



WaterSC Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Adopted, October 30, 2024

The Importance of Stakeholder Engagement for WaterSC

Water is a shared resource, important to how South Carolinians live, work, play and grow. It supports habitats, wildlife, recreation, tourism, agriculture, forestry, energy, industry, drinking water supplies, and more. While our state's groundwater and surface water resources are abundant, it is also a critical time for WaterSC to guide the future of planning and management for those resources during these times of continued economic growth and prosperity.

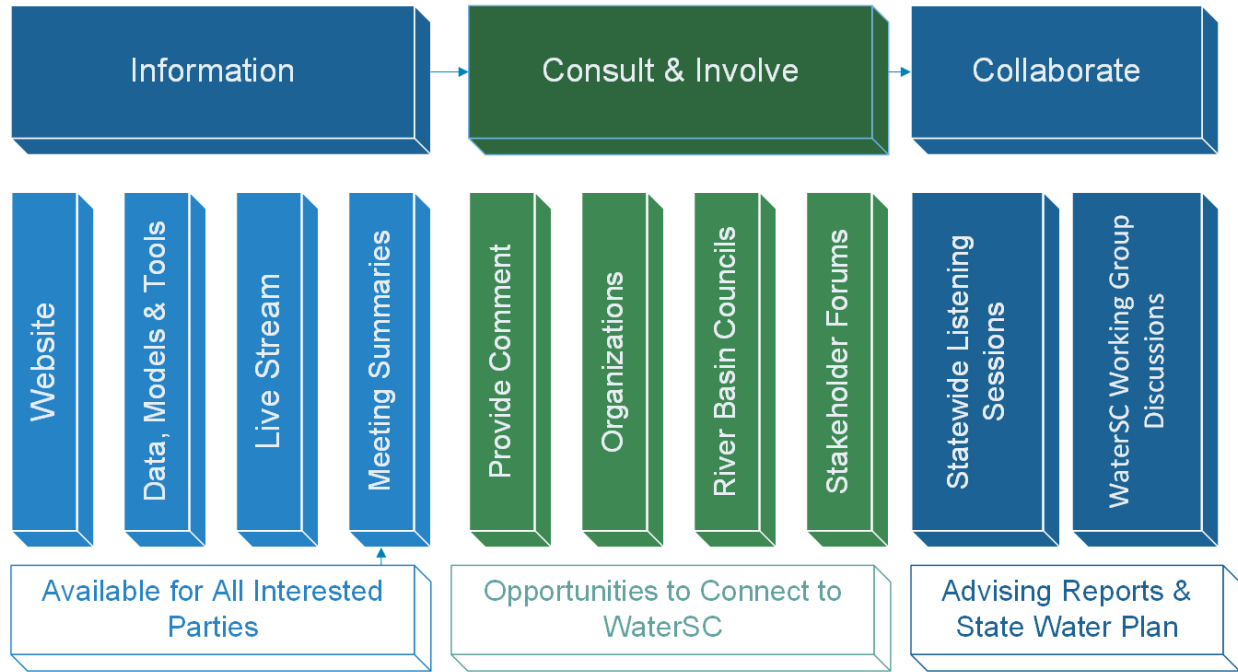
The success of WaterSC will benefit from the collective voices of South Carolinians in these timely conversations. WaterSC will build upon the data, technical information, previous efforts, lessons learned, and diverse experiences of many to help update the State Water Plan by the end of 2025.

The WaterSC Stakeholder Engagement Plan outlines the multi-tiered approach to maximize information sharing, public participation and engagement, bringing thousands of people into this process in the coming year with opportunities to participate in the WaterSC Working Group discussions.

Each voice is valuable to WaterSC and the stakeholder engagement strategies are designed to offer multiple ways for anyone who is interested to participate, with options for:

- Continued learning throughout a transparent process with web-based resources, meeting summaries and livestream recordings;
- Providing input with individual comments, Stakeholder Forums, and connections to River Basin Councils and other organizations;
- Strengthening relationships by working directly with WaterSC and Stakeholder Forums;
- Considering solutions that are best for South Carolina, and
- Encouraging continued engagement as the State Water Plan is put into action beyond the conclusion of WaterSC in late 2025.

WaterSC Opportunities for Participation and Engagement



WaterSC Charge

The Charge for WaterSC originates from Executive Order No. 2024-22 which recognized the State of South Carolina’s significant interests in the development of a state water resources policy and plan that will:

- balance the State’s economic, environmental, and social needs;
- ensure the reliability, resiliency, sustainability, and sufficiency of the State’s water resources for all existing and future uses, while simultaneously protecting the environment; and
- support and facilitate additional collaboration with ongoing efforts and existing initiatives.

The South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SCDES) has been charged to convene and coordinate the WaterSC Water Resources Working Group (WaterSC Working Group) which shall undertake the following actions and initiatives:

1. Adopt and publish a Stakeholder Engagement Plan for the development of the updated State Water Plan **(October 31, 2024)**
2. Provide a report to the Surface Water Study Committee, based on a consensus of the membership, informing the Committee of the current state of surface water in

South Carolina and making recommendations regarding any necessary additions or changes to current law to ensure sustainable surface water withdrawal practices and procedures **(January 31, 2025)**

3. To advise and assist SCDES regarding the comprehensive water resources policy for the State such that DES may issue an updated State Water Plan on or before December 31, 2025.

The WaterSC Working Group

The WaterSC Working Group chaired by Myra Reece of SCDES includes:

- *ex officio* representatives of the following State Agencies: Office of Resilience; Department of Agriculture; Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism; Department of Natural Resources; Department of Commerce; and
- up to twenty-five (25) additional participants from the following sectors and categories: 1. Academia; 2. Public water suppliers; 3. Conservation, water and land; 4. Agriculture; 5. Forestry; 6. Industry; 7. Energy; 8. Tourism and hospitality; 9. Historic preservation; and 10. Individuals with relevant professional expertise.
- The WaterSC Working Group may recommend that SCDES designate up to three (3) additional participants who have relevant professional, academic, or research expertise or subject-matter experience.

This group is asked to adopt the following group values as a guide for their work and discussions:

- *Have a statewide resource-focused approach:* Water is a shared resource, and stakeholders share the responsibility to inform the development of the state water plan and policies. This Working Group is asked to continue to recognize the significance and value of the state's water resources holistically including the connections between groundwater and surface water.
- *Remain committed to the process:* Each member of the Working Group adds a distinct and valuable perspective, experience and voice to the WaterSC discussions. Members are strongly encouraged to attend and participate in monthly meetings. Those unable to attend may choose a designee for representation of the sector and state at one or more meetings.
- *Serve as a voice and connection for stakeholder sectors and categories:* Members of WaterSC are not representing one business or organization during these efforts. Rather they are committed to serving as a voice for the state and other stakeholders. As a member of WaterSC, you will be a key component in sharing information, connecting with others in your sector by hosting Stakeholder Forums and finding ways to bring those perspectives into the Working Group discussions.

- *Provide transparency:* WaterSC meetings will be working meetings. Meeting minutes, presentation materials, livestream access and recordings will be accessible to allow interested stakeholders and citizens to be informed and engaged.
- *Be collaborative and solution-focused:* Meetings and Forums of WaterSC will bring different ideas, perspectives and experiences together to work collaboratively. Please bring your thoughts to the dialogue and listen to others with mutual respect, looking towards solutions that will work best for South Carolina.

Levels of Stakeholder Engagement

As the WaterSC Working Group brings diverse perspectives and experiences together, WaterSC is designed to have an inclusive approach, offering various levels of stakeholder engagement and participation.

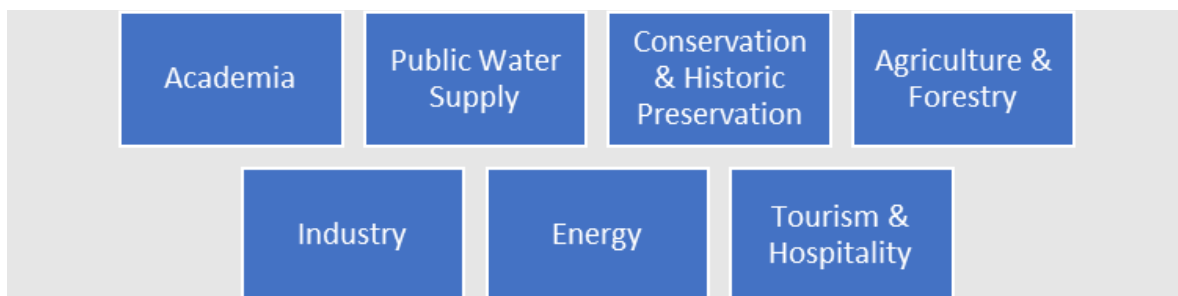
Stakeholder Forums

While the monthly meetings of the WaterSC Working Group will provide the hub of the collaborative dialogue, ***Working Group members or their designees are also asked to provide opportunities for additional sector-focused stakeholder engagement between meetings by hosting Stakeholder Forums.*** These forums may link to existing organizations and other sector-specific stakeholders, offering open pathways for expanded input and involvement that can be shared back with the full Working Group.

SCDES will provide tools and templates for Stakeholder Engagement Forums, which will be used to record participation and input on framed questions to assist the Working Group. Forums may also address questions, link to technical information and help guide topics for Working Group meeting agendas.

Working Group leaders will determine the scheduling and logistics for forums. SCDES will provide a facilitator and technical expert who can assist during these Forum Discussions.

Designated stakeholder forums will include:



Additional Stakeholder Forums may be added to complement the process and meet additional needs to support WaterSC.

Statewide Listening Sessions

WaterSC will continue to benefit from and build upon the work of existing River Basin Councils, Groundwater Management Councils and other state, regional and local groups. Statewide Listening Sessions will offer greater opportunities to connect with a broader range of community leaders and others with interests in the state's water resources by holding participatory meetings in regional locations. Up to three rounds of Listening Sessions will be planned during the WaterSC process in 2025, visiting up to four locations across the state with each round. Details will be provided so that the Working Group and other stakeholders can encourage participation from many interested in the process.

Web-based Resources

The WaterSC webpage des.sc.gov/watersc will provide updated information. This webpage will include links to presentation materials, meeting summaries and livestream/recordings of Water SC Working Group Meetings. The website will also provide opportunities to comment or ask questions.

Providing Comment

Comments may be provided throughout the WaterSC process via a form on the webpage, by emailing waterSC@des.sc.gov and by mail to SCDES, Bureau of Water, Attn: Robert Devlin, 2600 Bull Street, Columbia, South Carolina 29201.

Timeline for Engagement

WaterSC will work collaboratively to complete its tasks of presenting an updated State Water Plan by December 31, 2025. Specific times and dates of the Working Group, Stakeholder Forums and Listening Sessions will be noted on the des.sc.gov/watersc webpage as scheduled.

- WaterSC Working Group will have monthly meetings from October 30, 2024 to December 2025 or when all tasks are complete.
- WaterSC Stakeholder Forums will also plan to meet monthly in times between Working Group meetings to offer input to agenda topics and tasks.
- WaterSC Listening Sessions will be planned in 2025 at intervals that are most beneficial to the process.
- Additional outreach and connections to River Basin Councils and existing organizations on the efforts of WaterSC will also be offered, as needed.
- Web-based resources and opportunities for comment will continue throughout the process.

SCDES Commitments

SCDES is committed to leading and supporting the WaterSC process and helping the Working Group be able to stay focused on its tasks. This commitment includes:

- Maintaining and updating the information available via www.des.sc.gov/watersc website;
- Offering opportunities for comment, engagement and input throughout the process;
- Coordinating Working Group meetings and providing agendas;
- Providing facilitation and technical support to Working Group Meetings and Stakeholder Forums;
- Assisting with tools and templates for WaterSC Working Group Meetings, Stakeholder Forums and Listening Session Discussions;
- Coordinating and hosting Listening Sessions, and
- Considering all perspectives and discussions into consideration in updating the State Water Plan.

Adoption and Ability to Amend

The Stakeholder Engagement Plan is designed as a living document to guide the process of WaterSC.

The Stakeholder Engagement Plan will be in draft form until adopted by the WaterSC Working Group. The Working Group has the ability to revisit and amend the Stakeholder Engagement Plan when it would be beneficial to the Working Group. Requests to revisit or consider amendment of the Engagement Plan should be made by having a member of the WaterSC Working Group contact the Chair prior to a meeting of the WaterSC Working Group.