

Carbon offsets here?

Upstate Forever is researching the possibilities

BY CHARLES SOWELL | STAFF

UPSTATE FOREVER is exploring carbon neutral options that may include upgrades for low income homeowners to help reduce their carbon footprint and help keep carbon offset dollars that are currently leaving the state right here at home.

John Tynan, co-director of Upstate Forever's clean air and water program, said the conservation group is in the early stages of a feasibility study that could bring a variety of stakeholders together in a public/private venture that would put the area on the cutting edge of the movement.

Upstate Forever purchases renewable energy credits from SkyEnergy to offset the yearly electricity use in their Greenville office. Those credits go to

build and operate wind farms in the West and Midwest.

"What we hope to do is find out if it is possible to take those offset dollars in the Upstate and at the same time improve local air quality," Tynan said. "One of the basic ideas we're studying is planting trees to generate offsets through carbon sequestration. Another idea would be to retrofit low income housing with energy saving devices to reduce electricity usage."

An added problem, so far as low-income housing is concerned, are the numbers of people who still use antiquated heating systems - burning coal, wood, or kerosene - that generate large amounts of particulate matter to cloud the air.

Overall, electric consumption and fuel use from what has been built in the area generate 40 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions in the state, Upstate Forever said on its Web site.

"If there is enough demand for this kind of thing (retrofits), we think there

is a vast potential," Tynan said.

With numbers in the 10,000 range the idea could take off.

Upgrades might include installing high-efficiency HVAC systems or on-demand hot water heaters. An education program on energy usage is also a potentially high return item on the Upstate Forever's wish list.

The average American's annual carbon footprint is 50,000 pounds. For a nifty calculator that shows just where your CO₂s are coming from and tips on how you can offset and reduce your output, check out www.carbonfund.org.

Upfront cost is the defining factor in low-income areas, Tynan said. In the long term, low-income communities stand to benefit the most from improved durability, reliability, and energy efficiency of their homes because of decreased operating and replacement costs.

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