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# Oconee council funds Stumphouse Mountain project

## Mountain property includes Issaqueena Falls, abandoned railroad beds that are now hiking trails

By David Williams  
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OCONEE COUNTY — The Oconee County Council's commitment of \$300,000 toward the saving of nearly 1,000 acres on Stumphouse Mountain is expected to help various organizations complete the historic conservation deal by a Aug. 29 deadline.

"We have a lot of work to put everything together," said Oconee native Frank Holleman, the Greenville attorney who has worked with The Nature Conservancy and Upstate Forever to secure the two tracts of land on the Oconee County landmark. "Now we have the funds to acquire a mountain."

Mr. Holleman said some additional money could be needed to cover various closing expenses.

The total value of the deal is about \$4.3 million and includes 450 acres the city of Walhalla has committed to a conservation easement through South Carolina Conservation Bank. There is also 511 acres of privately owned land adjacent to the Walhalla property that will be protected.

The mountain property includes Issaqueena Falls, abandoned railroad beds that are now hiking trails and old railroad tunnels. A Cherokee burial site is also on the mountain.

Walhalla will continue to operate Issaqueena Falls and Stumphouse Tunnel Park and city officials are looking forward to expanding the park's amenities, which would now include the old watershed lake that once served as Walhalla's water source.

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and the state's Department of Parks Recreation and Tourism have worked on the deal with the creation of a Heritage Preserve for the land and matching grants.

Kristen Austin, South Carolina and Southern Blue Ridge project director with The Nature Conservancy, said a formal announcement of the project's successful completion is being planned for Aug. 30 at the Oconee Heritage Center.

The county's contribution will come from existing contingency funds and will be repaid from future accommodation tax money.

County Administrator Dale Surrett said the county would be borrowing the money from itself with an interest-free loan.

“It makes me feel great to be a native of Oconee County,” Mr. Holleman said.

Walhalla businessman Eddie Martin helped sponsor a fundraiser for the project Sunday at the Walhalla Civic Auditorium. The event raised more than \$5,500.

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