

Comments at the September 12, 2012 meeting of the Wetlands Task Force

My name is Chester Sansbury. I'm here as a citizen and I appreciate the opportunity the Wetlands Task Force has given for public comment into your deliberations. You face a significant challenge in coming up with recommendations that everyone can agree with. I wish you success.

I don't have any prepared written comments to give you and some of my comments may be extemporaneous.

I'll give you some general background, explain my past experience and involvement in wetlands issues, and then suggest some things for your consideration.

I'm a lifelong resident of SC and my family roots in SC go back to the Revolutionary War period. I've lived here all my life except for a period of extended active duty in the Air Force. I'm a native of Charleston but have lived in the Columbia area since 1969.

I have a Bachelors and Masters degree in biology from the University of SC. I was a teaching assistant and research assistant at the USC. I've also had technical training in identification and delineation of wetlands.

I worked at the Baruch Institute at the USC before transferring to DHEC where I retired as Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Water 12 years ago. I have been an active citizen in environmental policy issues since retiring.

I appreciate the Task Force efforts on this issue and I hope you do your due diligence in coming up with recommendations. I'll also mention that I'm on the national board of ConservAmerica. It is, believe it or not, an organization of Republicans for environmental protection. I'm also chair of their political committee and I'm active in the Republican Party. I want to express thanks to Senator Campbell for his commitment to environmental protection. He is an excellent example for others.

I wrote the Water Quality Certification Regulations pursuant to the Federal Clean Water Act. I expect some of you are familiar with those regulations which I helped get through the DHEC Board and the General Assembly.

Governor Campbell appointed a Freshwater Wetlands Forum that produced a report in 1990. The forum had 37 members. It was much more diverse than the Wetlands Task Force. It had representatives from environmental organizations, business interests, developers, government, and the Legislature. I was on the writing committee for the report of that forum. Printed copies of the report are rare. I have only one copy. I don't think other copies are available and I don't think there is an electronic copy anywhere.

Every question or issue brought up here today was brought up by that forum and is discussed in their report. I'm not angry but I'm very frustrated because it has been over 20 years since that Forum's report and its recommendations and nothing has really changed. We're going over the same things that were debated over 20 years ago. It's like déjà vu all over again. I don't think there is anyone else in this room who was involved then.

I encourage you all to try to get a copy of the report and review it. Some things discussed in it have changed, such as government structure. At the time of the report there was a Land Resources Conservation Commission and a Water Resources Commission, which some of you may remember.

There are numerous recommendations in the report. I don't recall exactly how many, but it may be 40 or so. However I'll mention just two recommendations from page 5 in the report:

#28. The adoption of a regulatory program that includes all contiguous and isolated freshwater wetlands of the State. The area of jurisdiction should encompass all of the approximately 4.5 million acres of wetlands of the state.

#29. The establishment of a specific classification system for the State's freshwater wetlands, based on hydrologic type.

It's time to bring resolution to the wetlands policy issue and I hope you will come up with recommended legislation suitable to everyone.

Thank you.