

Highway 11 tract to be preserved

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Twenty-eight more acres of Scenic Highway 11 will be protected from development as the area grows.

That's because Lynn and Kent Davis have granted a conservation easement to Upstate Forever to protect the heavily wooded site.

The conservation easement is a legal agreement between the Davises and Upstate Forever which permanently prohibits any development, subdivisions or alteration of the land.

Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, said the Davises "continue to own the land while this beautiful stretch of Highway 11 will be preserved forever for public enjoyment."

Upstate Forever is a non-profit organization which manages a land trust program for protecting significant lands and natural resources in Greenville, Spartanburg, Cherokee, Pickens, Anderson, Laurens and Oconee counties.

The Davises plan to take advantage of tax incentives provided by Congress and South Carolina to landowners who grant conservation easements.

But that wasn't the couple's primary motivation, Mrs. Davis said. They had desired to help preserve State 11 for at least 20 years, she said.

Parts of the highway "are so spectacularly beautiful it's unbelievable," Mrs. Davis said.

"Both of us were interested in preserving what we could of what makes Highway 11 in South Carolina attractive to people."

State 11, also known as the Cherokee Foothills Scenic Highway, is on the National Scenic Byways list, a program sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration.

Greenville shares State 11 with Oconee, Pickens, Spartanburg and Cherokee counties.

Paul Ramsey, president of the Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Byway Association in Greenville County, a non-profit group working to enhance and preserve the State 11 corridor, said the scenic highway classification is a valuable asset to the area but "it actually provides little real protection of the beautiful vistas along the highway."

Billboards are disallowed on the highway, Ramsey said, but land can otherwise be developed in any way that is permitted under local land use ordinances.

"There are no such ordinances in this area, which means that protection of the highway corridor depends on the adjoining property owners," Ramsey said.

Mrs. Davis said, "Unless something is done, this beautiful highway could end up looking like Woodruff Road with a series of strip malls. We don't own much land, but we wanted to do what we could to prevent that from happening."

The Davises' property has more than 1,800 feet of frontage on State 11. According to Upstate Forever, the land contains a wide assortment of plant and animal life.

The couple, who live on an adjoining tract not visible from the highway, moved to the area about 27 years ago.

They remember when Woodruff Road was largely farmland. Some of the growth that's overflowing that main Eastside corridor and its surrounding areas is spreading into northern parts of the county.

"This is like the last undiscovered place to live," Mrs. Davis said. "I would hate for it to grow so fast that what makes it beautiful and special is destroyed."

The couple probably will add the tract on which their home is located to the easement in the future, Kent Davis said.