

Water main plan caught up in eddy of opposition

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Water system denies new line will add to draw on Saluda River

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A proposed water main has run into opposition from people who say the \$18-million project could increase the capacity to draw water from a mountain reservoir that feeds the South Saluda River, a delicate ecosystem home to crawfish, turtles and other animals.

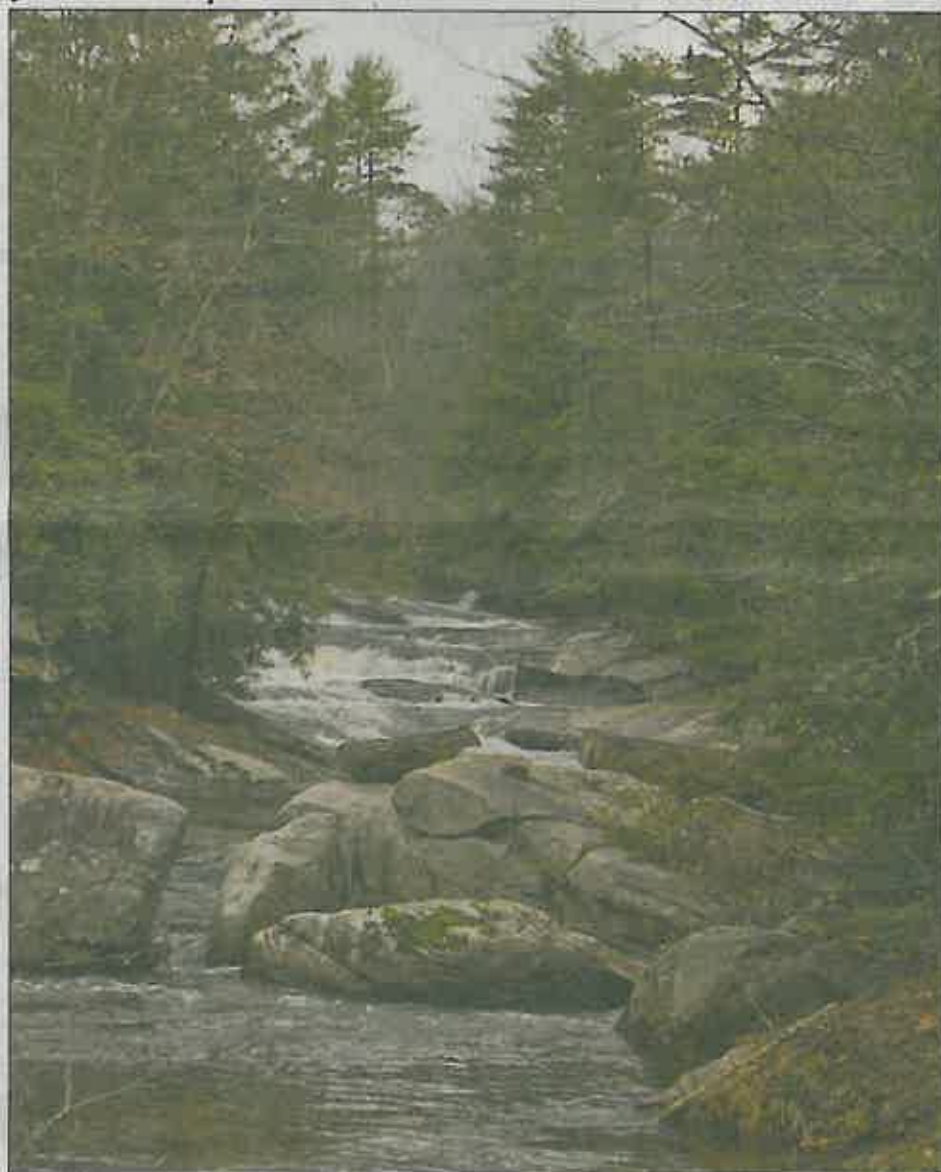
Greenville Water System says it plans to replace one of two 30-inch lines with a 42-inch main that would run from Table Rock Reservoir to a pumping station off Pumpkintown Road. The system's director said there is confusion about the project, which he said is to address aging lines, not to expand capacity.

To move forward, the 7.8-mile main needs a permit from the state Department of Health and Environmental Control.

Opponents said they have been examining the utility's plan and will air their concerns at a DHEC public hearing the agency says it will schedule soon. Among the critics are Upstate Forever, Save Our Saluda and the state Department of Natural Resources.

"We are very concerned about the lack of water being released to the South Saluda," said Dianne Anastos, chairwoman of Save Our Saluda.

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HEIDI HEILBRUNN / Staff

A plan to replace a water main from Table Rock Reservoir has raised concerns of increased draw from the Saluda River.



SUZIE FIDDLE / Staff

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da. "That's a major issue in this."

Lynn Stovall, the water

system's general manager, said the utility has no plans to draw water from the river and disputed that the new main would expand capacity.

While one of the 30-inch mains would remain in

place, it would serve as a "redundant backup" to the larger, new main, he said.

"There are a lot of folks who are real confused about that," Stovall said.

Greg Mixon, a DNR inland environmental coordi-

nator, said the proposed main would substantially increase the utility's capacity to remove water from "one of the state's most important freshwater rivers," harming the ecosystem for miles, according to a letter to DHEC water quality official Beth Quattlebaum.

"Importantly, it appears that the actual intent of the project is to transfer additional water out of the river system, probably during storm events," Mixon said in the letter.

Meanwhile, property owner Terry Thrasher has filed a lawsuit that seeks to prevent the water system from condemning a strip of land for the main along the existing right-of-way, according to records filed in Pickens County Court of Common Pleas.

Thrasher said in an interview that his home is on the scenic, 32-acre proper-

ty that borders the river, and that he mostly wants an explanation from the utility.

"Why does it have to be done?" he asked. "Why can't they just tell me why it has to go into a condemnation situation? I don't understand."

Stovall declined comment on the suit.

The mains were installed in 1930 and 1939, Stovall said. The project wouldn't require a rate hike, he said.

In his letter, Mixon warned that removing sand and rocks would cause long-lasting damage that would affect crawfish, bog turtles and animals higher in the food chain. He recommended a "complete, detailed" survey of the bog turtle population to assess the project's potential impact.

Stovall said the issues would be worked out in the

permitting process.

Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, said the work would be done in the Blue Ridge Escarpment area, which he said has been "identified as one of the most important ecosystems on the planet."

"We need to proceed with great caution with any type of development work in that area," he said.

The water system is seeking a permit through DHEC and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under the Corps' Nationwide Permit program.

Wyche said he backed Mixon's recommendation that the water system be required to meet the more stringent standards of an "individual permit," triggering more public input and interagency review.

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