

Upstate Update

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Upstate Forever's Monthly Bulletin on
Important Issues and Events in the Upstate

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1. Tentative Settlement Reached with the Cliffs

The Cliffs Communities, *Upstate Forever* and several conservation organizations have reached a tentative agreement resolving the dispute about the treatment of wastewater and the design for the golf course at the Mountain Park development in northern Greenville County (see [UU 97](#) and the [Winter-Spring 2009 Upstate Advocate](#)).

The Cliffs originally proposed to discharge wastewater directly into the North Saluda River, a beautiful trout stream that flows through the development. After a public outcry, the Cliffs withdrew the proposal and applied for a permit to discharge the wastewater on a hillside adjacent to the golf course. The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) issued the permit, and *Upstate Forever*, the South Carolina Wildlife Federation, the South Carolina Native Plant Society, Trout Unlimited, the Sierra Club and Save Our Saluda appealed the decision to the South Carolina Administrative Law Court. The grounds for the appeal included the failure to determine the suitability of the hillside area for handling the wastewater and the failure to impose any limits on how much water can be taken out of the North Saluda River to irrigate the golf course.

The Cliffs also sought authorization to construct an 18-hole golf course along both sides of the North Saluda River for a distance of almost 2.5 miles. The original plan for the course included 16 bridges, 9 playovers, limited buffers along the river, and no limits on using the river for irrigating the course. Again DHEC approved the plan, and *Upstate Forever* and the conservation groups appealed, citing severe impacts on the river and the failure to evaluate alternate sites for the golf course.

After many weeks of negotiations, the parties reached a settlement. The major elements include:

Revised Plan for Golf Course. The golf course will be built in accordance with a revised plan, which allows 8 bridges and 9 playovers, reduces the course length by 400 feet, eliminates most of the channel alteration work, and provides a continuous vegetated buffer along both sides of the river, most of which will be at least 30 feet wide and consist of trees. All of the trees and plants in the buffer must be native to the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Water Withdrawal Limits. Specific limits will apply on how much water can be withdrawn from the North Saluda River to irrigate the golf course.

Public Access to River. The Cliffs will build and maintain an area for public access to the river for boating and fishing.

Promoting sensible growth and protecting special places in the Upstate

Watershed Protection Fund. Over the next five years, the Cliffs will provide at least \$250,000 to a fund to protect and improve the natural resources of the North Saluda watershed.

Brad Wyche, Executive Director of *Upstate Forever* said, “We’ve come a long way from the Cliffs’ original plan, which included putting wastewater into the river, massive alteration of the river channel, limited buffers, and an excessive number of bridges and playovers. We continue to believe that this is not a good site for a golf course, but at least the impacts on the North Saluda will be substantially reduced. We’re pleased that the settlement includes a public access site to the river and the watershed protection fund.”

At press time, the attorneys for the parties were still working on the settlement agreement. The case will not be officially resolved until this agreement is signed by the parties, including DHEC, and approved by the S.C. Administrative Law Court.

2. Swamp Rabbit Trail Has a “Grand Hoppinging!”

On May 7 and 8, Greenville County celebrated the “Grand Hoppinging” of the long-awaited Greenville Hospital System Swamp Rabbit Tram-Trail, which stretches 13.5 miles from Travelers Rest to Greenville Technical College. Friday evening, thousands of runners and walkers participated in a 5K race on a section of the trail in Travelers Rest, a portion of the proceeds of which will benefit *Upstate Forever*. On Saturday, *Upstate Forever* volunteers—sporting large bunny ears—were stationed along the trail to assist users and distribute tickets for prize drawings that afternoon at the Peace Center amphitheatre.

Upstate Forever is proud of its role in making this spectacular project a reality. In 1998, when Railtex, the company that owned the rail line, put it on the market, we worked with the national Rails to Trails Conservancy to place the line in the “Rail Trail Bank” to give Greenville County time to acquire it. We lined up private funding to acquire it ourselves if the County failed to do so. But the County [through the Greenville County Economic Development Corporation (GCEDC)] came through and purchased it in 1999.

Acquisition is essential, but it’s only the first step. The Surface Transportation Board (STB) in Washington, D.C. has to officially approve the abandonment of rail service on a line in order to convert it to a trail. The GCEDC was dealing with complaints from a few customers on the northern part of the line and was reluctant to initiate the proceedings for abandonment. That’s when *Upstate Forever* Board chair Carlton Owen stepped up and organized an amazing group of volunteers to work every Saturday throughout the summer of 2005 to clear away the kudzu, briars and bushes from almost the entire length of the line—this enabled people to clearly see and appreciate the enormous potential of the project. The effort was key to building strong public support for the establishment of a trail, and soon GCEDC filed a petition for abandonment with the STB. *Upstate Forever* retained its own counsel and intervened in the case to support GCEDC’s request.

Under federal law, before a rail line can be abandoned, an opportunity must be given to any interested company or person to acquire the line at fair market value and resume rail service. Sure enough, a private railroad firm in Greenville sought to buy the entire line at a nominal price and resume commercial freight service. GCEDC and *Upstate Forever* strongly opposed the request and submitted appraisals showing that the line had substantial value. The STB basically agreed and established the value at over \$700,000. Even then, the private firm could have purchased the line for that price, but thankfully, it declined to do so. In April, 2006, the STB signed an order approving the abandonment.

Upstate Forever then agreed to serve as the “interim trail operator” to give GCEDC and the Greenville County Recreation District time to work out a final agreement for removing the rail lines and building the trail. The agreement provides that a small rubber-tired tram can also use the line—hence the term tram-trail.

In 2007, the Greenville Hospital System made a magnificent gift of \$1 million for the project, and the project was officially named the Greenville Hospital System Swamp Rabbit Tram-Trail.

The City of Greenville has been an enthusiastic and supportive partner on the project since much of the trail is located in the City and goes through Linky Stone Park, Falls Park, and Cleveland Park. The City also acquired, and received STB approval for abandonment of, a section of an old CSX rail line across the Reedy River from the Swamp Rabbit north of Westfield Street.

On May 21, in recognition of his extraordinary leadership on the Swamp Rabbit project and several other state and national conservation initiatives, Carlton Owen received the Order of the Palmetto, the highest civilian honor given by the State of South Carolina. Congratulations, Carlton, on this well-deserved award!

Take a ride, walk, or run along the trail today, and you will see this potential being fulfilled. The development of the Swamp Rabbit Trail has already spurred wonderful investments and improvements, both public and private, in downtown Travelers Rest. The trail will soon be extended to Lake Conestee, and there are already serious discussions about extending it south along the Reedy River to the new Cedar Shoals Park and north from Travelers Rest to the mountains and about lateral trails connecting parks and communities to the Swamp Rabbit.

The trail is proving to be hugely popular for both recreational users and commuters, benefitting public health through both increased fitness levels and improved air quality. And we are soon likely to see more economic development and aesthetic improvements along the parts of the trail in previously neglected areas like Berea. The Swamp Rabbit Trail is a public investment that will pay for itself many times over.

Thank you to these wonderful volunteers who helped us during the Grand Hopping: Lou and Donna Astle, Dora Bikas, Kirbie Crowe, Don and Glenna Descy, Laura Garrett, Linda Hutton, Mary McGee, Katherine Monteith, Paige Nikopoulos, Peg O'Donoghue, Claire and Gus Plagianis, Cathy Proner, Shelley Robbins, Laura Sams, Ali van den Broek, and Brad Wyche.

For more information (including trail maps) about the Swamp Rabbit Trail, go to <http://greenvillerec.com/parks/swamp-rabbit> (Greenville County) and www.greenvillesc.gov/ParksRec/Trails/ (City of Greenville).

3. *Upstate Forever Membership Survey: The Results Are In!*

As *Upstate Forever* undertakes a strategic planning effort to fulfill our mission for the next five years and beyond, a key element is the voice of our members. Why do you give to *Upstate Forever*? What parts of our work are most important to you? How well are we communicating with you?

To answer these questions, we created an online survey (with paper copies available upon request). In April, *Upstate Forever* members received postcards and emails requesting participation in the survey, and a total of 317 members (out of 2,153) did so, an excellent response rate of 15 percent. The results are in: Respondents are representative of the total membership in terms of giving level, and slightly more than half have been members three years or less. More than 90 percent are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" in response to questions with their membership experience. The vast majority also find the frequency of communication (emails, print mailings, event notices, etc.) from *Upstate Forever* to be "just right."

The five areas of *Upstate Forever's* work most important to respondents are land conservation, land use and infrastructure planning, clean water, low-impact development, and parks and natural areas. Members are most interested in participating in field trips on foot: hikes, visits to protected properties, and guided nature walks. Most respondents have not attended any of our Annual Meetings, but we hope to change that! (Go to www.upstateforever.org/join_events.html for information about our slate of

upcoming field trips and our November 13 Annual Meeting.)

To the question, “What would you change about *Upstate Forever*?” the most common response by far was “Nothing.” We are truly gratified by the positive results of this survey, but we continue to welcome your input and suggestions. Please contact Kirbie Crowe at kcrowe@upstateforever.org or (864) 250-0500x21 for more information about the survey.

4. Upstate Colleges Go Green(er)

As the Class of 2010 heads out into the world, three Upstate colleges and universities are making notable strides toward sustainability. First, Clemson University has released its “[White Paper on Clean Energy: Clemson University’s Commitment to Green Economic Development](#),” which outlines the university’s plan to be a leader in sustainability. The exciting plan has three key elements:

- Educational programs, from certifications to graduate levels, to enhance the skills of the current work force in energy-related industries and prepare the next generation of talent
- Innovation and technology transfer through growth of research in targeted areas and continued development of the university’s innovation campuses
- An initiative to transform the main campus into a national model for sustainability: a net-zero carbon emissions university

Second, over in Spartanburg’s historic Glendale Mill, a large and enthusiastic audience celebrated the dedication on April 20 of Wofford College’s new Goodall Environmental Studies Center. The Center, located in a renovated and retrofitted former mill office overlooking the Lawson’s Fork of the Pacolet River, will be the hub of activities for Wofford’s environmental studies program, the first major of its kind in the state. The building will also be the college’s first LEED project. The director of the Goodall Center is John Lane, associate professor of English and a member of *Upstate Forever*’s Advisory Council. (John also organized the inaugural “Earth Day Bike, Run and Thoreauvian Saunter,” in which a group of about 30 Wofford faculty, staff and students trekked 6.6 miles from the main college campus to the Glendale center that morning.) For more information, visit www.wofford.edu/glendaleshoals.

Third, Furman University’s Cliffs Cottage has been awarded LEED Gold certification by the U.S. Green Building Council. Built on the Furman campus in 2008, Cliffs Cottage was *Southern Living* magazine’s first “green” Showcase Home. The building has since been remodeled and now houses the university’s David E. Shi Center for Sustainability. The Cliffs Cottage is the third building on Furman’s campus to earn a LEED certification.

Finally, all three schools are included in a new guide to the nation’s most environmentally responsible colleges. The ratings in “[The Princeton Review’s Guide to 286 Green Colleges](#)” were based on data collected from hundreds of schools in 2009. The 286 schools included in the guide received scores in the 80th or higher percentile.

5. Upstate Forever Submits Comments on State Water Quality Standards

Every three years, South Carolina is required to review and amend, as necessary, its water quality standards in order to incorporate the latest Federal criteria, recommendations, and policies and receive comments from the general public on activities or changes to the standards that would improve water quality and public health (see http://www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/wq_standard.htm). This “triennial review” is currently underway, and in response *Upstate Forever* gathered together experts from ten other conservation organizations in the state to comment on the regulations. On May 14, a letter drafted by *Upstate Forever* staff members Laura Garrett and John Tynan and signed by all 11 groups was submitted to DHEC urging several improvements and clarifications in the regulations, including:

- Uphold water quality standards in times of drought or downstream of significant withdrawals, as pollutants typically become concentrated as volume decreases
- Clarify and limit the exceptions to the antidegradation policy
- Establish a process for addressing consistent violators
- Use historic records to establish natural baseline conditions for waters of the state
- As recommended by EPA in 1986, use *E. coli* levels to determine safe recreational use of waterbodies, rather than fecal coliform levels
- Prohibit the discharge of pollutants such as pesticides, herbicides, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) to groundwater that can be used for drinking water
- Establish and enforce numeric standards for pharmaceuticals, personal care products, and other contaminants in all waters of the state

To read the comments in their entirety, go to www.upstateforever.org/programsCAW/ConservationCommentsOnR.61-68and69.pdf.

6. Upstate Conservationists Join in Statewide Lobby Day

Nineteen *Upstate Forever* volunteers and staff members joined forces with conservationists from around the state for the annual Conservation Lobby Day held in Columbia on May 4. It was an educational and fun day (and night!) complete with remarks from elected officials (including Sen. Phil Leventis and SC Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers), updates on conservation issues statewide, and delicious local food. Thank you to Angela Lankford, Jeanna Smith, Jessica Patterson, John Smink, Charles Privette, Seth Harrison, and Billy Taylor, who took a day out of their schedules and joined 12 *Upstate Forever* staff members for the festivities. Hope to see you next year! To sign up for our Legislative Alert, emailed weekly during the legislative session, contact Nancy Fitzer at nfitzer@upstateforever.org.

7. Reducing Household Hazardous Waste in Spartanburg

Upstate Forever partnered with Spartanburg County and Master Gardeners to conduct the second annual Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day on April 17 at Boiling Springs High School. Waste was collected from approximately 240 cars, and included 43 propane tanks, 16 fire extinguishers, 605 gallons of flammable liquids, 17,840 pounds of waste paint, 605 gallons of liquid pesticides, 603 pounds of solid pesticides, 605 gallons of corrosives, and 594 fluorescent bulbs. Santee Cooper collected waste oil, The Battery Post collected batteries, and approximately 30 gas-powered lawnmowers were exchanged for discounts on electric mowers through DHEC's lawnmower exchange program. Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day will become a permanent annual event for the county, keeping hazardous chemicals out of garages and basements and disposing of them safely.

8. "Vintage Simple" Renovation Featured in National Publication

Congratulations to *Upstate Forever* Administrative Assistant Maria Garuti, whose home is featured on the cover and inside the Summer 2010 issue of *Kitchen + Bath Makeovers*, a special publication of *Better Homes and Gardens*. Maria's sustainable and beautiful design ethic is on display in the downtown Greenville bungalow that she and her husband, Bill, have renovated with minimal funds and much creativity. Read more about it on Maria's design blog: <http://vintagesimplehome.blogspot.com/2010/05/its-here.html>.

9. Upcoming Upstate Forever Events

Land Trust Day at Mast General

Saturday, June 5, 10:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m., Mast General Store, 111 N. Main Street, Greenville

Cost: free

For the seventh straight year, Mast General Store's Greenville location has chosen *Upstate Forever* to be the beneficiary of their annual Land Trust Day. The store will generously donate 20 percent of all sales on Saturday, June 5 to *Upstate Forever*. Take your shopping list for weddings, dads, grads, and summer outdoor adventures and celebrate Land Trust Day! Parking is free in the Richardson Street garage, located behind the store. Call *Upstate Forever* at (864) 250-0500 with questions.

Clemson Forest Field Trip

Saturday, June 12, 10:00 a.m., Clemson Forest, Pickens County

Cost: \$15, *Upstate Forever* members only

Naturalists Ben Sill and John Garton will lead a guided nature walk through this beautiful and unique property, highlighting points of ecological interest along the way. This trip is limited to *Upstate Forever* members only. To register, contact Gretchen Wilson at (864) 250-0500 or gwilson@upstateforever.org.

10. Quote of the Month

"The Swamp Rabbit Trail represents Greenville at its best – both in terms of long-range planning and of public and private partners working together for the common good."

– *The Greenville News* editorial, 5/5/10

