

Upstate Forever receives grants for river work

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Environmental group Upstate Forever said Wednesday it received \$1.1 million in federal and private grants to pursue a three-piece approach for protecting the Reedy and Saluda rivers that federal officials say could become a template for watershed efforts nationwide.

City and county officials as well as Clemson and Furman universities said they will collaborate on an ambitious plan to reward developers for reduced stormwater runoff and create more development incentives along the Reedy while funding the rehabilitation of river wetlands and old, polluting developments.

The money — \$800,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency and \$300,000 from the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation — will pay for Furman and Clemson to build tools designed to mitigate development's impact on the Upstate's smaller, steep-banked foothills streams.

The county and Clemson will develop a spreadsheet-based tool to help developers calculate the costs and

savings of reducing runoff with approaches like narrower streets and permeable surfaces, then better managing the remaining runoff with catch basins, rain gardens and the like.

Developers who earn a certain number of low-impact points would qualify for a "stormwater mitigation bank" that would sell credits they can use to avoid building a detention pond altogether, eliminating the pond costs and freeing up more land for development, said Heather Nix, Upstate Forever's urban rivers project manager.

Bank money would be used to reduce runoff at existing developments built before stormwater regulations.

A similar bank by the city and Furman would allow developers to buy credits for higher buildings along the Reedy in city-approved development zones, and the money would fund the restoration of floodplains and riverbanks, Nix said.

The first two years will be spent developing the mechanisms, with pilot projects over the following two years. City and county legislation would be required, she said.