

Upstate Forever

Promoting Sensible Growth and
Protecting Special Places in the Upstate

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Upstate Forever Works to Make Key Pickens County Property Available to the Public--Forever

2,208-Acre Nine Times Tract a “Top Priority” Conservation Project

Upstate Forever has signed a contract in an effort to protect the 2,208-acre Nine Times tract in Pickens County, which has been identified as the second-most ecologically significant property in South Carolina.

Under the terms of the agreement reached on Friday, Upstate Forever will purchase 560 acres and will have a two-year option to purchase the remaining 1,648 acres, all at a price of \$4,800 per acre.

Crescent Resources, LLC, the land management arm of Duke Energy, announced earlier this fall its intention to sell this key property. If conservation groups or public agencies did not purchase the property by the end of 2007, it would be marketed for private development. Upstate Forever, which currently protects 9,340 acres in the Upstate through conservation agreements, decided to pursue an outright purchase in order to meet this deadline. Upstate Forever will pursue public and private funding sources to repay the loans on the first parcel, after which ownership will be transferred to another organization or public agency. Simultaneously, a second fundraising campaign will be initiated to purchase the additional acreage under option.

Dana Leavitt, Upstate Forever's Land Trust Director, said, "The Nine Times tract is one of the top priority conservation projects in South Carolina. This was likely our only chance to secure this important property for the permanent recreational enjoyment of the citizens of Pickens County and the Upstate. Now our task is to secure the financial support to match the public's interest in having this property available forever."

Local officials and area residents expressed enthusiasm for conserving the Nine Times property. The Pickens County Municipal Association has approved a resolution supporting the project, and the Pickens County legislative delegation has pledged to seek a special legislative appropriation for

the property in the upcoming session. Upstate Forever will also apply for funding from the South Carolina Conservation Bank.

Governor Mark Sanford worked with Upstate Forever and Crescent Resources to help secure the agreement, which the governor said was a “real win for conservation in the Upstate.” Gov. Sanford added, “We’re hopeful that the state will ultimately be able to work with Upstate Forever to purchase the remainder of this property in the coming years. Protecting tracts like these are part of what makes increasing funding for the Conservation Bank so important.”

“It is a tremendous development to be able to move the acquisition of that property forward” said Sen. Larry Martin of Pickens County. “I applaud the Governor’s office, Upstate Forever, and all the individuals who worked on the acquisition. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make this purchase happen, and it will be an enormous benefit for many generations to come.”

“In my growing-up days I hiked on that property, and many of my friends hunted there. It is important to many folks around here to keep it out of the hands of the developers,” said Rep. Davey Hiott, who represents the Pickens area. “It is important that state agencies come up with a plan to make it accessible for all South Carolinians to enjoy.”

The Nine Times tract, also known as Big Rock Mountain, is located at the intersection of the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains and the Piedmont. Distinctive in both size and ecological significance, it contains five mountains and supports seven distinct forest types. The property is home to an abundance of wildlife, including reptiles, amphibians, rare bird species, native brook trout, and game species. In a 2005 botanical study of the area, Dr. Patrick McMillan of Clemson University found 134 species of native wildflowers in a 1,000-square meter plot.

“I am elated that we will potentially be able to save this magnificent property,” said lifelong Pickens County resident Ted Sheehan. “It’s only a 15-minute drive from the Pickens County Courthouse and will be easily accessible to the citizens of South Carolina for hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, and exploring all the rare species on the site.” Shehan, a former Pickens mayor, added, “This is the last big piece of property in Pickens County. We want to leave some places to our children and grandchildren so they can enjoy them forever.”

*Upstate Forever is a 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 2,200 members, two offices, and a staff of 18. For more information, see www.upstateforever.org.*

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