

# Upstate is 'crucible of life,' conservationists say

Seneca Journal 11/19/2010

## Experts inspire Oconee Forever audience

**BY BRETT MCLAUGHLIN**  
THE JOURNAL

WESTMINSTER — A one-two punch of conservation eloquence descended on College Street Baptist Church Wednesday night and some souls may have been converted in the battle to preserve land and resources.

Clemson University professors and renowned conservationists Dr. Drew Lanham and Dr. Patrick McMillan left a crowd of some 100 wanting more after their moving presentations on behalf of Oconee Forever, the local chapter of preservation-minded Upstate Forever.

Lanham, a wildlife professor at Clemson, mesmerized the audience, asking them to close their eyes and join him on a journey across the lands of South Carolina from the Lowcountry to the Piedmont to the Upstate.

His almost-poetic musings brought images of nature to life as he encouraged the audience to "wander beyond the comfort of quaint." As he talked of the mountains, the rolling hills and the

musty soil he said he was "swallowed whole in wonder."

"I see and think differently in these places," he said. "... The land is somehow always on my mind. I can hear the land ... I can smell the land."

He reminded the audience that, "Land does not belong to someone, as much as we belong to the land," and he encouraged them to think of place, land and nature as one.

"Failing to know the connection (between place, land and nature) tells the disconnection," he warned.

In a more conventional presentation, McMillan, host of the ETV and PBS series "Expeditions with Patrick McMillan," told the audience that the Blue Ridge Escarpment and the foothills of the Upstate are a crucible of life.

"It's hard to beat the diversity in our own backyard," McMillan said, noting there are three times more species of plants in this part of the Carolinas than there are in the Valdivian Rainforest of Chile. "There are more species of trillium

and salamanders here than anywhere else of this same size on the earth."

To the crowd's delight, he recalled the history of the Oconee Bell, noting that it only grows around Lake Jocassee and Lake Keowee and in a small area in North Carolina.

"Oconee Bells can only survive in the shadow of these mountains," he said, adding that the species does not propagate elsewhere because ants carry its seed, as they do two-thirds of the plant species in the Upstate.

McMillan said the Appalachian Mountain chain turns left at Greenville, creating a "crucible" that captures moisture and warmth. This natural phenomenon, he said, has a moderating effect on climate change, allowing species to travel 100 feet up to find moisture and coolness that requires other species to travel 1,000 miles north.

"This place is a crucible of life in the face of change," he said. "This is a place we have to prioritize for preservation."