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Upstate Forever earns accreditation

By Angelia Davis
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Greenville-based Upstate Forever is the first in the state and one of four land trust organizations in the Southeast to achieve accreditation.

Upstate Forever was among 39 organizations to be awarded national accreditation status this month in the inaugural announcement of accredited lands trusts by The Land Trust Accreditation Commission.

The commission, a program of the National Land Trust Alliance, is a volunteer board of diverse land conservation and nonprofit management experts from around the country. Accredited land trusts display a seal indicating they meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust and ensure that conservation efforts are permanent.

Tammara van Ryn, the commission's executive director, said in a statement that the accreditation seal "lets the public know that the accredited land trust has undergone extensive, external review of the governance and management of its organization and the systems and policies it uses to protect land."

Dana Leavitt, Upstate Forever Land Trust program director, said his organization is stronger today "having gone through this rigorous accreditation program," which was two years in the making.

He said the organization is proud to display the accreditation seal "which certifies that we are a land trust that land owners can truly trust."

Upstate Forever was founded in 1998. It has been assisting landowners in permanently protecting their properties through conservation easements since 2000.

Today, the organization protects more than 10,000 acres in the Upstate, consisting of farms, forest and other significant properties. The organization's goal is to protect 30,000 more acres in the next five years, said Tom Kester, past Upstate Forever chairman and current board member.
