Upstate Forever chosen for pilot program

Upstate Forever is one of 22 land conservation organizations in the United States—and the only one in the Southeast— selected to participate in a pilot project for a new national accreditation program.

The accreditation program will recognize organizations that meet national standards for administering and managing land trust programs.

Upstate Forever's Land Trust Program primarily uses voluntary conservation agreements, also known as conservation easements, to protect significant lands and resources in the Upstate. These include ecologically sensitive areas, working farms, scenic vistas, wildlife habitat, historic sites, and areas along rivers and streams.

Under these agreements, the landowner continues to own and enjoy the property but places restrictions on how the land can be used in order to protect its conservation values.

At present, Upstate Forever has 39 conservation agreements protecting nearly 8,000 acres in the region, with more currently in progress

"Accreditation will help build even broader public support for our work. We are honored to be participating in the inaugural pilot program," said Dana Leavitt, Director of Upstate Forever's Land Trust Program.

The accreditation program will be tested this year and will be available to interested organizations starting in 2008. At that time, land trusts can join the ranks of other nonprofit organizations that gain professional recognition through accreditation, such as museums, zoos, aquariums, colleges and hospitals.

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