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Many helped save Upstate's natural beauty

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The face of South Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains just outside of Walhalla, Stumphouse Mountain is home to Issaqueena Falls, one of South Carolina's iconic natural landmarks. Stumphouse is a place of history and legend. The Cherokee hunted the forests of Stumphouse. At the falls, the young Creek woman, Issaqueena, jumped with her daughter onto a rocky ledge to escape Cherokees, after she had warned the trading post at Ninety-Six of an impending Cherokee attack. Walhalla's original German immigrants bought property on Stumphouse when they came to South Carolina's frontier.

John C. Calhoun planned for a railroad to pass through Stumphouse, to connect Charleston with the Midwest. Hundreds of Irish immigrants came to the mountain to build the railroad and blasted three tunnels into the side of the mountain, including the famous Stumphouse Mountain Tunnel.

And the tunnel is where Clemson University first learned to make blue cheese, its signature agricultural product. Thousands of people visit Stumphouse and Issaqueena Falls each year, because of this history and because of their natural beauty.

Just 10 months ago, residents of Walhalla first learned that a Florida developer had his eye on Stumphouse Mountain. People in Walhalla, Oconee County and across the region stepped forward to protect this important part of our area's natural and human history. They were joined by our area's conservation organizations — The Nature Conservancy, Upstate Forever, Naturaland Trust, the Chattooga Conservancy and Oconee Preservation Unlimited Stewardship Trust.

The result: This past summer, the Walhalla City Council received over \$1.2 million from the South Carolina Conservation Bank and placed a conservation easement on the city's 440-acre Stumphouse watershed property, to be held in perpetuity by Upstate Forever.

In late August, The Nature Conservancy acquired 511 additional acres on Stumphouse, including Issaqueena Falls, two of the tunnels on the mountain, a public hiking trail on two miles of the old Blue Ridge Railroad bed and beautiful mountainside forests. In December, most of those 511 acres will be turned over to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources to be a S.C. Heritage Preserve. This property will be open to the public and will also have the highest level of protection granted under South Carolina law. The Issaqueena Falls and surrounding acres will be protected by a strict conservation easement, and the falls will be given to the City of Walhalla to be part of its city park.

On Dec. 1, at 1 p.m. at the Walhalla City Park on Stumphouse Mountain, the Department of Natural Resources and the conservation organizations will hold a dedication ceremony to mark the establishment of the Heritage Trust site on Stumphouse Mountain. As we approach that historic day, all of us in the area

should be thankful for:

- The more than 1,100 people from more than 110 cities and towns who contributed to the protection of Stumphouse Mountain and Issaqueena Falls.
- The residents of Walhalla and Oconee County who stood up for Stumphouse Mountain and Issaqueena Falls.
- The Oconee County families who were good stewards of the Stumphouse property and worked with the conservation organizations to protect the property for future generations.
- The South Carolina Conservation Bank, which provided \$1.2 million for the conservation easement.
- The Department of Natural Resources, which provided \$1.5 million toward the purchase of the 511 acres, and which will manage and protect the Heritage Trust site in perpetuity.
- The City of Walhalla, which years ago set aside 440 acres on Stumphouse for public benefit and which agreed to protect them forever with a conservation easement.
- Oconee County Council, which unanimously and generously committed \$300,000 to protect Stumphouse.
- Oconee County's Sen. Thomas Alexander, who worked enthusiastically and tirelessly for the effort, and Reps. Bill Whitmire and Bill Sandifer, who provided critical support.
- The S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, and its Heritage Corridor Board, which provided \$220,000 to protect Stumphouse.
- Mr. and Mrs. Fred Stanback, dedicated conservationists for the Southern Blue Ridge, who made a \$300,000 challenge grant.
- The Graham Foundation, which made the first large private gift to get the fundraising effort started.

Most of all, I am thankful for the beauty, majesty and glory of the South Carolina Blue Ridge Mountains, a precious gift from the creator to us, our ancestors, and our children and grandchildren.

Let us hope and pray that we will follow the example

of Stumphouse and protect other of our precious mountain gifts for future generations.

Frank Holleman, 53, lives in Greenville and is a volunteer with several conservation groups, a member of the Greenville law firm Wyche, Burgess, Freeman & Parham P.A., and a former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education. Mr. Holleman is a native of Oconee County and his grandfather was a mayor of Walhalla.

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