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# Upstate Forever opposes Interstate 3 study for South Carolina

By David Williams  
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Upstate Forever, one of the leading conservation groups that helped save Stumphouse Mountain in Oconee County, took a stance Tuesday against studying an interstate highway through South Carolina.

The proposed Interstate 3 that was originally planned through northeast Georgia from Savannah to Knoxville, Tenn., now is being considered for a portion of South Carolina that could include U.S. 25.

“It was a bad idea for Georgia. It’s a bad idea for South Carolina,” said Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever.

Mr. Wyche said the Upstate Forever governing board members voted 10-0 Tuesday to oppose any study of the interstate.

“We need to take care of the roads we have,” Mr. Wyche said. “An interstate is unnecessary and not only would contribute to sprawl but would also damage the air quality.”

U.S. Rep. Paul Broun, R-Ga., said Interstate 3 was economically not viable as proposed originally for his state and the northeast Georgia mountains.

However, Rep. Broun did say the corridor is necessary to bring economic growth to his congressional district that includes the Augusta area.

Rep. Broun has proposed studying routes from Augusta that tie into Interstate 26 near Clinton or to Interstate 85 at Greenville.

U.S. Rep. Gresham Barrett, R-S.C., said he was aware of Rep. Broun’s efforts to study potential routes that would include areas in Rep. Barrett’s district.

“I have also been made aware of possible environmental concerns being raised by South Carolina conservation groups,” Rep. Barrett said Tuesday. “I believe as we look at ways to bring economic development to the state, we can do so while also balancing environmental concerns. If at any time I believe the plan is more detrimental to South Carolina than beneficial, I will rethink my support.”

The Stop I-3 Coalition, formed in 2004 when the plan for Interstate 3 was first developed, still is opposed to the construction of the highway in both Georgia and South Carolina.

Buzz Williams, executive director of the Chattooga Conservancy, which was one of the founding agencies for the Stop I-3 Coalition, has expressed concern that U.S. 25 would be included in any federal government study of potential routes.

“I’ve never seen a highway the federal government did not like,” Mr. Williams said Tuesday.

Mr. Williams, who formerly sat on the board of the Stop I-3 group, said his main concern is once technical language is introduced in Washington then there will be no stopping the highway.

“We need a politician from South Carolina to step up and stop the funding of this,” Mr. Williams said.

Interstate 3 received \$1.32 million for study by the Federal Highway Administration in 2005. The original route went from Savannah, Ga., area through northeast Georgia to Knoxville, Tenn.

Now, possible routes include Augusta to Greenwood along U.S. 25 to Greenville or SC 25 from Augusta to Greenwood then SC 72 to Clinton where it would connect with I-26.

The use of U.S. 25, which also runs just west of Greenville and near Travelers Rest, concerns the conservationists.

Mr. Williams pointed out it is the most direct route to join Interstate 26 south of Asheville, N.C.

Rep. Broun has said he expects to make the recommendations to study South Carolina routes during this year’s congressional session.

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