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Upstate Forever appeals Cliffs decision

Environmental group challenging DHEC permit of golf course on river

By Eric Connor
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An Upstate environmental group has appealed a state regulatory agency's approval needed for developer Jim Anthony to go ahead with controversial plans to build a Gary Player-designed golf course along the North Saluda River in the mountains of northern Greenville County.

In the appeal filed Friday by Upstate Forever, several environmental groups assert that other sites weren't considered and that special conditions to lessen the golf course's environmental impact on the North Saluda River "are riddled with ambiguities and will be nearly impossible for DHEC or anyone else to truly enforce."

The state Department of Health and Environmental Control approved water-quality certification for the project after negotiating 16 conditions to minimize the impact on the North Saluda, including a 25-foot buffer between the golf course and the river.

Anthony's company, The Cliffs Communities Inc., still needs permission from the Army Corps of Engineers to build the 18-hole golf course.

The course is part of his plans for The Cliffs at Mountain Park, a 5,000-acre private gated community near the intersection of State 11 and U.S. 25.

On Friday, Anthony said the environmental groups' claim that the special conditions are ambiguous and unenforceable is "an unfair criticism of DHEC and other agencies" who have accepted the developer's plans.

"DHEC did not get introduced to the regulatory business yesterday," Anthony said. "There's nothing ambiguous about it. We're disappointed. We've worked with them. All agencies whose jobs are to protect our resources, none of them oppose this deal."

The project's effects on the river and its tributaries could damage a diverse habitat of more than 400 species of rare plants and more species of trees than in all of Europe, according to the appeal.

Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, said alternative locations that wouldn't have the golf course wrap around the North Saluda weren't considered.

"The Cliffs did a completely unacceptable job in evaluating other sites for the golf course," Wyche said. "There are plenty of other feasible sites for the golf course that would have no impact at all on the North Saluda. No one is saying that the Cliffs shouldn't have a golf course. It just shouldn't be built along the river."

Anthony said the environmental organizations haven't suggested other sites "because there isn't another site" that is feasible.

The development, which is under construction, also would include 1,500 homes, a 300-acre

pedestrian village and a new headquarters for the Gary Player Group, the legendary golfer's company.

Anthony also needs separate DHEC approval for a wastewater disposal plan for the development. He modified his original plans after the South Carolina Wildlife Federation, the state chapter of the Sierra Club and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service objected.
