

Hundreds of Santee Cooper Employees Receive 'Incentive' Bonuses

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By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

"Incentive" bonuses totaling more than \$5 million were doled out this year to 1,463 Santee Cooper employees, with individual cash rewards averaging about \$3,500 and topping out at \$165,000 for a high-level executive, The Nerve found in a review of utility records.

The records, provided by the state-created utility under the S.C. Freedom of Information Act, also show that 1,459 workers receive an annual salary of at least \$50,000, with 483 paid \$100,000 or more.

A Santee Cooper spokeswoman told The Nerve that "merit pay raises" took effect in March – roughly the time when the coronavirus outbreak hit South Carolina, which in the following weeks resulted in the loss of thousands of jobs statewide with government-imposed shutdowns.

Santee Cooper president and CEO Mark Bonsall's annual salary is \$1,108,221, according to utility records. The Nerve [reported](#) in February his total annual compensation is \$1,160,652, which includes a \$12,540 car allowance.

Bonsall's salary is double what former CEO Lonnie Carter was making before his 2017 retirement – which included a [six-figure golden parachute](#) – following the abandonment of the \$9 billion V.C. Summer nuclear construction project.

In the latest utility records released to The Nerve, annual salary was defined as "base, overtime & management vehicle program." "Incentive pay" was listed as a separate category and was added to an employee's annual salary to make up "total cash compensation."

With incentive pay, 1,504 employees this year make at least \$50,000 in "total cash compensation," The Nerve's review found. The Freedom of Information Act requires public bodies to provide exact salary amounts earned by employees making \$50,000 or more yearly in compensation.

The totals listed in the latest utility records did not include state health insurance and retirement contributions.

In an email response today to The Nerve, Santee Cooper spokeswoman Mollie Gore said incentive pay is tied to a "corporate goals program that incentivizes employees to achieve certain financial, safety and customer satisfaction goals," adding, "There are specific dollar amounts tied to each goal."

Bonsall and other members of the utility's executive staff "do not participate in the corporate goals incentive program," Gore said, though as The Nerve reported in February, Bonsall is eligible to receive a maximum \$250,000 "incentive opportunity" at the discretion of the utility's board of

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Gore in her written response said Bonsall has "asked the Board not to consider him for a raise this year." Deputy CEO Charles Duckworth, who, according to utility records received the largest incentive bonus this year – \$165,000 – has a contract that "spells out his incentive plan, and his payment reflects that contractual provision," Gore said.

Rahul Dembla, the utility's senior finance director, received a \$44,007 incentive bonus this year – the second-highest amount in the records provided to The Nerve. Of the remaining 1,461 workers who received those payouts, their amounts ranged from \$15.55 to \$5,065.08, records show.

The awarded incentive bonuses for all employees totaled more than \$5.1 million, The Nerve's review found.

Gore said as with Duckworth, Dembla has a "separate incentive plan that was agreed to when he was hired." Other pay increases reflect changes in responsibilities, she said, noting that Bonsall "reorganized staff, and many employees have new and additional responsibilities."

Santee Cooper, headquartered in Moncks Corner in Berkeley County, provides electricity directly and indirectly, through the state's 20 electric cooperatives, to about 2 million South Carolinians.

State lawmakers in the upcoming legislative session that begins next month could again consider a multibillion-dollar offer by Florida-based NextEra Energy to purchase Santee Cooper, a plan by Virginia-based Dominion Energy to manage the utility, and a third reform proposal by the utility itself. The COVID-19 outbreak this year in the state put those discussions on hold.

As part of its proposal to purchase Santee Cooper, NextEra Energy would reduce Santee Cooper's workforce by about 740 positions in a "phased approach through 2024," a NextEra spokeswoman told The Nerve earlier this year. The 740 positions represent about 46% of the utility's approximately 1,620-employee total workforce.

Dominion Energy took over Cayce-based SCANA Corp., the parent company of South Carolina Electric & Gas, which was a partner with Santee Cooper in the failed V.C. Summer project in Fairfield County. Dominion earlier this year asked the state Public Service Commission to approve a nearly 8% electric rate hike for its customers.

The seven PSC members, who are elected by lawmakers and nominated by a legislatively controlled panel called the State Regulation of Public Utilities Review Committee (PURC), scheduled two additional public hearings for next month after The Nerve raised questions about the [lack of public input](#) on the proposed rate hike.

As The Nerve has previously reported, the 10-member PURC, chaired by Sen. Thomas Alexander, R-Oconee, [exerts considerable control](#) over the regulation of utilities in South Carolina, including

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qualifying the 12 Santee Cooper board members, who are appointed by the governor.

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Following is a list of Santee Cooper employees whose "total cash compensation" this year is at least \$200,000, according to utility records:

- Mark Bonsall, president and CEO: \$1,108,221;
- Charles Duckworth, deputy CEO and chief of planning: \$732,699;
- Pamela Williams, chief public affairs officer: \$418,958;
- Kenneth Lott, chief financial and administration officer: \$387,366;
- Rahul Dembla, senior finance director: \$365,397
- James Poston, chief customer officer: \$320,235;
- Suzanne Ritter, treasurer: \$290,091;
- Jane Hood: senior director, environmental/water systems: \$278,167;
- Dominick Maddalone, senior innovation director: \$272,466;
- Michael Crosby, nuclear assets director: \$268,836;
- Arnold Singleton, power systems director: \$265,411;
- Victoria Budreau, senior customer service director: \$260,943;
- Thomas Curtis, chief generation officer: \$260,879;
- Stephen Pelcher, deputy general counsel, nuclear/regulatory compliance: \$257,572;
- Michael Brown, research and development director: \$257,009;
- Daniel Camp, senior real estate director: \$250,731;
- Bernadette Gillians, legal services director: \$244,873;
- Monique Washington, chief audit executive: \$208,612;
- Donald Cribb, station manager, generating station: \$207,575;
- John Dills, director, construction services management: \$207,301;
- Wilbur James, director, district engineering and operations: \$200,617;
- Rebecca Roser, associate general counsel: \$200,302

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