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Permits for golf course challenged

Opponents cite environmental impact of project in Greenville County

By SAMMY FRETWELL

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Developer Jim Anthony says he wants to build golf courses that don't pollute the environment.

But Anthony, one of the Upstate's most visible developers, is catching heat over a resort golf course community he and PGA legend Gary Player are working on.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a conservation group have challenged environmental permits for the Cliffs at Mountain Park, a 5,000-acre upscale project in the Blue Ridge of Greenville County.

According to a state permit application, the Cliffs at Mountain Park will dump 175,000 gallons of sewage a day into the North Saluda River. It also will fill and dam up creeks that drain into the river, records show.

At least six rare species of fish are at risk from the project, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

"We were expecting a superlative, state-of-the art golf course design that would serve as a model for other golf course developers," Upstate Forever director Brad Wyche said. "We are disappointed in what they came up with. There is room for improvement."

Anthony and Clemson University last month announced plans for a golf course research center at The Cliffs at Mountain Park.

Among other things, the research center is supposed to evaluate how runoff from different types of golf course grasses affects nearby streams. Anthony said he wants to serve as an example for others who develop golf courses.

The project "will blaze trails in research," Anthony said in an Oct. 19 news release.

Attempts to reach Anthony or representatives of his Cliffs Communities corporation were unsuccessful Wednesday.

A former telephone company lineman, Anthony has developed or will develop eight resort communities in the mountains of the Carolinas in the past two decades.

Player, once one of the top golfers on the PGA tour, is the designer of the Mountain Park golf course, according to a Cliffs' promotional brochure. A spokesperson for Player was not available Wednesday.

The Cliffs at Mountain Park will feature the golf course, a European-style village, an organic garden, hiking trails and home sites ranging in price from \$300,000 to more than \$1 million.

Anthony also has enlisted PGA superstar Tiger Woods to design a golf course at another development project in North Carolina, called The Cliffs at High Carolina.

Conservationists were so concerned about the Cliffs at Mountain Park they sent 40 letters to the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control Wednesday after hearing about the project from Upstate Forever. They want a public hearing.

Wyche said the North Saluda is an important mountain stream that deserves protection. Flowing from near North Carolina, it eventually forms the Saluda River, which runs to Columbia.

Instead of dumping treated sewage into the North Saluda River, Upstate Forever wants the Cliffs to apply wastewater from homes and businesses onto the golf course to protect the river's water quality. It's a method used by some other golf courses as water supplies dwindle and water quality issues surface. It also is one way some golf courses are trying to reduce environmental impacts long associated with the industry.

Meanwhile, the Fish and Wildlife Service wants Anthony to scrap the current plan and start over. The project will pipe and dam nearly a half-mile of the North Saluda River, while building 17 golf cart bridges across the water, the service said,

A Sept. 21 comment letter says part of the plan is to “restore” a portion of the North Saluda, but it actually will realign the river to benefit the golf course design. Fish species at risk are the Santee Chub, Seagreen Darter, Fieryblack Shiner, Rosy Face Chub, Greenfin Shiner and Flat bullhead, the service said.

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