC and Planning Team Introductions

Each member of the RBC team introduced themselves and briefly gave their background information, which is summarized below. John Boyer also noted that each member will need to select an alternate that can attend and vote on decisions in the members absence. In addition to the RBC members, Baker Stevens, the Charleston Water System Assistant Source Water Manager and alternate for Jason Thompson attended the meeting. There were also three guests that attended the meeting.

Name	Interest Group	Organization (Title)	Background Info
Todd Biegger	Agriculture, Forestry, Irrigation	Crowfield Golf Club (Superintendent)	Also on advisory committee for Tri-County groundwater withdraw group. Joined RBC because of interest in water conservation. Not familiar with the current water planning process.
W.E. Mickey Johnson, Jr.	Agriculture, Forestry, Irrigation	Four J Family Farms (Owner)	Owner of 5th generation family farm. Farm spans 3 counties, mostly growing commercial grain. Joined RBC because of interest in soil and water conservation. Somewhat familiar with planning process.
Sarah Wiggins	Agriculture, Forestry, Irrigation	State Farm (Sales - Business Insurance)	Resident in rural region of Santee Basin. Encouraged to join Santee RBC after talking to individuals participating in other RBCs. Not familiar with the current water planning process.
Mike Wooten	At-Large	Bolton and Menk, Inc. (Principal Engineer)	Experienced in operation of Santee Cooper's dam and dike system. This experience spurred his interest in being part of RBC. Somewhat familiar with RBC process.
Michael Melchers	Electric Power Utilities	Santee Cooper (FERC Administrator)	In charge of FERC compliance program at Santee Cooper. Familiar on Santee Cooper reservoir operations. Joined RBC because of interest to preserve the beauty of SC waterbodies for future generations. Somewhat familiar of RBC Process.
Brandon Stutts	Electric Power Utilities	Dominion Energy (Environmental Consultant)	Specializes in all things water related - such as fish protection and wetlands delineation. Also served on other RBCs and looks forward to working on Santee.
Riley Egger	Environmental Interests	Coastal Conservation League (Program Director)	Program Director for environmental advocacy group focusing on policy solutions. Co-Chairs SC Rivers Forever team. Fairly familiar with RBC process, worked with other RBC members previously.
John Grego	Environmental Interests	Friends of Congaree Swamp (President)	Previously Professor of Statistics at USC, also volunteers on the Adopt-A-Stream process. Has been following the RBC process for some time and is familiar with the RBC planning process.
David Wielicki	Environmental Interests	South Carolina Waterfowl Association (CEO)	Joined RBC because of work in land/wildlife conservation. David is an avid outdoorsman, and eager to work with the RBC to protect wildlife and water rights.
Hixon Copp	Industry and Economic Development	Williamsburg County (Director of Economic Development)	Joined the RBC because of interest in working with neighboring counties to preserve and promote natural resources.
Jeff Ruble	Industry and Economic Development	Richland County (Director of Economic Development)	<i>Unable to participate in meeting, therefore could not provide more background info</i>
Alicia Wilson	Local Government	Summerville Commissioners of Public Works (Deputy GM - Operations)	Alicia was involved in the writing of the Surface Water Withdraw Act several decades ago. Also has experience in NPDES Permitting. Somewhat familiar with RBC process, was on email stream of Edisto RBC.

Name	Interest Group	Organization (Title)	Background Info
Allan Clum	Water and Sewer Utilities	Mount Pleasant Waterworks (General Manager)	Background in environmental science before moving into management, also participating in groundwater planning. Interested in the RBC because of his Water Utility's presence in the basin.
Jason Thompson	Water and Sewer Utilities	Charleston Water System (Source Water Manager)	Experienced in the RBC process from serving on the Edisto RBC. Eager to work with other stakeholders to develop solutions that satisfy the differing parties interest.

4.0 Public Comments

Public comments: There were no public comments.

Agency comments: There were no Agency comments.

5.0 Overview of River Basin, The Planning Framework, And Examples

Scott Harder first spoke on water use in SC. He noted the statutory mandate to develop and create the river basin plan. He stated some of the pressures on water supply such as population growth and drought. He described the history of water planning in the state and the progression to the current water planning framework. He described the eight river basins in the state and why the state adopted a bottom-up approach that encourages stakeholder engagement and participation.

Scott described the five-step process of water planning in the planning framework – 1. Surface Water Assessments; 2. Groundwater Assessment 3. Water Demand Projections 4. River Basin Plans 5. State Water Plans. It was noted that the groundwater assessment models would not be available during the first iteration of planning. He explained the Planning Process Advisory Committee's (PPAC) role in overseeing the process and that a new advisory committee, the WaterSC, will be taking its place moving forward. He elaborated on what a river basin plan is expected to achieve and went further to discuss the planning framework and the main features of a river basin plan. He drew attention to the 50-year planning horizon of surface and groundwater, emphasizing drought conditions. Scott noted the status of the other river basin plans, as well as the overall state water plan. He suggested reviewing the completed river basin plans to get an idea of what other RBCs are recommending.

Leigh Anne Monroe spoke on WaterSC and their directives. She highlighted the statewide water planning meetings timeline and deadlines. The WaterSC group is set up similar to RBCs, just at a statewide level.

John Boyer started an in-depth discussion on what constitutes the river basin plan by highlighting the four questions the plan seeks to ask:

- What is the basin's current available water supply and demands?
- What are the current permitted and registered water uses?
- What will be the basin's water demand over the Planning horizon, and will the water supply meet the demand?
- What water management strategies will be employed to ensure the supply meets or exceeds the projected demand over the Planning horizon?

He gave examples of strategies recommended in other basins – such as water reuse. He reminded the members of the guiding principles, which include acknowledging that water is a finite essential resource that needs to be made available to users and shared equitably while ensuring sustainability. This can be achieved by the effective use of hydrologic data models and water demand projections in the river basin planning process. He explained in detail the content of each chapter and planning phases, described the process of developing, reaching consensus, writing a plan, and updating the plan. John then gave an overview of RBC roles/responsibilities and how to elect a chair/vice-chair. He recommended electing a chair/vice-chair by the 2nd or 3rd meeting.

Brooke Czwartacki then discussed the major water features of the Santee River basin. She presented data from historical figures of water supply and demand in the basin. The Simplified Water Allocation Model (SWAM) will be used to evaluate multiple demand scenarios. While there is no groundwater modeling, groundwater withdrawal data can broadly be used to influence groundwater recommendations. Brook highlighted that there is ongoing coordination with other planning bodies through the Interiver Basin Councils. Lastly, she denoted the meeting participation guidelines and river basin plan implementation.

John followed up Brooke by discussing the four phases of the planning process:

- Getting familiar with modeling tools, demands, and other RBC members. Field trips will be planned in the near future. Potential trip ideas, such as visiting a local agribusiness, was discussed. Trips and focused informational meetings might need to be planned between RBC meetings so that every water interest category can be included.
- Discuss if there is enough water to meet current and future needs. Flow-ecology relationships will not be evaluated for this RBC, but such info on other basins can be found online.
- Development of solutions. Example solutions such an increasing dam height to increase reservoir storage were discussed.
- Write a plan detailing recommendations and solutions.

RBC Questions:

Q: Was starting the Santee River Basin Plan last a conscious choice?

A: Yes, the planning process was designed so that the upstream impacts to the Santee Basin could be better understood before starting the Santee RBC.

Q: The timeline for the Santee RBC is quite compressed. Is it realistic to develop a River Basin Plan in this timeframe? What happens if we can't meet the deadline?

A: The compressed timeline will certainly be a challenge, but we can take lessons learned from other basins to make the process more efficient. There may need to be short virtual meetings between the monthly meetings to facilitate progress. The goal is to at least have a working draft by Fall 2025 that can inform the SC State Water Plan. After that, further details can be hammered out in subsequent RBC meetings.

Q: How will not having the groundwater models available impact recommendations?

A: There was groundwater modeling available for the Edisto, so we are able to see the effects of groundwater modeling on scenario analysis to some extent. We will have to acknowledge that this is a missing piece of information that will need to be returned to in future planning.

Q: Can you provide some understanding as to what this plan will include, such as specific recommendations, technical standards, etc.

A: The plan will include a technical review of future water availability. It will identify where there may be future shortages and recommendations to alleviate these shortages.

Q: Does the authority to implement RBC recommendations fall on the state legislature?

A: It can. Some recommendations would have to be enacted by the state, but some can be implemented at the local level. It should be noted that the RBC planning body doesn't have any authority to enact laws, only provide recommendations.

Q: To familiarize oneself with WaterSC, is there a specific upcoming meeting one should attend?

A: No specific meeting to attend, but all meetings are virtually recorded and can be watched on the WaterSC website. Meetings can be attended in person as well. Comments can also be submitted online.

Q: How will the State Water Plan incorporate the RBC's Implementation Plan?

A: Its currently unknown how the State Water Plan will incorporate the RBC's planned strategies and actions, but hopefully the State Water Plan will rely heavily on data gathered by the various RBCs and their recommendations.

Q: Who has the ultimate authority of surface water?

A: It's a mix, SCDES has regulatory authority over most surface water, but the Army Corps also has authority over operations of certain reservoirs.

Q: How do Lake Marion and Moultrie operate when drought conditions are such that they cannot release enough flow to prevent saltwater intrusion?

A: Flow to the Cooper River is prioritized, it would take a catastrophic drought to not have enough water to prevent saltwater intrusion on these rivers.

Q: Will an unimpaired flow model be run for the Santee, as done for other river basins (unimpaired flow is flow with anthropogenic impacts removed)?

A: Yes, it can be run if the RBC thinks it will be useful. All other RBCs requested in be performed.

6.0 Review of RBC Bylaws

John Boyer reviewed the RBC Bylaws. He noted that the purpose of the Bylaws includes defining and governing the decision-making process, defining membership and appointment procedures, defining the method of election and powers of the Chair and Vice Chair, describing how the RBC will operate, and describing how the RBC will communicate internally and externally. He emphasized the importance of identifying an alternate and encouraged the members to dedicate at least two years to serve on the RBC. Moreso, regular attendance is essential, as described in the Bylaws. Alternates are welcome to attend all meetings.

Other areas of the RBC Bylaws emphasized by John Boyer include Consensus; Majority – most decisions will be by simple majority; Super majority; Planning Horizon; Roles and responsibilities of the RBC; Attendance and Preparation for Meetings; Chair and Vice-Chair; RBC meetings (as agreed by the members); Special meetings; Closed Meetings; Code of conduct during meetings; Avoiding conflict of interest; Avoiding indiscriminate media communication; Amending (if deemed necessary) the Bylaws; Terms of office (2, 3, or 4 years); and Sub-committees. The election for the Chair/Vice-Chair will occur at the next meeting. Anyone interested in these positions should reach out to John prior.

In the interest of time, the discussion on specific term member lengths was tabled until the next meeting.

7.0 Basin Priorities Discussion

A breakout session was held to discuss basin priorities and consider the following questions:

- What do you want to preserve, protect or enhance?
- What are the outcomes you want to encourage?
- What type of actions do you want to promote?
- How do you want the basin to be managed?

The RBC members attending in-person were divided into two small groups (Group 1 and 2), and a third group of virtual attendees was formed. After small group discussion, the groups reported back with responses addressing the prompts.

Group 1

- Knowing how limited we are in terms of supply
- Protect traditional uses. Recreation, public water, power, ag, etc.
- Concern about large, new users (e.g. data centers) and their power consumption
- Preserving water for recreation, in-stream uses and recognizing its economic impact.
- Agriculture is important, especially in terms of economy
- Knowing interconnectivity, interbasin transfers is important
- Is saltwater intrusion an issue?
- Understanding regulatory restrictions for minimum instream flows (MIFs)

John noted that, based on discussions in other RBCs, many water utilities don't always know where they have (operable) interconnections with other utilities or their size.

Group 2

- Maintaining traditional uses
- Pinewood Landfill is a water quality threat
- Protecting groundwater; flash drought resulted in increased groundwater use
- Better coordination upstream and downstream. Example, Duke Power didn't always coordinate with downstream customers.

- Recognizing importance of and preserving opportunities for groundwater recharge
- Promoting a water conservation ethic. Public Education is important, especially for domestic water use.

Some RBC members provided insight in how aquifers are used and the severity of the flash 2024 drought. The yearly recharge of aquifers was also discussed. There has been an overall theme of building water supply resilience across multiple RBCs.

Group 3:

- Protect the watershed
- Ensuring equitable use of water
- Protect existing users
- Desire to build consensus on policy recommendations, including at a local level
- Expand public education and understanding of drought management
- Desire to understand methodologies used for demand projections, and make sure they are realistic and “current”

John noted that model simulations of future conditions typically do not add new demand objects to the basin, unless there are known plans to build a facility that withdraws water. Instead, the current demands of existing users are generally increased. If there is information of a new water user coming to the basin, it can be added to the model as part of the future projection scenarios.

John also noted that other RBCs have recommended land use ordinances at the local level, particularly to combat sedimentation that causes reservoir storage loss. These land use ordinances can also positively impact water quality.

8.0 Conclusions and Upcoming Schedule

John led discussion to identify future meeting dates and times. It concluded that meetings will be held on the second Tuesday of each month, except for January, beginning at 9 am and ending by 1 pm. For January, the meeting will be held on January 28th, 2025, at the same facility - Old Santee Canal Park's Learning Center. The agenda for next month's meeting may include a more in-depth review of the planning framework and technical discussion of basic hydrology and monitoring, but the agenda has not yet been set.