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Group gets accredited

BY CHARLES SOWELL
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Upstate Forever's land conservation arm has been accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance.

Upstate Forever is the first accredited land trust in South Carolina and one of only four in the Southeast. Upstate Forever has 10,000 acres under conservation easement, the organization says.

That makes Upstate Forever a significant private conservation player in the Upstate, but still smaller than other groups across South Carolina.

For instance, the Lowcountry Open Land Trust protects 57,567 acres; the Nature Conservancy has more than 25,000 acres in trust. Other land conservation players in the state include Ducks Unlimited with a few hundred acres; Spartanburg Area Conservancy (SPACE) with 1,613; Congaree Land Trust has 8,084; and Upper Savannah Land Trust has 3,923.

Dana Leavitt, Upstate Forever Land Trust program director, said the designation will reassure landowners who are thinking about putting their property under a conservation easement. "This helps show them their property will be protected for the long term," Leavitt

said. "That's where the business of due diligence comes into play."

"Accredited land trusts meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever," said Land Trust Accreditation Commission Executive Director Tammara Van Ryn. "The accreditation seal lets the public know that the accredited land trust has undergone an extensive, external review of the governance and management of its organization and the systems and policies it uses to protect land."

"Upstate Forever's accredited status demonstrates our commitment to permanent land conservation," said Leavitt. "Our land trust is a stronger organization today having gone through this rigorous accreditation program."

Across the nation, more than 1,600 land trusts have worked with willing landowners to conserve more than 37 million acres of critical lands, Leavitt said.

More information on the Land Trust Accreditation Commission is available on the Commission's website, www.landtrustaccreditation.org.

Upstate Forever will host a conference for landowners and professionals at the Carolina First Center on Sept. 30. For details, visit www.upstateforever.org or call (864) 250-0500.