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## AGENCY’S DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

### Introduction and Analysis

The **South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SCDES)** is a state cabinet agency established by South Carolina law on July 1, 2024, with specific mandates for ensuring the protection and preservation of the environment for the benefit of all South Carolinians.

SCDES has offices throughout the state, with more than 1,200 team members providing environmental oversight and essential services impacting the quality of life of our residents while supporting our vibrant business community. The agency is comprised of environmental experts who use science and data to drive decisions and actions for protecting South Carolina’s air, land, water and coast for generations to come. SCDES supports sustainable growth of our flourishing state to ensure economic development with sensible environmental stewardship. Through community partnerships and stakeholder engagement, we use collaboration as our greatest tool for addressing environmental challenges and supporting communities across the state.

SCDES has five environmental bureaus:

- Bureau of Water
- Bureau of Air Quality
- Bureau of Land and Waste Management
- Bureau of Coastal Management
- Bureau of Regional and Laboratory Services

These five environmental bureaus are assisted by several essential support teams, including Human Resources, Finance and Operations, Office of Technology, Communications, Collaborative Partnerships and Strategic Initiatives, Legislative Affairs, General Counsel, Constituent Services and others.

The agency’s staff are more than engineers, scientists and inspectors – they are collaborators, educators, advisors and public servants, who work to ensure South Carolinians thrive in a healthy and sustainable environment. SCDES is committed to solutions to environmental challenges that enhance the environment and the wellbeing of all South Carolinians. The agency’s mission seeks to ensure South Carolina's air, land, water and coast are protected and preserved for generations to come.

### Programmatic Overview

The **Bureau of Water (BOW)** protects and preserves the state’s water resources for drinking, swimming, fishing and other uses that benefit South Carolinians. BOW develops and enforces state water quality standards, regulates drinking water providers, issues water quantity permits, implements groundwater protection programs, establishes private well regulations, and issues permits for wastewater discharges from industrial and domestic sources.

Staff conduct water quality monitoring at beaches, lakes and rivers; perform routine inspections of

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drinking water and wastewater facilities; and issues stormwater permits through the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System for construction sites, municipal systems and industrial sites. Also, as part of the restructuring, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resource’s Hydrology and Aquatic Nuisance species programs are now part of BOW.

BOW also oversees the state’s Shellfish program, manages the Dam Safety program, and leads the agency’s ongoing assessment of the impacts of PFAS and other emerging contaminants in South Carolina’s water resources. Program areas within BOW include Drinking Water, Non-Point Source Pollution, Recreational Waters, State Revolving Fund, Stormwater, Wastewater Permitting, Water Quality Certification, Private Wells and the Office of Rural Water.

Through partnerships and community engagement, BOW promotes the state’s Adopt-A-Stream volunteer program and encourages hands-on environmental learning at schools through the Champions of the Environment grant opportunity.

The **Bureau of Air Quality (BAQ)** protects the air we breathe by ensuring regulated industries comply with state and federal laws and regulations establishing air quality standards. BAQ also implements strategies that help maintain the quality of South Carolina’s air and works with partners on air quality awareness efforts.

BAQ issues air quality construction and operating permits to industrial, commercial and institutional facilities that emit regulated air pollutants; implements federal and state air toxics programs; performs routine inspections and monitoring of facilities to ensure compliance with air permits and regulations; and oversees the state and federal asbestos program. Programs within BAQ include Air Permitting, Asbestos, Ambient Air Monitoring Network, Diesel Emissions Reduction Act grants, and Ozone Forecasting.

BAQ also helps educate South Carolinians about ways to reduce air pollution, offers free radon test kits to residents, and issues air quality forecasts and alerts so residents can take precautions on days with expected increased concentrations in ozone or other airborne contaminants.

The **Bureau of Land and Waste Management (BLWM)** provides critical oversight to protects our state’s land resources. BLWM regulates mining and solid waste-related activities, oversees the redevelopment of contaminated industrial sites (called “brownfields”), supports statewide recycling and food waste reduction goals, and helps ensure the proper handling of solid and hazardous waste.

Additionally, BLWM issues permits for underground storage tanks; regulates the use of ionizing radiation; licenses the use of radioactive materials; and oversees the investigation, remediation and cleanup of contaminated soil at Superfund, dry-cleaning, above-ground storage tank, and permitted hazardous waste facility locations. BLWM coordinates activities for remediating chemical releases from underground storage tanks. Staff work closely with local governments, schools, businesses and the public to promote waste reduction and recycling.

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Programs within BLWM include Brownfields/Voluntary Cleanup, Dry Cleaning Restoration, Hazardous Waste, Infectious Waste, Radioactive Waste, Solid Waste Permitting, Superfund, Radioactive Materials, X-ray, and Underground Storage.

The **Bureau of Coastal Management (BCM)** helps ensure the appropriate use, development and conservation of coastal resources in South Carolina. BCM oversees the direct permitting of activities that take place within the state's critical areas (coastal waters, tidelands, beaches and the beach/dune system) and uses regulatory management to preserve the state's natural, historic and cultural coastal resources. BCM is committed to maintaining a sustainable South Carolina coast by ensuring development and growth are carefully aligned with the policies and regulations designed to preserve the state's coastal resources.

BCM provides stakeholders with technical, planning and educational resources to aid in the understanding and management of coastal issues and encourages cooperative efforts among state agencies, local governments, community groups and stakeholders for addressing environmental concerns along the coast.

BCM supports initiatives such as Adopt-A-Beach, living shorelines, "Keep Off the Dunes," and the Abandoned and Derelict Vessel Working Group that helps keep abandoned boats from becoming marine hazards.

The **Bureau of Regional and Laboratory Services (BRLS)** supports our environment by responding to chemical spills and releases, issuing permits for septic system installations, sampling and monitoring air and water, and investigating environmental concerns received from the public.

BRLS performs inspections across South Carolina to ensure environmental standards are met and regulated facilities operate in compliance with their permits. BRLS has roles with the public pools we swim in, the landfills we take our trash to, the underground storage tanks that store gasoline, the wastewater plants that treat sewage, the drinking water systems that make our water safe, and the manufacturing facilities that are part of the state's economy.

BRLS also oversees environmental laboratory certification in the state to ensure valid, quality data are used to determine compliance with state regulations. Additionally, BRLS operates a primary central environmental laboratory in Columbia and seven regional environmental laboratories around the state

### **Agency Achievements** **July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025**

In its first year, SCDES has achieved a significant number of goals and milestones that support its identity as a premier state government agency dedicated to making a difference in the lives of the residents we serve every day. Through our commitment to the sustainable protection of air, land, water and coastal resources for the benefit of all, SCDES is at the forefront of ensuring long-term environmental protection while supporting the state's unprecedented economic and population

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growth. The following includes some of our year-one successes.

### **Embracing Modernization: Supporting Environmental Protection through the Enhanced Use of Technology**

- **South Carolina Coastal Atlas:** SCDES received a 2024 Notable State Document Award from the South Carolina State Library for development of the [South Carolina Coastal Atlas](#), a public data tool that provides valuable information about South Carolina’s coastal environment. The Coastal Atlas allows users to explore data and applications using interactive features on the ArcGIS StoryMap platform, and it highlights information related to the state’s critical areas, living shorelines, public beach access, beach erosion, beach renourishment, hazard vulnerability, King Tides, abandoned boats and more. Users of the Coastal Atlas can navigate major milestones along the Coastal Management Program’s historical timeline, from the 1973 inception of the Coastal Zone Planning and Management Council, through state government restructuring over the decades, to present-day Coastal Program initiatives.
- **Recycle Here SC mobile phone app:** SCDES and PalmettoPride received the Innovation Partnership Award from Keep America Beautiful for collaboration on the launch of the [Recycle Here SC mobile phone app](#). The Recycle Here SC app consolidates information for South Carolina residents on what, where and how to recycle various items across the state. It’s one of the first recycling apps of its kind nationally.
- **SCDES AI Workgroup:** To explore the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, SCDES established an internal workgroup and AI policy. By understanding the basics of AI, identifying opportunities for its application, and considering both ethical and practical implications, we aim to develop strategies that enhance our staff's effectiveness and efficiency all the while maintaining the essential human element. Our goal is to foster an open dialogue about how AI can streamline processes, improve decision-making, and accelerate innovation.
- **Emergency response debris drop-off tools:** Our SCDES Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Team's collaborative work with the S.C. Emergency Management Division (SCEMD) was featured in ESRI Magazine, a national publication of the Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. During the statewide emergency response to Hurricane Helene, SCDES’s GIS team created a debris drop-off dashboard that EMD incorporated into its larger emergency response tool. This interactive resource was shared with county directors to provide important debris management information during emergency response efforts. The debris drop-off component also provided quarantine zones that were used to restrict the spread of invasive plant and insect species across the state.

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- **Emergency response dam assessment tools:** During Tropical Storm Debby and Hurricane Helene, we developed Pre- and Post-Dam Inspection GIS dashboards. These important tools helped emergency personnel quickly assess dam conditions before and after storm impacts, improving situational awareness and aiding in rapid decision-making during recovery operations.
- **Continued Developments and Improvements to ePermitting:** ePermitting is SCDES's online platform for environmental permitting, licensing, registration, projects, reporting, monitoring, complaints, compliance and enforcement. It's designed to support the full regulatory lifecycle while allowing our customers to do business with the agency through a user-friendly platform. Since our ePermitting project began, we have successfully implemented 28 programs into it and continue to shift new permitting programs to the online platform. The goal is to have all of our environmental permitting processes housed within ePermitting, which leads to a streamlined, quicker approach to the permitting process. Training videos, troubleshooting resources, and help lines managed by our staff guide users through ePermitting until they become familiar with the platform.

### **SCDES's Successful First Disaster Responses through Statewide Support**

- **Tropical Storm Debby:** Debby was SCDES's first major event response. Our emergency response protocol was activated internally to ensure seamless coordination among our environmental bureaus, and our liaison staff reported to the State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC) to support statewide coordination efforts led by SCEMD. We worked closely with SCEMD, fellow state agencies, regulated entities (such as drinking water and wastewater utilities), and local governments. We created a storm-specific webpage that was updated daily with the latest information from our agency and used our social media platforms to provide real-time updates on critical issues – including dam safety alerts, drinking water and wastewater impacts, private well safety, shellfish closures, and debris site activations. Emergency banner alerts on the agency webpage directed the public to our Hurricane Debby webpage, our SCDES social media accounts, and SCEMD for the latest information.
- **Hurricane Helene:** Helene brought unthinkable damage to South Carolina and our neighboring states. Our emergency response protocol was activated again to ensure seamless coordination among our environmental bureaus, and our liaison staff reported to the State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC) to support statewide coordination efforts led by SCEMD. Our essential employees performed around-the-clock to prepare for and respond to the storm. Our dam safety team assessed dams and remained on-call 24/7 to assist dam owners and members of our Disaster Coordination Team were critical in gathering information from facilities around the state to provide daily updates during Governor briefings and press conferences. The damage

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from the storm resulted in unprecedented amounts of debris that required appropriate management. We worked with other state agencies, local governments and businesses to identify sites where the storm debris could be collected and processed, providing flexibility to regulatory requirements to assist with the storm recovery.

- **Team South Carolina County Days:** In the days following impact from Helene, SCDES joined other state agencies, FEMA and nonprofit organizations in attending Team South Carolina County Days hosted by the Governor’s Office and the South Carolina Department of Administration. These events provided a one-stop opportunity for people impacted by Hurricane Helene to learn about relief resources. We provided information on testing for private wells that were impacted by Helene, debris disposal, and mold remediation.
- **South Carolina wildfires:** SCDES closely monitored air quality during wildfires in Horry County and at Table Rock, N.C. Staff meteorologists forecasted and issued Air Quality Alerts to notify the public – these alerts mean people could experience health impacts due to fine particulate concentrations caused by wildfire smoke. The agency provided updates and information on its social media accounts and meteorology staff supported interviews requested by local news media to amplify key messaging.

### **Continuous Improvement of the Environmental Permitting Process**

SCDES has prioritized making improvements to our environmental permitting processes to reduce timeframes. Through these efforts:

- The average Onsite Wastewater (septic tank) permit processing timeframes have been reduced from 21 weeks to 9.32 days.
- Coastal Zone Consistency (CZC) review timeframes have been reduced from an average of 8-9 months to the majority of reviews completed in under 60 days.

We are implementing the Lean Six Sigma study strategies that were used to improve these two programs’ permitting times to other permitting programs. Successful strategies include internal review processes to identify efficiencies, improving permit applications, and providing refined information on permitting webpages and resources.

Additionally, SCDES hosted a series of four Permit Central Workshops across the state to engage with consultants, developers, local leaders, and government partners on improving environmental permitting processes. These workshops are part of the agency’s ongoing commitment to not only streamline SCDES’s permit review timelines but also taking a leading role in gaining efficiencies with all parties involved in the permitting process. These workshops reflect SCDES’s proactive approach to

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engaging stakeholders, sharing innovations, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement in environmental permitting across South Carolina.

## Environmental Protection through Collaboration

- **Presenting the first SCDES Power of Partnership Awards:** SCDES awarded its first [Power of Partnerships Awards](#) in January 2025, recognizing those who demonstrate extraordinary partnership in preserving South Carolina's environment. The inaugural Power of Partnerships Awards were presented to the Watershed Evaluation Team (WET), which is a working group of stakeholders from multiple jurisdictions in York County: City of York, York County, City of Rock Hill, Catawba Regional Council of Governments, Catawba Indian Nation, City of Fort Mill and the City of Tega Cay. These stakeholders assembled WET in 2022 to better understand and manage York County's water resources and through their cooperative efforts, developed watershed plans in the region. The watershed plans are used to implement improvements for protecting water quality throughout York County.
- **Receiving national accolades from the EPA:** In December 2024, SCDES was awarded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Notable Achievement Award for Superfund Team of the Year. We received this national recognition for the collaborative work performed at the Cone Mills/U.S. Finishing Superfund Site in Greenville. The EPA noted that SCDES's efforts to support land redevelopment efforts at this site reflected outstanding performance in support of the EPA's most significant priorities and recognized SCDES's accomplishment as one of the most noteworthy nationwide.
- **Protecting communities by replacing the Lake Conestee Dam:** The Lake Conestee Dam, located on the Reedy River in Greenville County, was built in the 1880s and in recent years was identified as posing potential risks to people and the environment due to its deteriorated state. An additional challenge was that sampling results indicated the presence of metals, pesticides and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons within the sediment at the bottom of the reservoir. Replacing the dam was imperative. Through a collaborative effort between SCDES and local officials, and with \$36 million in funding support from the General Assembly and another \$9 million contributed through stakeholder groups, the Lake Conestee Dam Restoration Project was formed, and construction of a new dam began in early 2025. This project will benefit the surrounding communities and our entire state for generations to come. SCDES continues to work closely with the Conestee Nature Preserve, the Conestee Foundation, Kiewit Construction, local officials and the community as this critical infrastructure project is nearly complete.
- **Reducing the environmental impacts of waste tires:** SCDES played an integral role providing technical assistance and more than \$2.3 million in grant funding to local governments for the

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recovery of waste tires. In FY 2024, counties reported recycling 39,051.9 tons of waste tires. SCDES, in partnership with PalmettoPride and county litter officers, addressed the illegal dumping of waste tires at 35 sites throughout the state. In accordance with legislation passed in May 2025, SCDES and the S.C. Department of Commerce will develop a state plan for the management of waste tires, to include market develop, as an additional approach to reducing the environmental impact of these materials.

- Growing SC Adopt-a-Stream's statewide volunteer network:** SC Adopt-a-Stream (SC AAS) is an SCDES program that empowers community members to protect and improve water quality through education and certified volunteer monitoring. This volunteer monitoring data has many uses, including education, establishing baseline conditions, and screening for water quality issues and pollution concerns. In the past 12 months, SC AAS hosted 52 volunteer workshops, certified 319 new volunteers, and recertified 327 continuing volunteers and 35 trainers. Additionally, SC AAS partnered with the Environmental Education Association of South Carolina to launch Friends of SC AAS, a donor platform to support volunteer water quality monitoring efforts.

### **Proactively monitoring new environmental challenges**

Through its close partnerships with federal EPA partners and stakeholder groups such as the Environmental Council of States (of which SCDES Director Myra Reece is a past-president), SCDES is engaged in national conversations about environmental challenges and emerging issues. Led by our Office of Science Services, we keep a pulse on new information about topics that could impact South Carolina's natural resources.

The foremost emerging issue that SCDES has been proactively addressing for the past several years is Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). PFAS are a large group of human-made chemicals that present public health and environmental issues across the nation. PFAS chemicals are widespread in the environment and can accumulate in people, wildlife and fish and cause health impacts.

SCDES continues to advance its Private Drinking Water Well PFAS Assessment Project, initiated through a 2022 legislative budget proviso. The project assesses and mitigates PFAS contamination in private wells across the state, particularly in areas with vulnerable groundwater. Some of the project's current highlights include:

- 1,161 private-well water samples collected
- 1,121 PFAS sample results received
- 534 samples with detectable PFAS levels
- 202 samples exceeding the Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for PFOA and/or PFOS
- 1,017 sample requests submitted via the online application
- 939 sample requests fulfilled

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Additional key actions and outreach efforts:

- Point-of-use water filters have been distributed to households with PFAS levels above standards for public water systems, used as screening thresholds despite regulatory exemptions for small private wells.
- The project prioritizes sampling based on aquifer vulnerability, well susceptibility, and proximity to known PFAS sources.
- Outreach efforts target areas of interest and include expanded sampling for mobile home parks and unregulated subdivisions.
- With an estimated one million private wells in use statewide and approximately 20% of residents relying on them for drinking water, the project adopts a risk-based strategy. This includes:
  - Evaluating land-use practices and aquifer characteristics
  - Offering free sampling and analysis
  - Providing filtration systems or public water connection funding for affected wells

This initiative reflects SCDES's commitment to protecting public health by addressing emerging contaminants in unregulated water sources.

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