

Tree cover on decline

Clemson study shows what's green is going away

BY CHARLES SOWELL | STAFF

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IN THE PAST 18 YEARS the Upstate has lost 700,000 acres of tree cover which is roughly equal to the combined areas of Greenville and Cherokee counties, recent data compiled by Clemson University show.

"We were surprised at this finding," said Steven Sperry one of the co-authors of the study. "We knew there had been some loss of forest cover in the region, but we never imagined it was of this magnitude. For a region that prides itself on being green, this is a disturbing trend."

Barry Nocks and Sperry did the study based on satellite and aerial photographs of the region over the 18 year period. Both teach in the



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A new Clemson study shows forested areas in the Upstate are on the decline.

city and regional planning program at Clemson.

Among the findings was a surprising decline in density across the 10-county region. Density measures the number of people on a per square mile basis. In the Upstate there were 2,091 persons per >

Year	Persons per urban square mile
1992	2,091
2000	1,515
2010	1,201

> urban square mile in 1992, 1,515 in 2000 and today is 1,201; a nearly 50 percent decrease.

"This is a clear indicator of sprawl," said Nocks. "People and development are spreading out across most of the region rather than being concentrated around the urban centers. Sprawling development and increased pasture land were the main reasons our region has lost so much of its forest cover."

The study evaluated density trends in four different areas of the Upstate, the greatest decline in density occurred in Anderson, Oconee and Pickens counties - from 2,437 persons per square mile in 1992 to 1,065 in 2009, a drop of 56 percent. The density declines in the other areas were 47 percent for Abbeville, Greenwood and Laurens counties; 34 percent for Greenville and Spartanburg counties; and 30 percent for Cherokee and Union counties.

The glimmer of good news is the study found the growth ratio for the region, which compares the rate of land development to the rate of population growth, declined slightly.

In 2008, the Strom Thurmond Institute at Clemson found that from 1990 to 2000, the ratio was 5 to 1 in the Upstate, that is, for every one percent increase in population, the amount of developed land increased by five percent.

Nocks and Sperry found that from 1990 to 2010, the ratio was closer to 4.4. The decrease in the ratio is primarily the result of two economic downturns during the past decade.

"The small reduction in the growth ratio is the only bit of good news in what is otherwise a dismal assessment of our region's growth pattern," said Brad Wyche, Upstate Forever's executive director.

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