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Money sought to save Stumphouse Tunnel

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WALHALLA — A partnership of conservation groups and Oconee County government leaders said today they need help raising \$4.3 million to protect 951 acres of land on Stumphouse Mountain.

The Nature Conservancy, the project's leader, reported that public and private money has already been raised, but another \$1.42 million is needed by Aug. 29.

The project involves two tracts and will cost \$4.3 million in public and private money, according to The Nature Conservancy.

A 511-acre tract includes some of the Upstate's most scenic and culturally significant sites: Issaqueena Falls, two pre-Civil War-era tunnels and sites important to Cherokee history.

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Next door are 440 acres that a Georgia developer, Tri-State Assets Group, sought to buy from the city of Walhalla. The developer withdrew its plans to build houses and a hotel in February after opponents circulated a petition and packed City Council chambers.

If successful in raising the money, The Nature Conservancy plans to protect Issaqueena Falls with a conservation easement and donate the 100-foot cascade to the city of Walhalla.


The city of Walhalla now operates a park at the tunnel and Issaqueena Falls, but the city doesn't own the falls. It's on private property that the city leases. Other sections would be conveyed to the state Department of Natural Resources for a Heritage Preserve, according to The Nature Conservancy.

The 440-acre tract includes three ponds and has been used by the DNR for a youth hunting program, the only one of its kind in Oconee, Pickens, Anderson and Greenville counties.

Upstate Forever, a Greenville-based conservation group, and the city of Walhalla are asking the taxpayer-funded South Carolina Conservation Bank to provide \$1.22 million toward an easement on the 440-acre tract.

The bank's board plans to meet Wednesday at the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts & Humanities.

The DNR has committed \$1.5 million to the project and the private, Greenville-based The Graham Foundation has provided the conservancy with \$180,000, according to The Nature Conservancy. Other public grants are pending, according to the conservancy.

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