

# Conservation Bank protecting key site

COLUMBIA (AP) — The South Carolina Conservation Bank will spend \$11 million to preserve about 25,000 acres, including some of the state's most historical and environmentally sensitive properties.

The bank board voted last week to commit the funds. The Conservation Bank, created by the Legislature two years ago, was funded for the first time this year. A portion of deed recording

fees devoted to purchasing land or conservation easements is expected to raise nearly \$15 million this year.

Dana Leavitt, an official with the conservation group Upstate Forever, said the effort is overdue in a state that had set aside little money to protect land.

"We are far behind other states, but at least we're starting somewhere," Leavitt said.

Some of the protected land

long has been coveted by conservation groups. In 2000, the Sierra Club listed some of the sites as among the state's most significant land for conservation.

Proposals for protected properties include the purchase of about 100 acres near scenic S.C. Highway 11 on the western end of Jocassee Gorges in Pickens County for \$497,500.

Officials also hope to use \$341,250 to buy 310 acres of the

Battle of Camden site in Kershaw County. The state funds will allow the Palmetto Conservation Foundation to pay off the mortgage on the property and begin work on an interpretive center, said George Fields, director of military heritage for the foundation.

Another \$2 million will be used to purchase 2,000 acres on the Catawba River and the Great Falls Reservoir.

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