

Upstate Forever

Promoting Sensible Growth and
Protecting Special Places in the Upstate

**For Immediate Release
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FUNDING FOR FIRST PHASE OF STUMPHOUSE MOUNTAIN PROJECT APPROVED BY CONSERVATION BANK BOARD

Funds Will Allow Upstate Forever To Protect City of Walhalla's Watershed Property

At its meeting today in Greenville, the South Carolina Conservation Bank Board awarded a grant of \$1,227,150 to Upstate Forever to protect the City of Walhalla's 440 acre "watershed property" on Stumphouse Mountain. The watershed property is part of a larger 1,000 acre site which a partnership of conservation organizations and natural resource agencies is trying to protect for public use and enjoyment.

The site includes some of the most important natural and historical landmarks in South Carolina and Oconee County: Issaqueena Falls, a spectacular 100-foot waterfall and one of the state's best known natural treasures; two of the three tunnels that were constructed prior to the Civil War to build a railroad from South Carolina to Tennessee; the old rail bed for the railroad, now a hiking trail; and sites important to Cherokee history. The property also includes the face of the Blue Ridge Mountains as viewed from S.C. Highway 28, numerous streams, towering hardwood forests, and valuable habitat for native plants, animals, and birds.

Upstate Forever Land Trust Director Dana Leavitt said, "I want to thank the City of Walhalla for its support and for allowing us to proceed with the application. And I want to thank the Conservation Bank Board for its generous grant. This is a huge boost for our partnership's efforts, but we still have a long way to go to complete the entire project. We need substantially more funding to succeed, but all of us are working hard to raise it."

The fundraising effort is now focused on a 511-acre privately owned tract on Stumphouse Mountain that adjoins the City's watershed property. The owners of this tract have signed a contract with the South Carolina chapter of The Nature Conservancy to acquire the property. The Nature Conservancy, in turn, would transfer the property to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) to establish a Heritage Preserve site for public use and enjoyment.

SCDNR has committed \$1.5 million to the project. "The Stumphouse Mountain project is a great example of people in a community coming together to protect a local treasure, and our agency is very pleased to be part of the process," said John Frampton, SCDNR's Director.

The Graham Foundation, a private foundation based in Greenville that works to protect the environment, has made a grant of \$180,000 to The Nature Conservancy for the project.

"The partnership is actively seeking donors to complete the project. With the great news from the Conservation Bank Board, we anticipate the remaining funds needed at about \$1.4 million. But we must raise all of the funds by August 29 in order to acquire this critical property," said Mark Robertson, Executive Director of the South Carolina chapter of The Nature Conservancy. "The campaign to Save Stumphouse Mountain is underway."

At a press conference in Walhalla on June 18, federal, state and local officials turned out to express their support for the project: Senator Thomas Alexander; Representatives Bill Whitmire and Bill Sandifer; Oconee County Council Chair Marion Lyles, and other members of Oconee County Council; Walhalla Mayor Lamar Bailes and other members of Walhalla City Council; and representatives of Senator Lindsey Graham and Representative Gresham Barrett.

The conservation partnership includes Upstate Forever, The Nature Conservancy, Naturaland Trust, Chattooga Conservancy, the Oconee Preservation Unlimited Stewardship Trust, SCDNR, US Forest Service, SC Parks, Recreation and Tourism, and SC Forestry Commission, and local citizens who have made this project possible.

Contacts: Dana Leavitt, Upstate Forever: 864-420-1886
Mark Robertson, The Nature Conservancy: 803-254-9049