



Meeting Summary

Santee River Basin Council Meeting No. 6 (Hybrid Format)

Date: May 13th, 2025
Time: 9:00 AM
Location: Santee Operations Center
(1 Riverwood Drive, Moncks Corner, SC 29461)
Prepared by: CDM Smith
RBC Members Present: Todd Biegger, Sarah Wiggins, Mike Wooten, Alicia Wilson*, Michael Melchers, Riley Egger, John Grego*, Jason Thompson, Hunter James (alternate for David Wielicki), Allan Clum, Tony Hill and Guinn Wallover (alternates for Allan Clum), Brandon Stutts*
RBC Members Absent: Jeff Ruble, W.E. Mickey Johnson, Jr., Hixon Copp
Planning Team Present: John Boyer, Scott Harder, Brooke Czwartacki, Leigh Anne Monroe, Andrew Wachob*, Joseph Koon, Sam Quinney, Melissa Griffin*, Megan Marini, Nicholas Pinder*, Kathryn Smith*, Lauren Dwyre*, Devendra Amatya*
**Attended virtually*

Action Items (New or Reminders)

1. (Reminder) RBC members should consider identifying an alternate who can fill in for them in they need to miss a meeting and should provide the alternates name and contact information to ohn Boyer.

Decisions

The RBC reached consensus on several recommendations related to drought response, drought planning, and policy, regulatory, and legislative issues (see meeting minutes).

Meeting Agenda

The following items were on the agenda, which was approved by RBC motion:

- Review of meeting objectives and approval of the agenda
- Public Comments
- Discussion and Selection of Drought Management Recommendations
- Surface Water Law and Regulation and Case Studies
- Discussion and Selection of Policy, Regulatory, and Legislative Recommendations

Meeting Summary

The meeting was called to order at 9 am, with Michael Melchers welcoming the RBC members. Michael stated the meeting objectives and invited the RBC members for approval of the previous minutes and

the agenda. The previous meeting minutes were approved by Sarah Wiggins with a second by Mike Wooten. The agenda was also approved by RBC motion by Todd Biegger and Mike Wooten.

John Boyer provided highlights of the April 25th WaterSC meeting which included presentation by Tricia Kilgore of the SC WaterReuse chapter. The chapter is working on a marketing study and media campaign to promote water reuse.

John Boyer continued facilitating the discussion and selection of drought management recommendations that began during the last meeting. The RBC approved the recommendation that encourages water utilities in the basin to consider drought surcharges on water use during severe and/or extreme drought phases. The RBC discussed developing a recommendation that all water use sectors should consider best management practices (BMPs) related to water use and efficiency. John noted that we will have a separate discussion at a future meeting to review, discuss, and identify a toolbox of BMPs, and the RBCs decisions will be documented in chapters 6 and 7 of the River Basin Plan. Melissa Griffin from DNR walked the group through the CMOR (Condition Monitoring Observer Reports) which is a public tool online where people can report drought or other weather conditions. The RBC agreed they should increase awareness of this tool and encourage more people to use it. The RBC approved the recommendation to fund and establish a mesoscale network of weather and climate monitoring stations in South Carolina.

Leigh Anne Monroe with SCDES reviewed groundwater use and reporting, surface water withdrawal, permitting, and reporting. SCDES issues permits/registrations statewide if a user withdraws over 3 million gallons a month during any month of the year. The Surface Water Withdrawal Permitting Use and Reporting Act was established in 2011 requiring permitting for those users meeting that criterion. Existing withdrawers prior to the 2011 act are not subject to the minimum in-stream flow requirements. These users account for 97% of the permits, and no public notice was required. The surface water permits duration is for 20 years with possible extension to 50 years which is much longer than groundwater permit timeframes. Agricultural registrations do not require minimum in-stream flow requirements, and the permits have no expiration date. Since the Act was passed in 2011, only 9 new permits have been issued.

The RBC discussed the fact that the majority of the permits are grandfathered and last for many years, compared to groundwater permits, which are reviewed every 5 years. The group discussed whether there should be some changes made to have these grandfathered permit holders be reviewed and held them to similar requirements as newly permitted users. There is a concern that grandfathered users may not be utilizing their fully permitted amounts yet their permitted amounts may restrict new permits. The minimum in stream flow requirements are only applicable to new permits so the majority of the permits in the state, which are grandfathered, means minimum instream flows don't apply to most users.

Joe Koon with SCDES summarized several case studies which highlight aspects of the surface water laws and regulations. The first case study involved industry looking to locate in an area where groundwater is unavailable in the long term, but surface water is readily available. The new industry would be subject to minimum in-stream flows and would be required to have a contingency plan. Grandfathered users would not need to have a contingency plan or meet the minimum in-stream flows. The second case study highlighted an example where farmers might seek to increase their registered limit or attempt to get a new registration, but all the safe yield has already been registered or used for the stream reach. This example represents the case in several areas of the state where new, very large registrations have taken the entire safe yield of river stretches, which restricts new farmers from being able to get permits

in those areas. Joe summarized a third case study where a public supply system wanted to increase their water supply from a water body where grandfathered permits exist by transferring an industrial intake to a water supply intake. Joe noted this is currently not allowed. In this case, the reservoir was over allocated and permitted volumes exceeded physically available water based on the permitted amounts, regardless of the actual use, which was lower. The new permit request could not be granted even though water is available.

John Boyer led the discussion about policy, legislative, and regulatory recommendations. He explained that RBC members can suggest modifications to state law, local ordinances, regulations, etc. They can recommend new laws or ordinances, ideas for recurring funding for water planning work, and recommendations for restructuring existing groups or agencies.

The RBC approved by consensus recommendations about reasonable use criteria, improving current laws that allow for regulation of water use so that they are enforceable and effective, recurring funding for annual, ongoing state water planning activities, including river basin planning and a grant program to help support the implementation of the actions and strategies identified by each RBC River Basin Plan.

John provided an update on the surface water models, letting the RBC know there continues to be a delay while waiting on outflows from the Catawba River basin. The Santee model update cannot be completed until the final upstream flows are determined. The next RBC meeting will be held on June 10th, 2025. The agenda for next month's meeting will be included prior to the meeting date.