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Group: Tax breaks help preserve land
Upstate Forever says record year boosted by incentives

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An Upstate organization conserved more land in 2006 than ever before, partly due to better tax incentives for landowners.

Upstate Forever, a conservation group, signed land protection agreements for more than 3,005 acres of land in the past year.

The agreement protects the property from further development forever, said Dana Leavitt, the organization's land trust director.

He attributed the increase in conservation agreements to new tax incentives that are more available to modest-income landowners.

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"In about 70 percent of the cases where somebody was donating the conservation agreement, they couldn't take all the tax benefits," he said.

"Now that they can use it for a higher percentage of their income and for a longer period of time, it makes it to where even people that are making a normal income can use those tax advantages."

The organization created a conservation agreement for a 190-acre tract of land in Laurens County known as Timber Creek Farm.

"I always knew that I was going to protect this wonderful place," said landowner Dianne Culbertson. "But I have to say that the new tax incentives were the main reason I decided to go ahead and get it done last year."

Leavitt also attributed the growth in conservation to better education.

Upstate Forever also protected an 860-acre tract of land that adjoins Jones Gap State Park. The property includes Head Foremost Falls, 1.3 miles of frontage along the Middle Saluda River and the eastern tip of Pinnacle Mountain.

Upstate Forever's third largest protected property is a 586-acre tract on the border of Greenville and Pickens counties.

"My daughters and I wanted to make sure that this green space and wonderful wildlife habitat would be here forever," said landowner Laura Townes.

"As we saw the expanding development along Highway 11, we realized our property was an important place to protect."

The organization has agreements protecting almost 8,000 acres in the Upstate.

"We're going to experience continued growth as people retire and learn about the Upstate of South Carolina," Leavitt said.

"It's important for our grandchildren and the future citizens that we've reserved some of these beautiful areas that contribute to our quality of life."

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