

Conservation groups secure Nine Times Preserve, eye 1,700 more acres

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Calling it the last large tract of land in the Upstate and an endangered resource, Pickens County outdoor writer Dennis Chastain praised an announcement Wednesday about the establishment of a new nature preserve.

The Nine Times Preserve is a 560 acre tract in northern Pickens County where the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains meet the Piedmont. The Nature Conservancy has purchased the land from conservation partner **Upstate Forever**, which acquired the property from Crescent Resources at the end of 2007.

"Large tracts are almost nonexistent," Chastain said.

The well-known outdoor writer and outdoor enthusiast who lives at the base of Table Rock, said he has hiked and fished in the Nine Times area for more than 30 years.

The conservation groups hope the Nine Times Preserve will be added to another 1,700 acres which is near the Jocassee Gorges Wilderness Area.

Upstate Forever also secured an option to purchase the balance of the property, roughly 1,700 acres, and the two organizations are al-



Photos courtesy of The Nature Conservancy

An aerial view of land that is to become a nature preserve in Pickens County.

ready working with their conservation partners on a plan to raise the money.

Chastain said the groups hope to raise \$8 million, and the window of opportunity is small.

"The 1,700 acres is just as special as the Nine Times area," Chastain said. "They've got to raise the money before the property goes on the auction block."

The Nine Times property and additional acres contain five mountains and supports seven distinct forest types. The land is home to an abundance of fish and



A black bear such as those that have been found on a tract of Pickens County land that is to be a nature preserve.

wildlife, including reptiles, amphibians and black bear. A recent inventory of the

property identified the presence of a high concentration of state-level rare species and species of federal concern, including the peregrine falcon, a bird that was only recently removed from the Endangered Species List. A botanical survey at the site revealed 134 native wildflower species.

"We are thrilled to have the opportunity to partner with Upstate Forever to conserve one of the largest unprotected forest blocks in the South Carolina Blue Ridge," said Mark Robert-

son, executive director of The Nature Conservancy of South Carolina. "The South Carolina Conservation Bank provided a generous grant of \$1.5 million, and Fred and Alice Stanback, two of our nation's greatest conservation benefactors, made a very generous gift. Protecting this property would never have happened without them. Many other private individuals and foundations also contributed to the project, and we are grateful for their commitment."

The Nature Conservancy



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will own and manage the property as a nature preserve, according to Kristen Austin, Southern Blue Ridge project director with The Nature Conservancy. Public use and public access will be a key part of the property's management. The site will remain in a wildlife management area administered by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and will be open to the public for hunting during designated seasons. Although the land will be open to hunting this fall, The Nature Conservancy will be working to prepare the site for further public use and officially will open the preserve in spring 2009.

Visit nature.org/south-carolina, www.upstateforever.org or sccbanc.sc.gov for more information.