

Opinion

A map for our future

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Maps are amazing - they tell us where we have been, where we are and where we can go. They tell us about the known world. Maps are a visualization tool that help us transform data into



In My Own Words

By SHELLEY ROBBINS

useful knowledge about the people and places around us. Upstate Forever has developed a new study, illustrated by a series of maps, called A Special Places Inventory of Spartanburg County, that tells us about a Spartanburg County that most of us have not considered before. These maps offer us a new way to visualize the geographic and biological data - our special places - that surround us.

Back in 2007, Upstate Forever released a Growth Model Study for the Upstate

prepared by the Strom Thurmond Institute at Clemson. This model showed how developed the Upstate will be by 2030 if the historic 5:1 growth pattern continues (5:1 growth means that for every 10% increase in population, developed land increases by 50%). We realized that if we continue to develop at this rate once the economy recovers, our special places will be gone by 2030. But in order for us to feel compelled to protect special places, we must know, collectively, that they exist.

In response, we developed the Special Places Inventory, a Resource Co-Occurrence Model funded by the Spartanburg County Foundation and created by Lawson Revan. The model is an objective, Geographic Information System (GIS)-based analysis of the intact ecosystems remaining in Spartanburg County. It is a model that is objective and easily replicated. It looks at five readily-available GIS layers of data: population density, rare and endangered plant species, streams and

water bodies, a Department of Natural Resources (DNR) species richness layer, and DNR's land class layer. Those five layers were then indexed, or weighted, on a scale of 0 to 10. For example, with the land class layer, we had Wofford biologist Dr. Doug Rayner and Converse botanist-emeritus Dr. Bob Powell rank the various land classes by ecological importance (for example, aquatic vegetation and certain types of forest ranked a 9 or a 10, while urban development ranked zero).

Those five indexed data layers were then "stacked" on top of one another, such that any point in the county could score between zero and 50. We then located a natural break in the data at a score of 38. Areas with a score of 38 and above became our six Conservation Focus Areas and they represent our last, best remaining intact ecosystems in Spartanburg County. These areas are: 1) Landrum and Campobello, 2) North of Pacolet, 3) Ferguson Creek and the North Tyger River, 4) Croft and West of Glenn Springs, 5) the Tyger River and 6) the Enoree River. They generally aren't pristine, but they are in good shape and can continue to serve the citizens of Spartanburg County by

filtering our water, cleaning our air, sheltering our wildlife, and giving us beautiful areas to appreciate and to restore our souls. Think about these places the next time you are sitting in traffic at Westgate Mall. Then try to imagine a Spartanburg County with none of these places left.

Our point in all of this is that we cannot protect or even appreciate what we do not know about. We would like Spartanburg County citizens, political leaders, planners, and developers to think differently about these areas. Growth will continue. People will continue to move here from other places. Our population will continue to grow and grow and grow. But will places like this still be here for our grandchildren in 2030? 2050? They will not if we do not take action now. But we can't take action if we don't know they exist. Maps tell us about the known world. So now we know. But what are we going to do?

The Growth Study and the Special Places Inventory of Spartanburg County can both be found on our website www.upstateforever.org. ■

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