

It's not too late to preserve what we have

THE CONCERT OF NATURE, what could that mean? The muse delivered the line as Canada Geese strutted across a pasture near Paris Mountain State Park.

A clear winter sky framed the hillside vignette that was also bordered with barren hardwoods. The beauty took my breath away.

But, "The concert of nature?" What does that mean? Concerts are often put on by musicians. When musicians put on a concert, we generally pay them. People like musicians to work for free, one of the few professions where people expect work for free. So if we expect there to be costs involved in a concert, do we also expect there to be costs involved in maintaining and sustaining nature?

Oh, that's what it means. Nature itself is like a giant musician from whom some of us just keep expecting free play.

A lot has been said lately about the noble work of Upstate Forever. That's as it should be. The group has been at the forefront of land conservation, park creation, and general consciousness raising around the power and beauty of nature.

It's not just that nature puts on beautiful concerts in places like Paris Mountain, Caesar's Head, and Table Rock, all along the Blue Ridge. These natural resources also provide flood control, habitat for wild animals, hunting and fishing areas, and recreational wonders for generations to come.



A view of Table Rock reservoir.

Charles Sowell / Staff

And yes, we have to pay. Upstate Forever recently publicized a Clemson study by Dr. Barry Nocks and Professor Stephen Sperry, which reported the alarming fact that the 10-county Upstate region has lost 700,000 acres of forest cover in the past 18 years. That's forest cover roughly equal to the size of Greenville and Cherokee counties combined.

It's hard for nature to play her concerts if we keep cutting down trees.

The two Clemson profs blamed the loss of trees on sprawl and pasture land, with sprawl being the overwhelming problem. During those 18 years, a time of population

growth, the population has sprawled out of urban centers building more houses and cutting down more trees.

On a case-by-case basis, this is, of course, everybody's right. On a widespread, population-wide basis, we are shooting ourselves in the foot.

Cutting down trees reduces our oxygen supply and creates run off problems. If you don't believe it, watch the mudslides in Haiti and Southern California where wholesale deforestation is decades ahead of us.

Brad Wyche, the executive director of Upstate Forever, reacted to the report by saying, "It's extremely expensive to provide services to a population that is so spread out

across the region, and the impacts on our natural resources can be devastating. It's shocking and mind-boggling that we've lost 700,000 acres of our forest cover in such a relatively short period of time. If that's not a wake-up call to get serious about managing growth, I don't know what is."

There's little we can do to get back those 700,000 acres (almost two acres for every citizen of Greenville County). We can plant trees whenever and wherever possible.

But there is a great deal we can do to preserve the trees we have left. We can re-energize urban living, something Greenville's downtown is doing beautifully. We can live in urban centers, use public transportation, create communities where trees are already down instead of cutting down more. We can create conservation easements, greenways near rivers and streams, secure more large tracts of forests where they still exist and most importantly support groups like Upstate Forever who take the long view of the environmental and recreational power of our forests and work actively to protect them.

Nature puts on a lovely concert. We should expect to pay if we want her to play.

Pat Jobe is the minister of the Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

