

July 2025

AN IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF CHEROKEE COUNTY'S BALLOT RECONCILIATION WORKSHEETS FROM THE NOVEMBER 2022 GENERAL ELECTION



The mission of the South Carolina State Election Commission (SEC) is to ensure every eligible citizen can register to vote and participate in fair and impartial elections, knowing that every vote counts and every vote matters.

Pursuant to S.C. Code §7-3-20(D)(3), the SEC is authorized to conduct audits of county boards of voter registration and elections to ensure those boards' compliance with applicable state or federal laws or SEC policies, procedures, or standardized processes regarding the conduct of elections or the voter registration process by all persons involved. These audits are conducted by the SEC's Audit Division.

Additionally, S.C. Code §7-3-25(A) authorizes the SEC to identify any compliance failures and establish and implement a corrective action to remedy such failures. Recommendations in this report will require implementation of a corrective action plan that is developed by the county and approved by the SEC's Audit Division.

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Summary of Results

For the November 2022 General Election, 72% of Cherokee County's ballot reconciliation worksheets were completed, and 68% were reconciled. Of the 28% of worksheets that were partially completed, this was likely due to the lack of a requirement from the State Election Commission (SEC) to fill every field, even if zero. For the worksheets that were not reconciled, adjustments to the county's poll clerk training and ballot reconciliation worksheet review process may improve the reconciliation of these worksheets. Adequately completing and reconciling the ballot reconciliation worksheets for each polling location may give greater assurance that the results include all valid ballots cast.

Background

As defined by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, ballot reconciliation is the method in which election officials keep track of each ballot that has been printed or issued to a voter. Tracking the number of ballots printed, used, and unused during an election cycle ensures election officials have accounted for every ballot created and the election results include every valid ballot cast.

In South Carolina, printed paper ballots were not common until the state's current voting equipment was implemented in all 46 counties in 2020. Prior to then, the state used a direct recording electronic, or DRE, as part of its voting system. A DRE is a vote capture device, in which ballots are displayed, selections are made, and results are stored all via electronic format. The exceptions to this were the ballots printed for voters whose right to vote had been challenged at the precinct or who had moved but were still allowed to vote and the printed ballots used in emergency situations. Since these ballots were the only ballots in paper form, these were the only ballots that could be accounted for at the time.

South Carolina's transition in February 2020 to a paper-based voting system, with 100% printed paper ballots, significantly altered the process of accounting for ballots. In preparation for the change to this new system, the SEC developed a ballot reconciliation worksheet in September 2019 to account for and reconcile ballots supplied, used, not used, and lost as well as the number of voters who voted. Over the last five years, there have been minor updates to the worksheet, but it remains generally the same as the September 2019 version. Figure 1 below is an image of the ballot reconciliation worksheet used during the 2022 November General Election. It is important to note that a description of the worksheet and the terms used within are included in the analysis that follows.

Figure 1: S.C. State Election Commission's Election Day Ballot Reconciliation Worksheet _Precinct ______ Date _____ County __ **Ballots Supplied** A Ballot Cards (Completed by County Office) Hand-Marked Paper Ballots (Completed by County Office) (Emergency/Provisional + Failsafe Provisional) Additional Ballot Cards Additional Hand-Marked Paper Ballots (Emergency/Provisional + Failsafe Provisional) Total 1 **Ballots Used** Ballots Scanned (Ballot Cards and Emergency Ballots) (Number displayed on the Scanner/DS200) F | Provisional Ballots (Hand-Marked Paper Ballots/Envelopes) G | Spoiled Ballots (Ballot Cards + Hand-Marked Paper Ballots Total 2 **Ballots Not Used Ballot Cards** Hand-Marked Paper Ballots (Emergency/Provisional + Failsafe Provisional) Total 3 Voters Checked In Electronic Poll Book (EPB) Paper Poll List (Include Provisionals NOT entered in the EPB) (DO NOT Include Curbside Poll List) Total 4 Total 2 + Total 3 (Should equal Total 1) Total 4 +G(Should equal Total 2) Explain any discrepancies: Are you returning any Emergency ballots that have not been scanned? Yes 🗌 No 🗍 (Do NOT include Provisional or Failsafe Provisional ballots) SEC FRM 1150-202208 every vote matters every vote counts.

Source: S.C. State Election Commission

State Law and SEC Requirements

While state law only requires ballot reconciliation for election day, the SEC's standardized operating procedures mandate this process for absentee and early voting as well. However, the scope of our audit was limited to election day ballot reconciliation, specifically for the 2022 November General Election. Therefore, the following sections provide an overview of the legal requirements for ballot reconciliation and the SEC's ballot reconciliation worksheet as they pertain to election day.

Overview

S.C. Code §7-13-1150 requires poll clerks—the lead poll managers—to account for all ballots delivered to them and return the number of ballots supplied, spoiled—ballots that were defaced or marked in error—unused, voted, and lost, if any. S.C. Code §7-13-1410 requires poll managers to count the number of individuals who voted as well as unused and spoiled ballots. Between the two sections of the law, a poll clerk must account for ballots supplied, ballots used—including spoiled and lost ballots—ballots unused, and voters who voted. This accounting of ballots is also referred to as ballot reconciliation.

By Voting Type and Election Type

In the abovementioned sections of state law, the use of the terms poll clerk and precinct suggest that ballot reconciliation is performed by a clerk at a precinct, which only occurs on election day. As for election type, Title 7 of the S.C. Code of Laws applies to all types of elections—primary, general, special, and runoff. As such, ballot reconciliation is required to be performed for all types of elections. Because these worksheets are intended to ensure all valid ballots in an election have been cast, they are to be completed prior to a county's certification—a statement by the county's board of canvassers that election results are a true and accurate accounting of all votes cast in a particular election.

Overview of the Ballot Reconciliation Worksheet

The SEC's ballot reconciliation worksheet is intended to be used by poll clerks to document, by precinct, the total ballots supplied, used, unused, and voters who voted. This worksheet accounts for these required components and contains two formulas, which are meant to ensure the appropriate values reconcile with each other. The following describes each section of the worksheet and the terms used.

Ballot Reconciliation Worksheet Top Portion

The top three-fourths of the worksheet contains 11 rows labeled A–K to record ballots supplied, used, and not used and voters checked in. Note, the worksheet accounts for voters who voted in the section "Voters Checked In," as only voters who voted are checked in at a polling location. Specifically, rows A–K include the following:

Row	ACCOUNTS FOR	Includes
A		Ballot Cards
В	Ballots Supplied	Hand-Marked Paper Ballots
С		Additional Ballot Cards
D		Additional Hand-Marked Paper Ballots
Е		Ballots Scanned
F	Ballots Used	Provisional Ballots
G		Spoiled Ballots
Н	Ballots Not Used	Ballot Cards
I		Hand-Marked Paper Ballots
J	Voters Checked In	Electronic Pollbook
K		Paper Poll List

Rows A–B are completed by county office staff, and rows C–K are completed by the poll clerk after the polls close. The terms used in the worksheet and referenced in the table above are defined below.

BALLOT CARD

The paper cardstock provided to a voter for the purpose of recording his vote selections using a ballot-marking device (definition below).

BALLOT-MARKING DEVICE

A piece of voting equipment that allows a voter to electronically select valid contest options and then produces a human-readable paper ballot. Ballots are not cast on this device.

HAND-MARKED PAPER BALLOT

A paper ballot marked by hand by a voter using a blue or black pen. A hand-marked paper ballot is used at the polling location for emergency voting, via an emergency ballot, and provisional voting, via a provisional or failsafe provisional ballot (definitions below).

EMERGENCY BALLOT

A hand-marked paper ballot used in the event the ballot-marking device is inoperable or otherwise unavailable. Generally, these ballots are cast at the polling location.

PROVISIONAL BALLOT

A hand-marked paper ballot used when a voter's eligibility to vote is challenged, which may occur, for instance, if he has already received a ballot in the mail but insists on voting at a polling location.

FAILSAFE PROVISIONAL BALLOT

A hand-marked paper ballot used when a voter has moved from one precinct to another within the same county and failed to update his address or has moved from one South Carolina county to another within 30 days of the election. Provisional and failsafe provisional ballots are not counted on election day. Instead, they are stored in individual sealed envelopes and kept separate from ballots that have been cast; these are the envelopes referred to in row F on the worksheet. After the polls close but prior to certification, the voter's eligibility is reviewed, and a determination is made to either accept or reject these ballots based on this review by the county board of canvassers. Accepted ballots are then counted.

SCANNER/DS200

A piece of voting equipment used to read the voter selections from a ballot card or a hand-marked paper ballot. Ballots are cast on this device.

SPOILED BALLOT

A ballot that has been defaced or marked in error. For example, a voter may make a selection by mistake and then return the ballot to a poll clerk for a second ballot. The term "spoiled" is then written on the back of the ballot and retained for records. State law also refers to a spoiled ballot as a soiled, marred, and defaced ballot.

ELECTRONIC POLLBOOK

A piece of election equipment in the form of a tablet that contains the electronic version of the voter registration list, which is used to determine whether a person is eligible to vote in an election and in the precinct. These pollbooks also have the ability to capture a voter's signature, which is evidence that a voter took the voter's oath. Ballots are not cast on this device.

PAPER POLL LIST

A form containing the voter's oath and signatures of voters who have taken the voter's oath. Paper poll lists are used when the electronic pollbooks are not available or when voters must be checked in manually.

Ballot Reconciliation Worksheet Bottom Portion

The bottom one-fourth of the worksheet contains the reconciliation portion, which is also to be completed by the poll clerk. Line 1, as follows, is intended to reconcile the number of used and unused ballots with the total ballots supplied.

Line 2 below is intended to reconcile the number of voters checked in with the number of ballots used.

Beneath the reconciliation formulas, there is a space to address any issues, including ballots that were lost or unscanned.

Worksheet Color Coding

For ease of completion, ballot reconciliation worksheets are meant to be printed in color. Four different colors are used for Totals 2 through 4 as well as for spoiled ballots:

Color	Corresponds to	
None	Total 1	Ballots Supplied
Yellow	Total 2	Ballots Used
Blue	Total 3	Ballot Not Used
Orange	Total 4	Voters Checked In
Green	Row G	Spoiled Ballots

Each color at the top of the worksheet has a corresponding color at the bottom, where reconciliation is performed. These colors are meant to assist the user in transferring the data from the top to the correct field at the bottom. It is important to note the color yellow for Total 2 and the color orange for Total 4 can often appear similar in appearance when printed.

Sample and Results

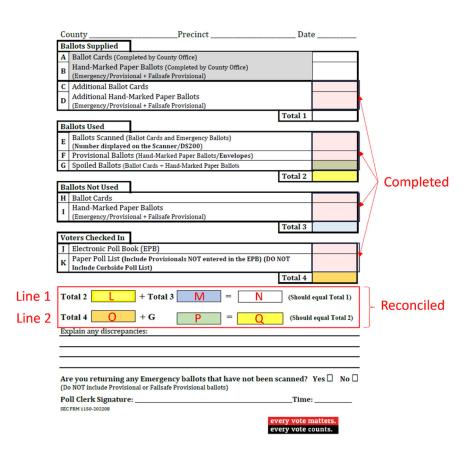
We reviewed a sample of ballot reconciliation worksheets from the November 2022 General Election for Cherokee County to determine if they were adequately completed and reconciled. For this election, the county completed its worksheets by precinct, and all were available for review. Per S.C. Code §7-13-1150, ballot reconciliation worksheets are to be completed by precinct. However, since counties, at times, consolidate multiple precincts into a single polling location, we conducted our analysis by polling location.

For the November 2022 General Election, Cherokee County had 29 polling locations. The sample included 25 of 29 polling locations, and the results were calculated at a 99% confidence level ± 10 percentage points. Therefore, these results can be generalized about all Cherokee County polling locations during the 2022 General Election.

For this review, the term "completed" meant rows C–K contained values. If a field in rows C–K was blank, zero was assumed unless zeros were used elsewhere on the worksheet. The total boxes for each section (Total 1, Total 2, Total 3, and Total 4) were not included within the definition of completed, as they were a separate method of counting ballots and voters from what was presented in rows C–K. Additionally, the term "reconciled" meant the addition in Line 1 and the resulting value in N equaled the value in Total 1 (Total Ballots Supplied), and the addition in Line 2 and the resulting value in Q equaled the value in Total 2 (Total Ballots Used).

Figure 2 below provides a diagram of what was considered completed and reconciled on the worksheet. Note, information in red was added to the diagram to distinguish otherwise unidentified fields and sections of the worksheet.

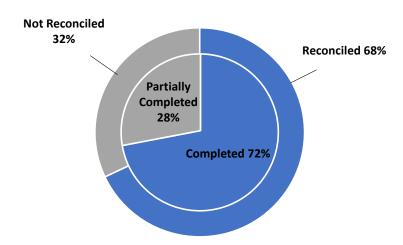
Figure 2: Worksheet Diagram for the Definition of Completed and Reconciled



Source: S.C. State Election Commission

For Cherokee County, 72% (18/25) of its ballot reconciliation worksheets were completed, and 28% (7/25) were partially completed. Additionally, 68% (17/25) of the worksheets were reconciled. Figure 3 below provides a breakdown of the completion and reconciliation status of these worksheets.

Figure 3: Overall Completion and Reconciliation Status of the Worksheets



Source: Analysis of Cherokee County's Ballot Reconciliation Worksheets, 2022 General Election

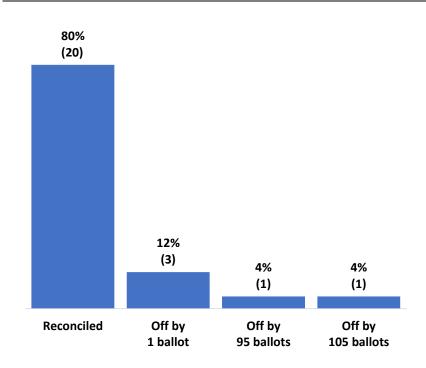
Completion of the Worksheets

For all seven of the worksheets considered partially completed, one or more fields were left blank, but other fields on the same worksheet contained zeros. The most common fields left blank were rows C (Additional Ballot Cards) and D (Additional Hand-Marked Paper Ballots). If the user had filled in zeros for all blank fields, then 100% (25/25) of the worksheets would have been completed. The SEC's instructions for the worksheet used in the November 2022 General Election did not require a user to fill all fields. However, as a third-party reviewer, it was difficult to discern if an empty field was an oversight or intentional. Requiring a value for all fields on the worksheet will likely improve clarity to all users. In December 2024, a recommendation was made to the SEC to require a value, even if zero, be written in each of the worksheet's fields.

Reconciliation of Line 1

As for reconciliation, 80% (20/25) of worksheets reconciled in Line 1 while 20% (5/25) did not reconcile. Figure 4 below provides a breakdown of Line 1.

Figure 4: Reconciliation Status of Line 1



Source: Analysis of Cherokee County's Ballot Reconciliation Worksheets, 2022 General Election

For all three worksheets off by one ballot, the issue is likely an incorrect starting amount for ballot cards supplied (row A). This can occur as the result of the ballot packaging process, which weighs rather than counts the ballots, and thus, the packs of ballots could be off by $\pm 2\%$. For instance, a package of 250 could be over or under by as many as 5 ballot cards. If county staff and poll clerks count the ballot packs and not the individual ballot cards, the values in rows A–D could be incorrect and, therefore, cause Total 1 (Total Ballots Supplied) to be incorrect. Thus, all three worksheets most likely had an incorrect Total 1 to start with, which caused Line 1 to not reconcile appropriately. In fact, two of the three worksheets with this issue have notes explaining they were short one ballot.

According to a county election official, office staff do not count individual ballot cards before they are distributed to the polling locations. However, poll clerks are trained to double count the ballot cards, once a new pack is opened, to ensure the totals listed in rows A (Ballot Cards Supplied) and B (Hand-Marked Paper Ballots Supplied) are correct. Despite this, all three worksheets with this issue did not correctly adjust the original starting total for row A, which caused these worksheets to not reconcile. Thus, having office staff also count ballot cards may prevent this kind of issue.

For the worksheets off by 95 and 105 ballots in Line 1, this was due to the poll clerk not accounting for the hand-marked paper ballots (row B) as unused hand-marked ballots (row I). For example, with the worksheet off by 95 ballots, there were 95 hand-marked paper ballots (row B) supplied, but none were used according to row F (Provisional Ballots) of the Ballots

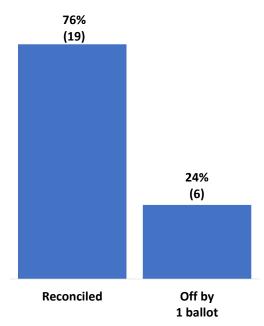
Used section of the worksheet. However, they were also not originally accounted for in row I (Hand-Marked Paper Ballots) of the Ballots Not Used section of the worksheet. This caused Total 3 (Total Ballots Not Used) to be off by 95 ballots, and thus, Line 1 was also off by 95 ballots. The same situation occurred on the worksheet off by 105 ballots. Thus, if the unused hand-marked paper ballots had been correctly accounted for in row I, the worksheets would have reconciled in Line 1. According to a county election official, poll clerks are trained to complete the ballot reconciliation worksheet with a hands-on exercise. Emphasizing how to properly account for hand-marked paper ballots during this exercise will likely prevent these errors.

It was apparent during our review that the county has a process in place for reviewing ballot reconciliation worksheets due to corrections made on specific areas of the worksheets. According to a county election official, ballot reconciliation worksheets are reviewed by office staff on election night as the poll clerks return. Then, office staff review the worksheets a second time the day following the election. However, while most worksheets had corrected values in the top portion of the worksheet (rows A–K), not all worksheets had been appropriately adjusted in Lines 1 and 2. This was the case with the worksheets off by 95 and 105 ballots. Ensuring all worksheets are edited with the necessary corrections prior to certification may fix simple issues and improve overall reconciliation.

Reconciliation of Line 2

Additionally, 76% (19/25) of worksheets reconciled in Line 2 while the remaining 24% (6/25) were off by 1 ballot. Figure 5 below provides a breakdown of Line 2.

Figure 5: Reconciliation Status of Line 2



Source: Analysis of Cherokee County's Ballot Reconciliation Worksheets,

2022 General Election

For the six worksheets off by one ballot:

# OF WORKSHEETS	MAIN ISSUE	ISSUE DESCRIPTION	
Voter Left Without Casting Ballot	IOOOL	A voter likely walked out of the polling location without scanning his ballot. When a checked-in voter receives a ballot but does not cast it, there are three scenarios that may occur: a voter may return the ballot to a poll manager, abandon the ballot during the voting process, or leave the precinct with the ballot. Per the 2022 General Election poll manager's handbook, when a voter: • Returns his ballot, the poll manager needs to spoil the ballot and cancel the voter's participation in the EPB; this would not cause a	
	Without	 reconciliation imbalance. Abandons his ballot during the voting process and does not inform the poll managers, they must assume the voter intended to cast the ballot. Two poll managers must place the ballot in the scanner. This would not cause a reconciliation imbalance. 	
	• Leaves with his ballot, the poll manager who is the exit monitor— the poll manager who instructs voters on how to scan their ballots and provides "I Voted" stickers—needs to alert the voter. However, it can be difficult to always know if a checked in voter has left with his ballot; this could cause a reconciliation imbalance. Under this circumstance, noting such a situation in the notes section on the worksheet is the only option to the poll clerk.		
		On this worksheet, the clerk noted that a voter likely left the polling location without casting his ballot and thus followed the proper procedure in this instance.	
1	Not Cancelling Voter's Participation	A voter requested not to have his ballot reissued after it was spoiled. Although this explains the issue, there are procedures in place to follow in this situation. When a voter checks in and decides not to vote, the poll clerk needs to follow the outlined process for canceling the voter's participation on the EPB after spoiling his issued ballot. By following this process, the voter's record will accurately reflect that he has not participated in the given election. This is important because he will now have the option to vote later in the election if he chooses. Ensuring poll managers are trained on how to appropriately cancel a voter's participation may resolve these issues.	
Electronic Pollbook Connectivity Issue		Based on the November 2022 General Election turnout data—data logged by the EPB host server that shows the count of voters who were issued voting credit—the total voters checked in was overstated by one on both worksheets. Using the turnout data, Line 2 reconciled on both worksheets.	
		It is important to note that EPBs can have connectivity issues at polling locations, which can, at times, cause devices to display incorrect totals	

		for voters checked in at the polling location. However, the accurate log of checked-in voters is recorded in the turnout data. Immediately following the November 2022 General Election and prior to the county's certification, a county election official voiced concerns to the SEC regarding the EPB check-in totals. However, the SEC was not aware—and it is uncertain whether other counties across the state were aware—of the impact of these connectivity issues at the time of this election. Reviewing the host server turnout report during the worksheet review process may prevent these types of issues.
1	Not Using Paper Poll List	The paper poll list—a paper version of the poll list to be used when EPBs are not available or when voters must be checked in manually—was likely not properly utilized. After reviewing the turnout report and DS200/scanner data from the 2022 General Election, there was one more ballot voted than voters checked in at this polling location. Thus, it is likely a voter did not sign the paper poll list when checking in or the clerk forgot to include the voter in row K (Paper Poll List/ Voters Checked In). Reviewing the returned election materials, such as the sealed provisional ballot envelopes or paper poll list, may prevent these types of issues.
1	Data Entry	According to a county election official, the poll clerk wrote that one provisional ballot was used (row F), but two provisional ballots were actually used at the polling location. As previously stated, ensuring the corrective edits are made on the worksheets, prior to certification, may prevent this error.

Recommendations

- 1. The Cherokee County Voter Registration and Elections Office should count individual ballot cards prior to sending them to the polling locations.
- 2. The Cherokee County Voter Registration and Elections Office should, during poll clerk trainings, place emphasis on:
 - The sections of the ballot reconciliation worksheet related to hand-marked paper ballots.
 - Cancelling voter participation in the electronic pollbook.
 - Proper use of the paper poll list.
- 3. The Cherokee County Voter Registration and Elections Office should, during its worksheet review process, make corrective edits to the ballot reconciliation worksheets, as needed, before certification based on:
 - The host server turnout report data for voters checked in.
 - Returned election materials (e.g. provisional ballot envelopes).

Appendix A: Objective, Scope, and Methodology

This report provides the results of our compliance audit of the Cherokee County Voter Registration and Elections Office and its use of the ballot reconciliation worksheet. We conducted this audit under the provision of S.C. Code §7-3-20(D)(3). The review period for the audit was for the November 2022 General Election, and the objective was to determine whether precinct ballot reconciliation worksheets from this election were adequately completed and reconciled. To conduct this audit, we used a variety of sources of evidence, including:

- Federal and state laws.
- S.C. State Election Commission (SEC) policies and procedures.
- SEC training materials.
- Interviews with and surveys of county election officials.
- Information from South Carolina and other state agencies as well as the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.
- Contracts and information from Election Systems & Software and its vendor Printelect.
- Ballot reconciliation worksheets.

Criteria used to evaluate compliance was based on federal and state laws and agency policies, procedures, and training material. We reviewed internal controls in several areas, including SEC policies and procedures; county policies, procedures, and practices; and agency training. Our findings are detailed in this report.

Appendix B: Cherokee County Comments

Cherokee County Response to Final Findings of November 2022 Election Audit:

July 16, 2025

To SEC Audit Team:

Cherokee County is pleased that you took our explanations and concerns into account when publishing the findings of this audit. We pride ourselves in doing things correctly and to the best of our ability. We are saddened, and disappointed, that there were some issues with our ballot reconciliation worksheets and we will strive to correct those issues in the future.

We would like to re-iterate, from pg. 9 of the report, that 100% of our worksheets actually were completed. We are under the strong belief, that if fields were left blank (no zero), and the addition of columns were correct, logic says the blank fields were meant to equal zero. Although the SEC has not ever required zeros be present in a field, now that we are aware of your preference, we will train our staff and poll managers to use zeros from this point forward.

With that said, we strongly believe that the Electronic Pollbook Connectivity Issues (listed on pg. 12 of report) are out of our control. To my recollection, the SEC, and the vendor of that equipment, had numerous issues with connectivity during the November 2022 election (check war room logs, if possible, for other counties concerns over this same issue); and we have continued to have connectivity issues in our county, and across the state. The SEC has been made aware of this situation, past and present, and no solutions have been given. We hope that solutions can be found soon, so that issues do not continue to arise and continue to confuse our staff and poll managers.

We appreciate your hard work and dedication in making sure elections across South Carolina are run fairly and securely. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to give our explanations and our concerns.

Best Regards,

Cassidy L Nichols

Cassidy L Nichols, Director Cherokee County Voter Registration and Elections