



July 16, 2009

Arnold Nemirow and Bob Baugh: Nature Conservancy grows its presence in Upstate

*By Arnold Nemirow
and Bob Baugh*

From the Greenville Watershed to the recently protected Stumphouse Mountain, Asbury Hills Methodist Camp and Nine Times Preserve, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) continues to grow in the Upstate. TNC's first project in the Upstate was 33 years ago in the Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment, where it facilitated the donation of land that is now Jones Gap State Park.

Statewide, we are now celebrating 40 years of conservation work: We have protected over 321,000 acres in South Carolina, and our mission is preserving and protecting the plants, animals and natural communities of our state. Consistent with this mission, TNC is taking a lead, nationally, in addressing the issues surrounding climate change.

The Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment is a global biological hotspot, meaning that it ranks higher than almost every other place on the planet in terms of plant and animal diversity and abundance. Although this area is less than 2 percent of the land mass in South Carolina, it harbors 40 percent of the state's rare plant species. That is why the Conservancy decided to work in the Escarpment in South Carolina.

South Carolina is the 40th state in the nation in size, but it is the 10th fastest developing state in the country with rural to urban land conversion. These statistics translate into one million people moving to the Palmetto State in the next 10 years.

Growth in the Upstate means more pressure on our natural resources and higher demand for places where people can enjoy outdoor activities and the beauty of the landscape. A key aspect in this growth is ensuring clean water for a growing state. Here in the Upstate, we are very fortunate that the Greenville watershed has been protected through the establishment of conservation easements.

Looking forward to the next 40 years there will be even more demand for leadership and collaboration. Mark Robertson, TNC's executive director in South Carolina said: "Our vision will be trained on how to integrate conservation with sustainable economic development — how our work fits with agriculture, forestry, the demand for water — how we can find that balance and have enough resources for people and for nature."

Since opening its Southern Blue Ridge office in Greenville in the spring of 2004, TNC has had a growing presence in the Upstate. Through the hard work and dedication of Project Director Kristen Austin and her colleagues in the South Carolina chapter, the Conservancy has protected more than 3,000 acres in the Upstate in those five years.

We have also partnered with other conservation groups, including Upstate Forever and Naturaland Trust, as well as the Department of Natural Resources; Parks, Recreation and Tourism; the Forestry Commission; and the U.S. Forest Service.

To further support our Upstate engagement, TNC now has seven trustees who live here, including this column's authors: Bob Baugh, who has been chairman of the South Carolina chapter for the past two years, and on July 1, Arnold Nemirow who succeeded him in this position. In addition, Richard

Heusel, Tami McKnew, Dr. Patrick McMillan, Dottie Schipper, and Lanny Webster serve as trustees from the Upstate. Dr. Douglas Rayner of Spartanburg retires from our board after many years of service.

South Carolina is still blessed with an abundance of natural resources. As challenging as it sometimes is, we must always strive for a balance between protecting our natural habitats and promoting economic growth. Indeed, the two should go hand in hand.

The Nature Conservancy has been at the forefront of this effort for more than four decades, and we want to say how much we value and need the support of the community and the Conservancy's members.

Additional Facts

GUEST COLUMN

Arnold Nemirow is the chairman of The Nature Conservancy of South Carolina. He was the chairman, CEO and president of Bowater Inc. until his retirement in 2006. Bob Baugh is the immediate past chairman of The Nature Conservancy as well as the SC Business Coalition on Health. He recently retired from Mitsubishi Polyester Film as human resources director.
