

# A wake-up call

Greenville Journal

7/8/11

ON MAY 17 OF THIS YEAR, the Southern Forest Futures Project released the results of its draft report on projected forest loss in the South over the next four decades. The Southern Forest Futures Project, via the U.S. Forest Service and Southern Group of State Foresters, is a multi-year research effort that forecasts changes in southern forests between 2010 and 2060. To call the estimates alarming is to greatly understate their import. Approximately 23 million acres of forest land are estimated to decrease, with 22% of the loss occurring in the Piedmont area of Georgia and the Carolinas. The 23 million acre loss comprises an area roughly the size of South Carolina.

The study cites urbanization as the key driving force behind forest loss, with bioenergy use, changing weather patterns, land ownership changes and invasive species also contributing to deforestation. And last November, a study done by Clemson University in conjunction with Upstate Forever found in excess of 700,000 acres of forest cover had been lost in the Upstate region between 1992 and 2010.

The findings of these two studies are extremely disturbing in light of recent revelations on the high probability of human-induced global climate change. Loss of forest cover has been closely linked to the increasing severity of droughts, floods and an overall decrease in water quality. If ever there was a time to support the enactment of legislation requiring coordinated comprehensive planning at all levels of government in South Carolina, it is now. Current

## IN MY OWN WORDS

BY DAVID A. LIPSTREU

efforts directed at land protection and encouraging more regional collaboration and coordination among the ten counties comprising the Upstate Region are laudable and a major first step in promoting managed growth and sustainable development. However, the process must now be taken further to ensure that the policies being promoted are implemented.

Under current South Carolina law, comprehensive plans are not required unless the governmental entity desires to adopt zoning or land development regulations, in which case it must adopt the land use element of the plan (provided there is one). Moreover, South Carolina's Priority Investment Act, while containing provisions that promote coordination of planning between neighboring communities, does not require it as a matter of law.

It is inevitable that the Upstate Region will continue to experience significant growth for the foreseeable future. As such, the natural resource amenities that are so vital to maintaining the quality of life here, must be protected for the long-term. State enabling legislation to require coordinated, comprehensive planning at all levels of government is the best means to accomplish this, and accordingly to take an active role in managing South Carolina's future. We simply can't leave it to chance.

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