

Enclosed photograph courtesy of S.C. Wildlife Federation, Left to Right:
Rowland Alston, Tony Bebber, Dana Leavitt, Angela Viney, Jerome Ringo

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dana Leavitt of Upstate Forever Wins Statewide Conservation Award

(Greenville, SC) - Dana Leavitt, Director of Upstate Forever's Land Trust, was recently recognized by the South Carolina Wildlife Federation (SCWF) as the State's Land Conservationist of the Year. He received the award in January at the Federation's Annual Meeting in Columbia.

"No one knows and cares more about the land than Dana. For over 20 years, he has been one of South Carolina's leading conservationists, not only advocating for the protection of land but "practicing what he preaches" on his own property. We are proud that Dana's great work has been acknowledged by this wonderful state award," said Brad Wyche, Upstate Forever's Executive Director.

Born and raised in Virginia, Dana came to our area in the early 1980s to attend Clemson University, fell in love with our region, and never left. While at Clemson, he found a special place on Three and Twenty Creek in Anderson County. This farm, a former rice plantation, has now been transformed by Dana and his partners into one of the premier natural waterfowl management sites in South Carolina. More than 10 years ago, a conservation easement was placed on the property with Ducks Unlimited, one of the first easements granted in the Upstate.

When Friends of the Reedy River was organized in the early 1990s, Dana was one of the first to become engaged and devoted to the rehabilitation of the river. With a keen eye for unique habitats, he "rediscovered" Lake Conestee, just a few miles below Greenville. He was able to recruit other conservation-minded individuals to create The Conestee Foundation in 1995 and serves as its President. Under Dana's leadership, the Foundation has made remarkable progress toward its goal of making the lake the centerpiece of a new park devoted to passive uses and environmental education.

Dana joined Upstate Forever as its first Land Trust Director in 2001. He has done an outstanding job in assembling an amazing portfolio of 18 easements protecting over 4,000 acres in the Upstate, with many more in the works. Dana spends much of his time meeting with landowners, explaining how easements work, and answering their questions. He has instant credibility not only because of his warm personality but because his own property is subject to a conservation easement. Leavitt said, "Today, more than ever, the protection of what makes the Upstate such an important and special region depends on private property owners. Many of these owners are deeply troubled by the manner in which the region is growing and are seeking ways to preserve their lands. They do not want to see their property, which has often been in the family for several generations, turned into cookie-cutter subdivisions and strip malls. They are looking for other options, and I am pleased to be able to offer them some."

South Carolina Wildlife Federation Executive Director Angela Viney explained why Dana deserved the award. "Dana continues to provide leadership to the conservation community of South Carolina through Upstate Forever, the alliance of statewide land trust organizations in which he participates, and the Conestee Foundation. He is a most worthy recipient of the Land Conservation Award."

Upstate Forever is a non-profit membership based organization serving the Upstate region of South Carolina through its three programs, Education, Advocacy, and Land Trust. The Education Program seeks to better inform the public and local government officials about land use and growth management issues. Through their Advocacy Program, Upstate Forever promotes and advocates for resource-conserving development practices and the protection of sensitive resources. Under the Land Trust Program, they work with property owners wishing to protect their lands through conservation easements. Founded in 1998, Upstate Forever currently has more than 1600 members and serves Anderson, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, Oconee, Pickens, and Spartanburg Counties. The main office is located in Greenville and a second office opened in Spartanburg last year.

SCWF is a state affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation. SCWF facilitates effective habitat conservation and respect for outdoor traditions for current and future generations through statewide leadership, education, advocacy and partnerships. For more information about SCWF, visit <http://www.scwf.org/about/index.php>

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