

## **For Immediate Release**

# **COALITION OF CONSERVATION GROUPS CHALLENGE DHEC APPROVAL OF CLIFFS' GOLF COURSE**

**May 29, 2008**

A coalition of six conservation organizations, representing over 20,000 citizens, has challenged the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control's approval of a new golf course at the Cliffs' Mountain Park development in northern Greenville County. The organizations include Save Our Saluda, Upstate Forever, Sierra Club, South Carolina Native Plant Society, Trout Unlimited, and the South Carolina Wildlife Federation. In addition, during DHEC's administrative process, over 3,000 citizens signed petitions or sent letters opposing the golf course.

The proposed 18-hole golf course, designed by the Gary Player Group, would be built along both sides of the North Saluda River for a distance of two and a half miles, almost the entire reach from Highway 25 to Highway 11. Player and the Cliffs propose 16 bridges across the river – 15 for golfers to use as they play back and forth across the river and one vehicular bridge that will connect the Mountain Park residential community to the golf course.

“We have only 200 miles of rivers and streams in the entire state of South Carolina that are capable of supporting trout, and the North Saluda is one of them,” said Chuck Adams, President of the Mountain Bridge Chapter of Trout Unlimited. “Protection of this extraordinary resource should be one of the top priorities of natural resource management in South Carolina. All doubts should be resolved in favor of protecting the resource, not in favor of permitting yet another golf course.”

One of the conservation groups' key points relates to alternatives. Brad Wyche, Executive Director of Upstate Forever, said, “The Cliffs did a completely unacceptable job in evaluating other sites for the golf course. The regulations are very clear that all feasible

alternatives have to be studied and that the alternative with the least environmental impact is the one that must be used. The Mountain Park development consists of 5,000 acres. There are plenty of other feasible sites for the golf course that would have no impact at all on the North Saluda. No one is saying that the Cliffs shouldn't have a golf course. It just shouldn't be built along the river.”

Ben Gregg, Executive Director of the South Carolina Wildlife Federation, said, “The feasible alternative issue in this case has huge implications for the entire state, especially when public resources are at stake. A linchpin of many environmental and natural resource programs is the requirement to carefully and thoroughly analyze all feasible alternatives. The Cliffs clearly failed to do that here.”

In the appeal, the conservation groups will also contest several aspects relating to the golf course design itself, such as the width and nature of the buffer along the river, the number and height of the bridges, and the extent of channel alteration work. “There shouldn't be a golf course wrapped around this river, but if that is permitted, additional measures and practices must be imposed to reduce impacts. The current design will fragment and degrade the natural buffer along the North Saluda, causing harm to the river and fish and wildlife resources,” said Dianne Anastos, Chair of Save Our Saluda. “This is not an environmentally sensitive design. DHEC is letting us all down in approving it.”

Other issues include impairment of navigation on the river due to the design of the 16 bridges, loss of public access for trout fishing, and the vague language and lack of enforceability of several of the other permit conditions.

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***Save Our Saluda** is a grassroots citizen action organization dedicated to the protection and preservation of the headwaters of the Saluda River Watershed. For more information, see [www.saveoursaluda.org](http://www.saveoursaluda.org). Contact: Dianne Anastos, Chair of the Board of Directors, (864) 836-3860.*

***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 over 3,300 members, two offices, and a staff of 18. For more information, see [www.upstateforever.org](http://www.upstateforever.org). Contact: Brad Wyche, Executive Director, (864) 250-0500.*

***Sierra Club** is a nonprofit, volunteer organization committed to exploring, enjoying, and protecting the wild places of the earth; to practicing and promoting the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educating and enlisting humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to using all lawful means to carry out these objectives. For more information, see [www.southcarolina.sierraclub.org](http://www.southcarolina.sierraclub.org). Contact: Dennis Chamberlain, (864) 331-3069.*

***The South Carolina Native Plant Society*** is a non-profit organization committed to the preservation and protection of native plant communities in South Carolina. Founded in March of 1996, the group works to promote the awareness and education of native plant species and their importance in the South Carolina landscape and history. For more information, see [www.scnps.org](http://www.scnps.org). Contact: Rick Huffman, Public Relations Chair, (864) 898-1221.

***South Carolina Wildlife Federation*** is nonprofit citizens' conservation organization that facilitates effective habitat conservation and respect for outdoor traditions for current and future generations through statewide leadership, education, advocacy, and partnerships. Since its founding by sportsmen in 1931, the SCWF has established itself as an umbrella organization representing various interests that help to ensure that our children and grandchildren enjoy the same natural heritage and opportunities for outdoor recreation. For more information, see [www.scwf.org](http://www.scwf.org). Contact: Ben Gregg, Executive Director, (803) 256-0670.

***Trout Unlimited*** is nonprofit organization committed to conserve, protect and restore North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds by applying "the very best information and thinking available" in its conservation work. The Mountain Bridge Chapter works to preserve the coldwater habitat of Northern Greenville County and surrounding areas with a volunteer base of over 400 members. For more information, see [www.mbtu.org](http://www.mbtu.org) or [www.tu.org](http://www.tu.org). Contact: Chuck Adams, President, Mountain Bridge Chapter, (864) 235-2251 or Meta Armstrong, Chair, SC State Council, (864) 268-7213