



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Upstate Forever Releases Annual Top Ten List

Organization Lists Top Ten Achievements in Planning and Conservation in the Upstate in 2011

Upstate Forever is pleased to announce its annual Top Ten List of the most notable achievements in land use, conservation, and sustainable development issues in the Upstate (not necessarily in order of importance):

1. South Saluda Trout Enhancement Project a Resounding Success

A once-degraded stretch of river in northern Greenville and Pickens Counties is now healthy, protected, and well-populated with trout, thanks to the South Saluda Trout Enhancement Project. The project, which involved the installation of 15 native rock cross-vanes in a 2,964-foot stretch of the South Saluda River, the installation of vehicle access controls at all high use areas, and stabilization and revegetation of degraded public access areas, was completed in the fall of 2011. The project was installed by the Natural Resource Conservation Service and sponsored by Partners for Trout, an alliance of government agencies and nonprofits organizations (including **Upstate Forever**) committed to the protection and restoration of trout habitat in South Carolina.

The enhancements to the South Saluda are working extremely well and appear to be natural to the untrained eye. The S.C. Department of Natural Resources now estimates that nearly 90 percent of the fish found during a recent sampling of the river were located in the deep water pools created by the project.

Numerous community members have expressed their enthusiastic support for the project, and local anglers are enjoying the convenient fishing spots, which are open to the public. To top it off, Partners for Trout will receive awards for the project from both **Upstate Forever** and the South Carolina Wildlife Federation at their respective annual award banquets next month.

For more information about the South Saluda Trout Enhancement Project, see this [fact sheet](#) and our [website](#).

2. Oconee County Creates Conservation Bank

2011 saw the establishment of the Upstate's first local conservation bank! Oconee County Council adopted the Oconee County Conservation Bank in September (see [UU 115](#) for background information on this issue), capping off a two-year grassroots effort to establish a local source of conservation funding.

While the legislation's passage represents great news for land protection, supporters are now working to identify a dedicated source of funding. (The [South Carolina Conservation Bank](#) also lacked a funding source when it was established in 2002). [Oconee Forever](#), which spearheaded the advocacy efforts, will continue to press for funding for conserving historic and cultural landmarks, productive agricultural land, high-quality watershed lands, significant forest areas, scenic lands and outstanding vistas in Oconee County. For more information, visit www.oconeecountyconservationbank.org.

3. Land Trust Surpasses 16,000 Acres Protected

Despite the struggling economy, **Upstate Forever** has continued our work with landowners to conserve the Upstate's rural heritage and special places. With the protection in 2011 of five additional properties totaling 1,442 acres, our Land Trust now permanently protects 84 properties across the region, encompassing 16,262 acres of significant farms, forests, natural areas and wildlife habitat through voluntary conservation agreements with landowners.

For more information about conservation agreements, visit www.upstateforever.org or contact Erin Knight, **Upstate Forever's** Land Trust Director, at (864) 250-0500x26.

4. Limits Instituted on Phosphorus Inputs to Saluda River

During dry years, when rivers and lakes are most vulnerable to algae blooms, wastewater treatment plants on the Saluda River account for over 70 percent of the phosphorus that reaches Lake Greenwood. Historically there has been no limit on the amount of phosphorus that could be released by these plants into the Saluda River, but thankfully that changed this year with the issuance by the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) of revised discharge permits for the ten plants. The permits now contain specific phosphorous limits and also allow the wastewater utilities to use an innovative trading agreement to control phosphorous in a cost-effective manner. The permits should reduce 2010 phosphorus levels by 25 percent.

Upstate Forever has advocated for phosphorus limits on the Saluda River since the release of our 2009 [Saving Lake Greenwood](#) (SLG) report and the listing of the Saluda as America's 6th Most Endangered River in 2009 because of the threat from phosphorus pollution. The SLG report, the result of five years of intensive research by a broad-based coalition headed by **Upstate Forever**, identified the two primary threats to the long-term health of Lake Greenwood as sediment from upstream development and phosphorus from wastewater discharges (see [UU 101](#) for more information).

DHEC has answered the call of **Upstate Forever**, American Rivers, and local advocacy groups such as Preserving Lake Greenwood to impose meaningful phosphorous limits on the wastewater plants. This is a huge accomplishment in our SLG campaign to protect the health of the Saluda River, Lake Greenwood, and the communities that depend on them. It can also serve as a model for addressing water quality problems in other watersheds.

5. Progress on Restoring Twelve Mile River

2011 saw two dams come down and progress toward removing the third, five years after a U.S. District Court ordered Schlumberger, Inc. to remediate polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination in Lake Hartwell and Twelve Mile River. As detailed in previous [Upstate Updates](#) and [Upstate Advocates](#), **Upstate Forever** and our partners (Pickens County Soil and Water Conservation District and Lake Hartwell Association) carefully monitored Schlumberger's progress in carrying out the work required by the Court to dredge and remove contaminated sediments and then dismantle the Woodside I and Woodside II dams. While we were disappointed that all of the contaminated sediment was not removed prior to the dams coming down, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will evaluate PCB levels in the river and lake and if the levels are unacceptable, it can require Schlumberger to implement additional cleanup measures.

In order to fully restore the river, the third dam must also come down. The Easley-Central Water District (ECWD), which owns and operates this dam, has no objection to its removal as long as an alternative water supply system is provided. The good news is that there is ample funding for the project in a "restoration account" of almost \$13 million that Schlumberger was required by the Court order to establish. But the federal and state agencies responsible for deciding how the account will be spent have not yet approved the project. At year end, a request by **Upstate Forever** and our partners for funds to prepare a specific project plan was pending with these agencies. Hopefully it will be approved soon, and we can take a big step toward restoring a clean, healthy, and free-flowing Twelve Mile River.

6. Jones Gap State Park Expands

One of the Upstate's crown jewels now sparkles even more brightly: Jones Gap State Park expanded by 600 acres in 2011, stretching its borders to the North Carolina state line. The property includes a 150-foot waterfall and one of the state's highest mountain peaks. This additional acreage will enable the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism to add more access points, trails, and interpretive facilities in the park. Naturaland Trust donated 305 acres, already protected under a conservation agreement with **Upstate Forever**. The remaining land was donated by The Nature Conservancy, which purchased the property with the help of 380 individual donors. What a wonderful achievement for conservation!

7. Innovative Parking Study Helps Improve Water Quality in Greenville

Upstate Forever and Furman University completed a unique parking study that analyzed the extent to which local parking lots are used during their busiest times. The study found that there is a huge surplus of off-street parking in many commercial developments in the City of Greenville, not including the Central Business District (see pages 8-9 of the [Summer-Fall 2011 Upstate Advocate](#)). Researchers found that between 41 and 63 percent of parking spaces sit empty during *peak* shopping hours, such as the day after Thanksgiving. Therefore, many parking lots can be reduced significantly in size and still comfortably accommodate shoppers' needs. Building too many parking spaces takes up valuable land, is an unnecessary cost to developers, and is bad for water quality.

In June, Greenville City Council used the findings of the parking study to amend its parking ordinance to establish more appropriate parking lot sizes. In most cases this means less parking will be required. Soon after, Council added a requirement that parking spaces above the minimum and below the maximum be constructed using pervious material or other approved low-impact development techniques. Both of these changes will go a long way to helping improve water quality in the City!

8. City of Spartanburg Adopts Upstate's First Form-Based Code

On July 1, 2011, the City of Spartanburg became the first community in the Upstate to institute a transect, or form-based zoning code — big news for advocates of planning for sensible growth. The new Downtown Code, two years in the making, replaced existing zoning regulations in the downtown area. An outgrowth of the 2008 Downtown Master Plan, the code focuses on the forms (appearance and design) rather than the actual uses of downtown buildings in order to ensure a mixed use, pedestrian-friendly urban environment while maximizing flexibility for property owners. Downtown Spartanburg is now divided into three distinct districts, with building heights, building types, frontages and setbacks specific to each district detailed in the code.

The Downtown Code will apply only to new and extensively renovated buildings, but over the long term it should greatly improve the character and walkability of the downtown. See this [article](#) in the *Spartanburg Herald-Journal* for more information about the code. The Downtown Master Plan, including the Downtown Code, can be read in full [here](#). And click [here](#) for information from **Upstate Forever** about the Transect and other planning tools.

9. Golden Creek Permit Revised to Protect Clean Water

In a victory for clean water, DHEC revised a wastewater discharge permit to which EPA had officially objected at the request of **Upstate Forever** and others. As described in [UU 112](#), in 2009 Easley Combined Utilities (ECU) applied to DHEC for a 10 percent variance in the discharge permit for its wastewater treatment plant on Golden Creek, a tributary of Twelve Mile River, which flows into Lake Hartwell, a source of drinking water and public recreation. This variance would have exempted ECU from complying with bacteria limits 10

percent of the time, a violation of a fundamental principle of the Clean Water Act.

DHEC originally denied the permit on this basis, but ECU appealed the decision to the South Carolina Administrative Law Court, which ruled in ECU's favor in 2010. **Upstate Forever** led an effort involving several other conservation organizations to convince EPA to exercise its authority under the Clean Water Act to object to the permit. On February 14, 2011, EPA did so, which kept the permit from going into effect. On March 17, DHEC reissued the permit without the 10 percent variance, satisfying EPA's objection and achieving a significant victory for clean water.

EPA, **Upstate Forever**, and the other conservation organizations, however, remain concerned that the Court's decision sets a dangerous precedent for South Carolina's waterways. EPA stated in a letter to DHEC that any future modification of the ECU plant's permit based on the reasoning of the Administrative Law Court would be subject to review and potential objection. Discharge limits exist to protect public health and our environmental resources — not just 90 percent of the time, but all of the time.

10. Ten at the Top Unveils Regional Vision

Fostering regional collaboration in the Upstate's ten counties is the mission of the nonprofit Ten at the Top (TATT). In April of last year, the organization unveiled its exciting and inspiring [Shared Upstate Growth Vision](#), developed with the input of more than 9,000 Upstate residents. The "five drivers" of the Vision are Human Potential, Economic and Entrepreneurial Vitality, Sustainable Growth, Natural Beauty and Resources, and Community Vibrancy; TATT has established and is administering regional task forces of citizens for each driver. In recognition of its great work, TATT was named one of three national finalists for the Alliance for Regional Stewardship's prestigious Organizational Champion Award. For more information about TATT and to get involved with one of the task forces, visit www.tenatthetop.org.

*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 1,800 members, two offices, and a staff of 17. For more information, see www.upstateforever.org.*

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Accompanying photos available upon request: contact Nancy Fitzer at nfitzer@upstateforever.org.