

Upstate Forever

Promoting Sensible Growth and
Protecting Special Places in the Upstate

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 27, 2007

Upstate Forever Chosen for National Accreditation Pilot Program

Only Organization in the Southeast Selected

Upstate Forever has been selected as one of 22 land conservation organizations in the United States—and the only one in the Southeast—to participate in a pilot project for a new national accreditation program. The accreditation program will recognize organizations that meet national standards for administering and managing land trust programs.

Upstate Forever's Land Trust Program primarily uses voluntary conservation agreements, also known as conservation easements, to protect significant lands and resources in the Upstate, such as ecologically sensitive areas, working farms, scenic vistas, wildlife habitat, historic sites, and areas along rivers and streams. Under these agreements, the landowner continues to own and enjoy the property but places restrictions on how the property can be used in order to protect its conservation values. *Upstate Forever* currently has 39 conservation agreements protecting nearly 8,000 acres in the region, with more currently in progress. More information about the organization's efforts can be found at www.upstateforever.org/programs_landtrust.html.

“Accreditation will help build even broader public support for our work. We are honored to be participating in the inaugural pilot program,” said Dana Leavitt, Director of *Upstate Forever's* Land Trust Program.

Upstate Forever and the other 21 groups in the pilot program are just a few of the more than 1,660 land trusts across the country. Organizations volunteered to be part of the pilot program operated by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, which was established in 2006 as an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance. The participants selected by the Commission represent a wide variety of land trust programs in terms of size, geographic location, and types of protected land.

The accreditation program will be tested this year and will be available to interested organizations starting in 2008. At that time, land trusts can join the ranks of other nonprofit organizations that gain professional recognition through accreditation, such as museums, zoos, aquariums, colleges and hospitals. Accredited land trusts will be able to display a seal indicating to the public that they

meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust and ensure that conservation efforts are permanent.

Tammara Van Ryn, the Commission's Executive Director, said: "In an era when the public is demanding accountability from government and nonprofit organizations, independent land trust accreditation will help provide the assurance of quality and permanence of land conservation the public is looking for. We are extremely grateful to the land trusts that volunteered to be part of the pilot accreditation program. These organizations are willing to demonstrate publicly their commitment to high standards of ethics and operations and serve the land conservation community and the American public by shaping this new program."

*Upstate Forever is nonprofit, membership-based organization promoting sensible growth and the protection of special places in the Upstate region of South Carolina. Our three program areas are: Land Trust, Sustainable Communities, and Clean Air and Water. Founded in 1998, **Upstate Forever** now has nearly 1800 members, two offices, and a staff of fifteen. For more information, see www.upstateforever.org.*

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission awards the accreditation seal to community institutions that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. The Commission, established in 2006 as an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, is governed by a volunteer board of diverse land conservation and nonprofit management experts from around the country. For more information see www.landtrustaccreditation.org.

Contacts:

Dana Leavitt, **Upstate Forever's** Director of Land Trust Program, 864-250-0500, ext. 23

Laura DiBetta, Land Trust Accreditation Commission, 518-587-3143, ext. 208