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### Group to warn Oconee of Interstate menace

Upstate Forever opposes \$1.3 million Interstate 3 study

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By Carlos Galarza (Contact / Staff Bio) February 2, 2009 - 11:59 p.m. EST

WALHALLA — Upstate Forever wants to warn Oconee County officials to be on the lookout for any effort to sell them on supporting a future interstate highway linking Knoxville, Tenn. and Savannah, Ga.

Although talk of such a project has been tossed about since 2004, Upstate Forever officials are wary because the Federal Highway Administration appears to be getting ready to spend \$1.3 million to study the costs and feasibility of an Interstate 3 project but not its environmental impact on the region.

Shelley Robbins, project coordinator for Upstate Forever, said Monday that part of the problem is there still is no definite route for the ambitious undertaking.

"What happens with transportation projects is that once they are in the books, they are hard to get rid of," Robbins said. "As to where the route would be, it could be anywhere. One would cut through Oconee."

Robbins said she would represent Upstate Forever at tonight's Oconee County meeting to present an update of the I-3 controversy.

For the past year, Upstate Forever has been on record opposing a study of I-3 that is being aggressively pushed by Rep. Paul Broun of Georgia. Robbins said that last spring, Broun, who represents Augusta, Ga., Athens, Ga. and much of northern Georgia is in favor of having the I-3 study look at a route between Augusta and Knoxville that would cross Upstate South Carolina because his constituents are opposed to the highway crossing the Georgia mountains.

Robbins said Upstate Forever opposes I-3 passing through any part of the Upstate. In her presentation tonight, Robbins will tell councilmen that I-3 would:

- be expensive, especially through the mountains;
- benefit the Port of Savannah over the Port of Charleston;
- be redundant because Interstates 95, 26 and 40 already connect Savannah to Knoxville;
- detract from the South Carolina Heritage Corridor and the mountains; and
- encourage more sprawl.

Robbins said the noise and pollution generated by I-3 would wreak havoc on Oconee's natural attractions and outdoor recreational activities.

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