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A mountainous task: Groups work together to save Stumphouse for future generations

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“I’m gonna build a mountain, from a little hill. I’m gonna build a mountain, least I hope I will. I’m gonna build a mountain, gonna build it high. Don’t know how I’m gonna doing it, only know I’m gonna try.” — Anthony Newley, from the 1962 Broadway musical “Stop the World, I Want to Get Off.”

They aren’t building a mountain in Oconee County; the mountain is already there. But The Nature Conservancy and Upstate Forever are poised to buy one — and keep it the treasure it is — for the public, today and for generations to come, to enjoy.

Oconee County Council did its part recently when it committed \$300,000 toward saving nearly 1,000 acres on Stumphouse Mountain. The transaction should be completed by the end of this month. The project includes 450 acres the city of Walhalla has committed to a conservation easement through the South Carolina Conservation Bank, according to our recent report. Also protected will be 511 acres of privately owned land adjacent to the Walhalla holdings.

The mountain property includes Issaqueena Falls, abandoned railroad beds converted to hiking trails and the famed Stumphouse Tunnel. The temperature drop one feels upon entering the tunnel must be experienced to be fully appreciated. A Cherokee burial site is also on the mountain. Also represented are fascinating chapters in railroad history and Civil War-era events.

For numerous years, Walhalla has operated the Issaqueena Falls and Stumphouse Tunnel Park, and that will continue, even be expanded to include other amenities. The county’s contribution will come from an already established contingency fund and will be repaid from future accommodations money, according to county Administrator Dale Surrett.

No one is more proud of what has transpired than Seneca native Frank Holleman, whose passion for the legend and the natural beauty of the area is legendary in itself. But it didn’t just happen. Many people and organizations demonstrated what can be accomplished when there is collaboration for the common good.

In an editorial on June 24, we wrote that Mr. Holleman and so many others believe as we do, that it is our obligation to preserve our natural and scenic resources. Stumphouse Mountain is more than a piece of land; it’s a part of Oconee County history. Issaqueena Falls is a 100-foot waterfall that will make either a first-timer or a repeat visitor gasp as its makes it continual descent. Even the name of the falls is historic, the name of a young Creek woman who lived among the Cherokees and warned the trading post at Ninety-Six of an impending attack.

But it is the sheer physical beauty of the tract — and the realization that it could be lost forever to development — that led efforts to preserve it for us, for our children, our grandchildren and beyond.

The generations that preceded us would be proud.

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