

Happy 10th anniversary, Upstate Forever

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For a time I lived away from Greenville, in a dry part of the country that would be almost entirely brown and dusty were it not for irrigation.

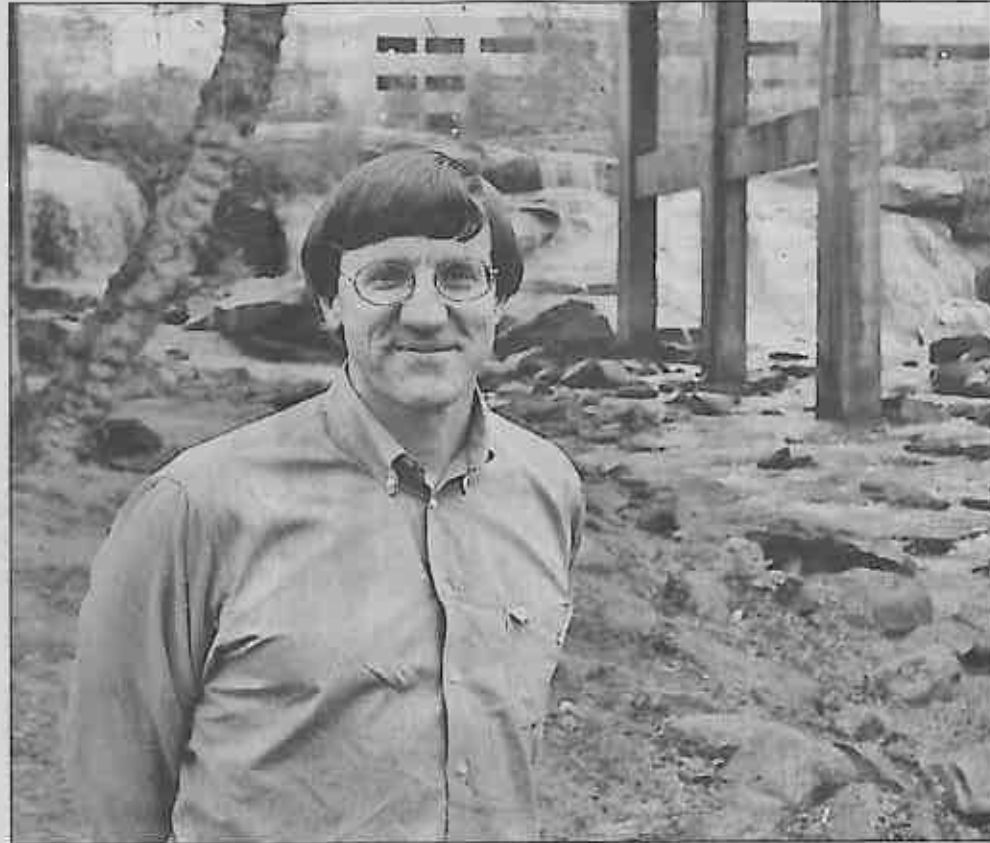
In the city of San Diego, it only rains on average 9.9 inches per year. They pipe in 80-90 percent of their water from hundreds of miles distant. It comes from north of Sacramento or from the east across the desert in a 242-mile long aqueduct.

Trees in that climate are not like ours. You don't see neighborhoods with high, spreading tree canopies that shade the houses built beneath them, like you see here in many of our older neighborhoods.

If you come from South Carolina but live in San Diego, much of the terrain between you and home, for well over a thousand miles, is spare and dry. Not until Houston and the piney woods of East Texas do you really start to see green.

So on visits to the Upstate, stands of tall leafy trees become a welcome sight. It's like a thirst. And because you don't see the woods here every day but only once or twice a year, you notice things — sort of the way time-lapse photography can reveal changes.

Main Street, Greenville, was pretty much empty and desolate when I moved West. In annual snapshots of time, I saw it come alive again. Each trip back there



Staff File Photo

Protecting and enhancing the Reedy River has been one of Upstate Forever's goals. In 2001, Brad Wyche stood near Reedy River Falls before the removal of the Camperdown Bridge.

were new stores, new restaurants, more people on the sidewalks.

The Eastside boomed with new development. So did Simpsonville and Mauldin. Taylors became Greater Taylors. And Greer, my gosh!

The growth was exciting when it meant well-planned designs that respected and preserved the area's natural beauty.

But too much of it wasn't

like that. The Upstate was clear cutting, building and paving at the rate of 90 acres a day, a Haywood Mall a day. To make things worse, to a large extent this wasn't happening inside the limits of towns or cities. Construction was chopping up the countryside. It was sprawl.

Streams were too often buried, or damaged by silt and the loss of native

shrubs and undergrowth along their banks, replaced by lawns and parking lots.

Trees, even big old oaks maybe 80 or more years old, were taken down right and left.

Woodruff Road, which once ran through woods, became what it is today.

Back in San Diego, I searched the Internet for someone or some entity in the Upstate expressing



Jeanne Brooks

jbrooks@greenvillenews.com

Columnist

concern. But for a long while, for years, I found only silence. If there were people who were sounding alarms, their voices didn't reach to where I was.

Finally one day my computer turned up a story about Upstate Forever (www.upstateforever.com).

Founded in 1998 by Brad Wyche, the nonprofit is now celebrating its 10th year. To my mind, its greatest accomplishment hasn't been the protection of 10,000 acres, though that was truly great.

It's been all the conferences, seminars, studies. It's been the raising of our awareness about what we're doing to this place we love and how fast we're doing it.

And how it's not too late, we can do things differently and better, there's still time.

■ Jeanne Brooks' column appears on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. She can be reached at (864) 298-4261.