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# Conservation bank OKs Upstate Forever's grant application

By David Williams  
Wednesday, June 20, 2007

[The South Carolina Conservation Bank](#) board has unanimously approved an application from [Upstate Forever](#) for a conservation easement to protect Walhalla's 440 acres of watershed property on Stumphouse Mountain.

The next step is for the Walhalla City Council to vote on entering into the easement.

The easement would pay Walhalla about \$1.2 million and the city would retain ownership of the property that includes the city's former water treatment facility and reservoir. Walhalla would also have water and timber rights and would be able to use the property for public recreation and as a tourist attraction.

"We can't do anything until it is formally presented," Walhalla Mayor Lamar Bailes said Wednesday. "We will negotiate and nail down the terms. We have tentatively agreed to a lot of things, but first we have to receive the offer."

Greenville attorney Frank Holleman, who has worked with Upstate Forever and other conservation organizations on what is called the Stumphouse Mountain, Issaqueena Falls project, said it was a great day for the city of Walhalla and the entire region.

"The point we made to the Conservation Bank was the real applicant is the people of Walhalla and Oconee County and the Upstate," Mr. Holleman said. "It is their strong belief that this site should be protected for its heritage, historical aspects and the heritage and the great view going into North Carolina and the beautiful mountain forest."

Dana Leavitt, Upstate Forever Land Trust director, said he wanted to thank the people of Walhalla for their support.

"This is a huge boost for our partnership's efforts," Mr. Leavitt said. "But we still have a long way to go to complete the entire project."

Mr. Holleman said the South Carolina Conservation Bank, which meets just twice a year, reviewed about 28 applications Wednesday and not all were as successful as the Upstate Forever petition.

"Some were not granted today and some were passed over," Mr. Holleman said.

Mr. Holleman took part in a press conference Monday at the Oconee Heritage Center during which it was

announced that the Walhalla property is now part of a two-part project to save nearly 1,000 acres on Stumphouse Mountain.

The project also includes Issaqueena Falls, two abandoned railroad tunnels and the old railroad bed that is a hiking trail, all of which is on private property.

Walhalla now operates Stumphouse Tunnel and Issaqueena Falls Park on S.C. 28 west of the city.

Clemson University owns Stumphouse Tunnel and the park property is adjacent to the city's watershed property.

[The South Carolina chapter of The Nature Conservancy](#) hopes to raise about \$1.4 million to complete the purchase of the 511-acre tract that is privately owned and adjacent to Walhalla's property. The Nature Conservancy has entered into a contract to buy the property and it faces an Aug. 29 deadline to complete the sale.

"If the bigger project goes forward and the entire project is completed, The Nature Conservancy intends to donate the falls to city of Walhalla and it would be protected for the public forever," Mr. Holleman said.

Mr. Holleman said he anticipates the paperwork for the Walhalla City Council to review to be done very quickly.

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