

Stumphouse, Issaqueena acquisition recognized

BY VINCE JACKSON
Special to the Independent-Mail

WALHALLA — Stumphouse Mountain watershed and Issaqueena Falls are official.

That is, officially a protected area in South Carolina.

A Native American chief, a former federal education official and about 100 others on Saturday marked the effort that went into organizing and funding acquisition of the property.

During the event, Chief John Hilton of the Cherokee Bear Clan of South Carolina, called on the Great Spirit to bless the area as special to peoples of Oconee County.

Remarking on the Irish, German and Native American heritage of the area, Chief Hilton said, "The graves of our ancestors can still be found in this place and it is and will always be sacred to the Cherokee."

When Upstate residents learned that a Florida developer had plans to build on the site, they formed a coalition of environmental groups, local governments and individuals to prevent the development and save the land.

An initial tract of 440 acres was designated a conservation easement by the Walhalla City Council, which made possible \$1.2 million obtained from the South Carolina Conservation Bank for its purchase.

An additional 511 acres, which included Issaqueena Falls, was then purchased and was joined to the first tract. The 511 acres will be managed by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources as a Heritage Preserve.

Frank Holleman of Greenville, former U.S. deputy secretary of education, called the acquisition "one of South

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JOHN HILTON
Chief, Cherokee Bear Clan

Carolina's iconic natural landmarks and a precious mountain gift which is now preserved for future generations."

The site includes John C. Calhoun's never-completed railroad tunnel; Issaqueena, South Carolina's most visited waterfall; and the Clemson University blue cheese production site.

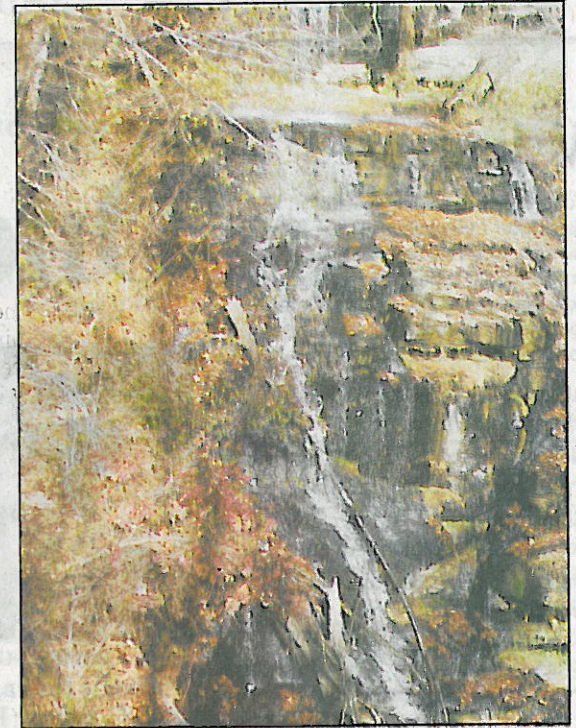
"This area is the Jewel of the Upstate and only this special group of conservation partners could have

made this happen as it did," said Dana Leavitt, director of Upstate Forever, a Greenville organization which promotes sensible growth and the protection of special Upstate locations. He said Issaqueena Falls will be given to the city of Walhalla and become a part of Walhalla's city park.

The Walhalla site will be protected in perpetuity under the direction of Upstate Forever, Mr. Leavitt said.

The acquisition, purchase and assignment of the properties occurred in what might be considered record time — about 10 months, said state Sen. Thomas Alexander.

"When a precious and never-to-be-seen-again resource is in danger, Upstate people can and will act," said Buzz Williams of the Chattooga Conservancy.



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Issaqueena Falls is now a protected area.