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Upstate marks Earth Day

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It was no secret that Tuesday was Earth Day, with some taking advantage of the occasion to tout their environmental programs and others focusing more intently on the cold rewards for recycling.

In Greenville, the environment protection group Upstate Forever laid out plans for its 10th anniversary. Executive director Brad Wyche said Upstate Forever's membership has swelled to 3,300, its staff to 18 and its offices to two.

In another 10 years, he said he's aiming for 10,000 members, two more offices -- and a pace of land development that merely doubles the rate of population growth.

A recent Clemson University study pegged the current ratio of land development to population growth at 5 to 1, with gridlock to come if governmental growth policies don't change, potentially fostering more dense development while preserving property freedoms.

Officials noted, among other achievements, Upstate Forever's 10,000 acres of protected land through conservation easements, its energy efficient Upstate House built with the local homebuilders association and its role in saving Stumphouse Mountain and converting the former Swamp Rabbit rail line into a walking and biking trail.

Throughout the year, Upstate Forever will visit 10 conservation easement properties, produce a 10-course meal of locally grown food, host a 10K run on the Swamp Rabbit trail and hold a 10th anniversary party.

In Columbia, business leaders joined with a bi-partisan group of lawmakers to announce an organization interested in improving the state's economy and the environment.

Citizens for Sound Conservation includes representatives from manufacturing, building, real estate and utility industries committed to improving growth in the state and conservation of natural resources.

"With today's technology, it is possible to improve our environmental quality of life while at the same time improving our economic quality of life," said Lewis Gossett, chairman of the organization's board and a manufacturing representative. "To pit one ideal against the other is counterproductive; indeed it is self defeating."

Gossett said there are numerous examples in the state where economic development and protecting the environment can be joined, such as incentives for green building practices, development of a comprehensive state water plan, clean coal technology and a renewed focus on nuclear and renewable clean power resources. The non-profit foundation plans a voter education drive as its first initiative, he said.

At Duncan Chapel Elementary School, students wore an item of green clothing to note the day and students who brought in a recyclable were given a ticket good for a popsicle.
