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# Stumphouse preservation officially on the books

Walhalla and Upstate Forever to protect land for future generations

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By Carlos Galarza (Contact / Staff Bio)

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WALHALLA — Property surrounding Stumphouse Mountain and Issaqueena Falls is now officially protected under a conservation easement signed between city and Upstate Forever officials.

The document, which details what can and cannot be done on land considered "a critical part of Stumphouse Mountain," was recently filed with the Oconee County Register of Deeds.

According to the agreement, the critical property totals about 70 acres and includes or is near a number of natural and historic landmarks including Issaqueena Falls, the Stumphouse Mountain Tunnel, the remains of the Blue Ridge Railroad constructed prior to the Civil War, additional tunnels constructed as part of that railroad, a cemetery of Irish immigrants who worked on the railroad and places of "significance and reverence" to the Cherokee Nation.

Upstate Forever is a non-profit organization that promotes sensible growth and protection of special places. The group partnered with Oconee County residents and other conservation groups to save the Stumphouse Mountain area from falling into the hands of a developer.

In August of last year, Upstate Forever presented Walhalla City Council with \$1.2 million to protect about 450 acres that makes up the old Stumphouse watershed.

The Nature Conservancy acquired an additional 511-acre tract to be donated to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources as a heritage preserve.

Walhalla Mayor Randy Chastain said the city turned 360-degrees from pursuing a development deal to preserving the landmark property for future generations. Chastain said he thinks the city did the right thing.

"Saving the land as it is will bring more people to the area than any development," Chastain said Tuesday. "Leaving (the land) as it is draws more people for shopping and brings business to the city."

The conservation easement between the city and Upstate Forever specifically prohibits any buildings or developments, and bans any "residential, commercial or industrial use or activity" on the protected property.

Walhalla will continue to oversee and maintain hiking trails, bridges and the viewing platform, and could construct additional hiking trails, exhibits, benches and other improvements if they are consistent with the scenic area.

The preamble to the agreement asserts that "tourism is a critical part of the present and future of Walhalla," and for that reason the protected property would continue to be a principal tourist attraction and economic asset for the city.

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