

UPSTATE UPDATE 40

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

January, 2003

Top Ten List of Most Notable Achievements In 2002

Here's our Top Ten List of the most notable achievements on land use, conservation and sustainable development issues in the Upstate during 2002 (not necessarily in order of importance).

1. *South Carolina Conservation Bank Act Becomes Law.*

On April 20, 2002, the South Carolina Conservation Bank Act became law. The Act will provide, beginning next year, a regular and significant source of funding to acquire either title to, or conservation easements on, important natural and historic resources in our state. The funding will come from a portion of the state's deed recording fees, which are collected when real estate is sold in the state. No tax increase is involved.

A volunteer board of conservationists, scientists and business leaders from across the state has been appointed to manage the Conservation Bank. Grants and loans will be made on a competitive basis for projects that meet specific conservation and financial criteria. The program is 100 per cent voluntary—all transactions will be between willing sellers and buyers. The legislation gives no authority to zone, regulate or condemn anyone's land.

The new law is a huge step in the right direction toward a better balance between development and conservation in South Carolina. But we need to remain vigilant. Already we are hearing reports from Columbia that there may be an effort in the current legislative session to delay funding until 2006 or even to repeal the entire law. So please go ahead and contact your representatives in the General Assembly and express your strong opposition to making any changes in the law. Let's give it a chance to work!

2. State Approves Reedy River Restoration Program.

Last year the State's natural resource trustees (the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control and the Governor) gave final approval to the "Reedy River Restoration Plan." This plan will govern the expenditure of the over \$6 million that the State received in its settlement with Colonial Pipeline Company for the 1 million gallon oil spill into the river in 1996. The plan consists of the following elements:

- \$3 million for the protection, and where appropriate, restoration of the stream channel, riparian corridors and significant associated wetlands of the Reedy River at and below the site of the spill.
- \$600,000 for a comprehensive Reedy River basin water quality model.
- \$400,000 for the design and implementation of site-specific solutions to water quality problems.
- \$300,000 for the long-term monitoring of the water quality and biological health of the river's aquatic resources.
- \$400,000 for the improvement of public access to the Reedy River for bank fishing, boating and other recreational use.
- \$500,000 for the establishment of an environmental education program for local governments, landowners and the general public.
- \$110,000 for installing and maintaining 400 nesting structures for waterfowl and other wetland birds.
- \$200,000 for the acquisition of Lake Conestee.

This plan, as it begins to be implemented this year, should result in significant and long-lasting improvements to the Reedy River and its

resources. After subjecting this river to decades of abuse, neglect and pollution, it's the least we can do.

3. Upstate Leaders Pledge Support For "Cleaner Air Sooner."

At the Upstate Air Quality Summit in Greenville on November 21, 2002, leaders of Greenville, Spartanburg and Anderson Counties signed a joint resolution pledging to work together to bring the Upstate into compliance with the federal 8-hour ozone standard three years ahead of schedule. In exchange for this commitment, the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will defer making any official "non-attainment" designation of the Upstate. Such a designation, which could have come as early as April of 2004, would make it much more difficult to receive approval for industrial growth and road-building projects in the region—a terrifying scenario to Upstate business leaders.

The Upstate is only the second region in the country to pursue this so-called "early action plan" for coming into compliance with the ozone standard. Several critical deadlines must be met:

June 16, 2003: The Upstate must describe the control measures that are being considered to achieve compliance.

March 31, 2004: The Upstate must submit its final plan containing measures that are "specific, quantified and permanent" and demonstrating how these measures will achieve compliance with the ozone standard by December 31, 2007.

Sept. 30, 2005: EPA must take final action on the local plan.

Dec. 31, 2005: The Upstate must implement the measures described in the approved plan.

Dec. 31, 2007: The Upstate must be in compliance with the ozone standard. If so, EPA will withdraw the deferred non-attainment designation and replace it with an attainment designation. If the area is not in

compliance, the non-attainment designation will become effective on April 15, 2008.

If any of these key milestones is missed, EPA has the authority to withdraw the deferred designation and put the Upstate back on the traditional track for achieving compliance.

Ground-level ozone is a major public health concern. Even at low concentrations, it can cause respiratory problems and aggravated asthma in children, people with respiratory diseases, and even healthy adults who are working or exercising outside. These effects are substantially reduced when the 8-hour standard is not exceeded.

Cars and trucks are responsible for almost 60 per cent of nitrogen oxide emissions—an essential ingredient of ground level ozone. (These emissions combine with sunlight and volatile organic compounds to form ozone). Thus, no plan will have any chance of success unless these sources are addressed. That will be particularly challenging in the Upstate, where both the number of vehicles and the amount of driving continue to increase dramatically. In just the last 10 years, our 144,000 new residents have brought 100,000 more cars to our region's roads and highways.

But it's certainly worth the effort—not only to have “cleaner air sooner” but also to show how Upstate counties can work together to solve regional problems. We hope that the effort will not be confined to ozone. There are many other important problems—economic development, infrastructure, transportation, housing, and conservation—that must be addressed on a regional basis.

4. Spartanburg Water System Approves First Purchase Of Development Rights Program In The Upstate.

The Spartanburg Water System approved the first Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program in the Upstate and joined forces with *Upstate Forever* to implement it. On September 24, 2002, the Water System Commissioners gave final approval to spending \$35,000 to purchase conservation easements to protect land along the North and South Pacolet Rivers. These rivers are the major tributaries to Lake Bowen, the county's most important source of public drinking water.

There is overwhelming scientific evidence that preserving land along rivers and streams—referred to as riparian buffers—is essential to maintaining and improving water quality. These buffers act like sponges, slowing upland runoff and keeping pollution out of waterways. By spending one dollar today to protect these buffers, the Spartanburg Water System will save many future dollars in treatment costs. New York City is the classic example of the wisdom of this policy. By protecting land in its watershed, the City expects to avoid the expenditure of billions of dollars for a new water filtration plant. Buffers also provide many other benefits—cooler stream temperatures, wildlife habitat and green corridors for communities as well as increases in the market value of the adjoining upland.

Congratulations to the Spartanburg Water System’s Commissioners and Graham Rich, the General Manager, for their visionary leadership in launching this program. We are honored to be a partner with them, and we hope their initiative will inspire local governments throughout the Upstate to establish similar programs.

5. Parking Lot Landscaping Ordinance Approved In Greenville County.

Upstate Forever began its work and advocacy on the landscaping ordinance for large office and commercial parking lots in Greenville County almost three years ago. At the time we thought that enactment of the ordinance would be a relatively easy process. After all, it applies only to large business parking lots, and these ordinances are now routine in most rapidly growing metropolitan areas. How wrong we were!

For almost three years, the ordinance bounced back and forth among the County Council, the Council’s Public Service, Planning and Development Committee and the Planning Commission where it was considered at no less than 16 official meetings!

As the ordinance spun on the regulatory merry-go-round, more and more citizens became involved. Hundreds began turning out for the meetings, taking time away from their jobs and families. Garden clubs were energized, petitions were circulated, Council members were called, and letters poured in to the local papers. Finally, on September 3, 2002, County Council approved the ordinance.

No doubt this is an important, urgently needed ordinance, but the interest, support and passion extend far beyond trees in parking lots. What we witnessed during the last year is an outpouring of concern about what is happening in Greenville County—the loss of open space, mounting traffic problems, harmful patterns of development and so forth. It is a concern shared by citizens everywhere.

The ordinance's tortuous process had one enormous "silver lining"—citizens became actively involved with their local government. For many, it was the first time they had ever attended a County Council meeting or ever talked to their representative. They are now engaged, knowing their voices can make a difference. We hope their example will inspire citizens throughout the Upstate to speak out as well on these critically important issues.

6. *Pickens County Adopts First Lake Buffer Ordinance In The Upstate.*

On March 4, 2002, Pickens County Council approved the first lake buffer ordinance in the Upstate. The ordinance establishes a 50-foot buffer along Lakes Hartwell, Keowee and Jocassee and imposes substantial restrictions on the uses and activities that can take place within this area, such as:

- Septic tank systems are not allowed within the buffer.
- Only 10 per cent of the area or 300 square feet, whichever is less, can contain any impervious surface.
- No trees larger than six-inch caliper can be removed unless certified to be a hazard by a registered forester.
- Within the first 25 feet of the buffer (along the lakes), grasses, manicured lawns, ornamental vegetation, clearcutting, mowing, fertilization, and use of herbicides and pesticides are prohibited.

This is unquestionably the most stringent buffer protection ordinance in the Upstate. Well done, Pickens County Council!

7. *Arkwright Revitalization Project Earns National Acclaim.*

Harold Mitchell grew up in the Arkwright community near downtown Spartanburg. He saw first hand the abuse, neglect and pollution that dragged his community down to the brink of extinction—the city landfill, a large fertilizer plant, and crumbling roads, just to name a few. Harold has made it his mission in life to bring the community back to life by providing sound infrastructure, eliminating health and environmental risks, and restoring respect for the neighborhood. He could not have chosen a better name for the organization he created to spearhead those efforts: Regenesis.

Through Harold's efforts, Spartanburg County has received over \$3.7 million in federal grants to revitalize the Arkwright community. A mill facility will be renovated and become the home of a new community health center. The dump sites are being cleaned up, and plans have been drafted for new houses, roads, parks and greenways in the area.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognized Harold for his visionary leadership by giving him the Citizen's Excellence in Community Involvement Award and the Environmental Merit Award.

Arkwright is proving to be a model for community revitalization projects throughout the United States, and none of it would have happened without Harold Mitchell's hard work and leadership.

8. *Downtown Areas Continue To Make Remarkable Progress.*

A strong, thriving downtown is one of the most important components of smart growth because they attract development to urban areas and reduce sprawl into the countryside. Several cities in the Upstate are planning and implementing exciting revitalization projects in their downtowns. Here are some of the highlights:

Anderson— There are big plans for a renaissance in the City of Anderson. Local leaders want to attract residents to the downtown area by increasing office and parking space and adding residential, shopping, dining, and entertainment opportunities in the central business district. Work is already underway to transform a former furniture store into a large office complex, and an existing building is being remodeled that will include Main Street's first downtown apartment. Late last year, a group of developers

announced plans to redevelop an entire city block and construct a parking facility and multi-story hotel. This ambitious blueprint for Anderson will take years to complete but will have far-reaching and long-term positive benefits for the entire Upstate.

Greer—The city wants its downtown to become a destination spot and, along with the local chamber of commerce, is funding a downtown revitalization project to spruce up the Five Points area around Main, Trade and Poinsett Streets. The project has brought Greer new sidewalks, ornate streetlights, and a pocket park, and coincides with the private development of many storefronts into shops and offices. A new ordinance that will require landscaping and trees in parking lots is expected to be adopted soon and reflects city leaders' resolve to make their downtown area inviting to area residents and visitors.

Spartanburg—The recent addition of a new four-story office building, a city parking garage, a church expansion, fountains, sculptures and streetscape enhancements have already breathed new life into downtown Spartanburg, and leaders are planning even more improvements. The Renaissance Project, a public/private venture at the heart of Spartanburg's revitalization, includes plans for a Marriott Hotel and Conference Center scheduled to open in October, an amphitheater, and arts facilities in the downtown area.

Simpsonville—A newly revitalized town square, green space, new lighting, and landscaping are all part of Simpsonville's long-range vision for a restored and thriving downtown area. The city is already enjoying a burst of new residential development near the central business district, some of which includes greenways and mixed housing types, and a cotton mill is being transformed into a retail marketplace with townhouses. Enhancements like these will only improve Simpsonville's already high quality of life and help it retain its place among the state's fastest growing small cities.

Laurens—"Main Street, Laurens" is a public-private partnership that combines downtown revitalization with historic preservation. A newly renovated City Hall and a major beautification of the courthouse square that includes period lighting, sand-swept brick sidewalks, and benches are nearing completion. Future plans include the construction of an amphitheater in a green space just one block off the courthouse square and the expansion of a trail that runs along Little River east of downtown.

Greenville—Community leaders in Greenville proved that you don't have to live with a bad mistake forever. In 1960, a massive structure of concrete and steel—the Camperdown Bridge—was built directly over Reedy River Falls in downtown Greenville. At that time the river was grossly polluted, and no one cared about it or thought twice about building a bridge over Greenville's birthplace. Many years later, as water quality improved and the river finally became appreciated and respected, the bridge stood out like the proverbial sore thumb.

So the city decided to do something about it—they had the bridge removed, every bit of it! The dream of “freeing the falls” had become a reality. The waterfall is now the centerpiece of an overall plan to revitalize the entire West End of the city. Meanwhile, several other exciting projects are also underway in the downtown area, including the redevelopment of two city blocks that will house new buildings with retail, office and residential space; a renovated high-rise office building with street level shopping; and an innovative new parking facility with mixed-use “bookends” on either side.

9. Voters Approve Change Of Government In Oconee County.

On November 5, 2002, Oconee County voters narrowly approved changing its form of government from its current council-supervisor to council-administrator.

Under the existing form of government, the voters elect the supervisor, and candidates need only have a high school education. Current Supervisor Ann Hughes strongly supported the change and emphasized that a skilled professional with management experience should direct the county's business. Under the new form of government, the county administrator will be hired directly by the county council, which will develop criteria for the position.

Oconee County was one of only five South Carolina counties under the supervisor form of government and will join 32 other counties with an administrator. Ms. Hughes, who was elected in 2001, will complete her four-year term before the new system takes effect.

10. Upstate Forever Passes 1,000-Member Level.

Well, we have to brag on ourselves just a little bit! On July 24, 2002, *Upstate Forever* passed the 1,000-member level. We are proud, honored and humbled to have reached this milestone in less than four years. Thank you for your support!

Best wishes to all of you and your families for a happy and prosperous 2003!