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## Efforts to add to Nine Times tract are at risk

*By Mike Foley*  
*STAFF WRITER*

Real-estate sales are bust. Wall Street is tanking.

And fundraising these days has taken a hit.

That's all bad news for Dana Leavitt, director of Upstate Forever's Land Trust Program, as he tries to exercise an option to buy the remaining 1,650 acres of the Nine Times Tract in northern Pickens County.

"We were successful in putting together a plan to buy Stumphouse Mountain," Leavitt said, "and we were able to buy the first 560 acres of Nine Times.

"But we have a lot steeper mountain to climb now given the recent financial debacle."

Unlike the Stumphouse purchase where Upstate Forever and The Nature Conservancy mounted a public campaign to raise dollars, so far, Upstate Forever's efforts have been behind the scenes. Leavitt said that is by design.

"Before we try and bring in resources," he said, "we have to figure out our strategy."

The clock is ticking, though, as the Nov. 1, 2009, option to buy the land from Crescent Resources draws nearer.

The Conservation Bank was a major player in helping buy the first 560 acres; it contributed more than half of the money. But that might not be an option now because the state budget is strained. And it's not the only tight budget. The S.C. Department of Natural Resources is under similar constraints.

"The one thing we know is that the people of Pickens County have pleaded with us to keep this land in public hands," Leavitt said. "Generations have hunted on this land, and we'd like to keep it in use for those people."

Leavitt said he is optimistic the property can be saved from development, but he's not sure about meeting the deadline.

"I think we'll be able to put a deal together, but 12 months is going to be difficult," he said. "We may have to go to Crescent to see if they'll give us an extension."