

Jeff Debessonet of the state Department of Health and Environmental Control said his organization plans to hold a public hearing on the proposed monthly discharge of 5.25 million gallons of treated wastewater into the North Saluda River by the developer of the Cliffs Mountain Ridge development. No date has been set.

News of the wastewater proposal and a plan to build a golf course along 2.5 miles of the stream - causing significant changes to the riparian environment and diverting some tributaries - sparked a firestorm among Upstate environmental groups and a flurry of letters and e-mails to government regulators.

Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever and an initiator of the letter-writing campaign, said his group planned to meet Wednesday morning with real-estate magnate Jim Anthony on his plans for Mountain Ridge.

Wyche's group maintains there are viable alternatives to Anthony's proposals and hopes to negotiate changes. Many in the Upstate environmental community, including the Sierra Club and the state chapter of the National Wildlife Federation, oppose Anthony's plans and see them as opening the door to more development in sensitive mountain environments.

Wyche said the nature of mountain soils and the fragility of the streams demands that every care be taken to preserve the resource.

Ron Sobczak president of the Batram Chapter of Sierra has been particularly concerned about where the water will come from for the Mountain Ridge project.

"We are in a severe drought right now and there is no indication of when it will end," he said on Tuesday.