

# Upstate Update

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

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### 1. *Upstate Forever* Opens Green Headquarters

The wait is over -- *Upstate Forever* moved into its new main office at 507 Pettigru Street in Greenville on October 1! It took more than a year of hard work, but we ended up restoring and remodeling an old building in a way that protects health, conserves energy and reduces environmental impacts. Our goal is for the project to serve as a model and inspiration for other residential, commercial or industrial renovation activities in the Upstate and elsewhere. Our new office will be certified under both the EarthCraft and Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) programs. We anticipate receiving LEED certification at the highest level (platinum).

Originally constructed as a single family residence in 1916, our building had been vacant for over twenty years and had deteriorated badly. The house contained asbestos, termite damage, rotted woodwork, and fire damage, all of which had to be addressed before we could begin the actual renovation work.

By renovating an existing building instead of constructing a new one, we adhered to the basic principle of sustainability, that "the greenest building is the one already built." Another important principle that we followed was to reuse existing materials wherever possible. Where it was not possible to reuse the materials, most of them were recycled. Finally, where new materials had to be used, we made sure they were highly sustainable.

This project addresses a big missing piece in the green movement -- how to improve the performance of existing buildings, which outnumber new buildings by 100 to 1. We will not be able to reduce the health, energy, and environmental impacts of the built environment unless existing structures are addressed. At our office, people can see, touch, feel, and learn about a wide range of green options as they consider their own renovation plans.

We hosted an Open House on Saturday, November 22 to show off our new home. Many of our members turned out to take a tour, explore the grounds, and get some ideas for their own green projects. If you're interested in a tour of the office or in information about the superb vendors and contractors with whom we worked, please contact us. (This information will be available on our website soon!) We hope you'll be inspired to undertake some green retrofits in your own home or office!

**Promoting sensible growth and protecting special places in the Upstate**

## 2. Upstate Forever's Land Trust Program Achieves Accreditation

We are excited to report that the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, has awarded *Upstate Forever* accredited status. *Upstate Forever* is the first accredited land trust in South Carolina and one of only four in the Southeast. Accredited land trusts meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands in perpetuity.

As part of the nearly two-year accreditation process, *Upstate Forever's* land trust underwent an extensive external and internal review of our governance and management program and the systems and policies we use to protect land. Our land trust is a stronger program today having gone through this rigorous program.

A total of 39 land trusts were awarded accreditation at a special ceremony at The Land Trust Alliance's annual National Land Conservation Conference in Pittsburgh, PA on September 19. Accredited land trusts may display a seal indicating to the public that they meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust and ensure that conservation efforts are permanent.

Since 2000, *Upstate Forever's* land trust program has assisted landowners to permanently protect their properties through conservation agreements. Today, we protect over 10,000 acres of farms, forest, and other significant lands throughout the Upstate. Across the nation, more than 1,600 land trusts have worked with willing landowners to conserve over 37 million acres of critical lands.

Congratulations to our land trust staff -- Dana Leavitt, Erin Knight, Jac Oliver, Mary Hays Huguley and Lisa Wickliffe -- and to our Board's Land Trust Committee -- Tom Kester (Chairman), Jimmy Grantham, Joe James, Patrick McMillan, Leon Patterson, Ted Shehan, and Kris Yon -- for this significant accomplishment!

## 3. Greenville and Oconee Counties Enable Zoning

Two Upstate counties have recently established processes to initiate zoning in areas currently lacking land use controls. In Greenville, where the majority of the county is unzoned, a text amendment to the zoning code gained final approval from County Council on October 21. Under the new rules, the county planning department may establish "Zoning Referendum Areas" (ZRAs) in currently unzoned areas in consultation with residents and property owners. If 15 percent of registered voters in a ZRA sign a petition to establish zoning, the planning department works with the community in establishing a land use plan, after which a referendum is held on whether to implement the plan through zoning. If the referendum passes, County Council makes the final decision on whether to adopt zoning in the ZRA.

In Oconee County, which previously had no zoning whatsoever, the County Council approved a zoning enabling ordinance on November 6. There, the zoning process is triggered when 15 percent of property owners in a planning district (based on the boundaries of the 17 fire districts) petition for it. After a review by the planning commission, the planning department works with citizens to develop a proposed zoning map. In addition, County Council establishes a District Planning Advisory Committee consisting of seven property owners of parcels within the district. The committee drafts a zoning map for the district, which is reviewed by the planning commission and forwarded to County Council. During a subsequent public comment period, all property owners within the district receive surveys about the proposed changes. County Council ultimately decides on whether to adopt the zoning changes.

The ordinance also allows for zoning to be initiated in smaller areas (minimum 200 acres, or 50 acres if in a subdivision) through petitions signed by at least 51 percent of property owners. County Council also reserves the right to initiate zoning as desired. In addition, the ordinance establishes overlay districts for Lakes Keowee and Jocassee as well as the I-85 corridor.

For many years, *Upstate Forever* has advocated for community-based zoning initiatives, so we are pleased with the adoption of these ordinances in Greenville and Oconee Counties. In both counties, however, it remains to be seen whether zoning petition drives will be successful and whether county councils will ultimately choose to approve proposed zonings. In Oconee County, the petitioners and advisory committee members are all specified to be “property owners” rather than “registered voters”; we expressed our opposition to this requirement since citizens who reside in an area but do not own property are not allowed to participate, while those who own property in a district but live elsewhere do have a voice in the process. Curiously, Oconee County Council decided to delay implementation of the ordinance for nearly six months, at which time a majority of the current Council will have been replaced by new members. We encourage citizens in both counties to stay informed, get involved, and advocate for good land use planning and zoning.

#### 4. Conservation Bank Emptied

Land conservation in our state suffered a huge setback in early November when the South Carolina General Assembly voted to eliminate funding for the SC Conservation Bank this fiscal year. The Conservation Bank had already been seriously crippled by the steep decline in real estate transfer fees, but the legislature delivered a death blow by requiring the Bank to transfer the entire balance of its funds for this year (about \$7 million) to the Department of Education to fund fuel for school buses. With this decision, the state will not be able to honor funds already approved and committed to landowners by the Conservation Bank Board in June, including several in the Upstate.

To pit land conservation against schoolchildren is grossly unfair. Both are important, and our leaders need to find ways to adequately respond to all of South Carolina’s critical needs. Our state allocates only a miniscule portion of its budget to preserving and significant lands (\$7 million is one-tenth of one percent of the state’s \$7 billion budget!), and once those lands are lost to development, they are gone forever. This is a perfect time to [contact your state House and Senate representatives](#), before the General Assembly convenes in January, and let them know that conservation needs to be a priority.

#### 5. Check Off for State Parks

The South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism is launching a new statewide public relations campaign called “Check Off for State Parks” to generate supplemental funding for park improvements. You can use the check-off box on your 2008 South Carolina state income tax return to make a donation that will be used to help preserve pristine pieces of property, build new hiking trails, install educational signage and preserve historic buildings. For more information, visit [www.scprrt.com/state-park-service/donations/check-off-for-state-parks.aspx](http://www.scprrt.com/state-park-service/donations/check-off-for-state-parks.aspx).

#### 6. Upstate Forever Presents Awards at Annual Meeting

November 1 was the perfect autumn day for *Upstate Forever’s* Annual Meeting at the Piedmont Forestry Center in Oconee County. Attendees learned about our accomplishments in 2008 -- our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year -- and our plans for the next decade before enjoying a delicious lunch catered by Butter Bean’s of Seneca. Local band Conservation Theory played bluegrass and folk tunes while more than 150 people enjoyed lunch under the picnic shelter or in a sunny spot on the grass. In the afternoon, over 50 participants took part in our guided hikes on the nearby Nine Times property in Pickens County, one of the most ecologically significant tracts in the country. Naturalist and author Dennis Chastain led a nature walk along an old railroad bed followed by a more strenuous hike to Cedar Rock Mountain.

A highlight of the day was the presentation of our 2008 Annual Awards. Congratulations to all of our wonderful award winners:

- Land Conservation Champions: Alice and Fred Stanback
- Sustainable Communities Champion: Todd Usher, Addison Homes
- Clean Water Champion: Save Our Saluda
- Outstanding Public Servant: Mike Caston, SJWD Water District
- Volunteers of the Year: Donna and Lou Astle

### 7. Anderson Teens Promote Sustainability

Caleb Suttles and Madison Bronson, students at the Montessori School of Anderson, have created an initiative they call “Evolution Green” which aims “to encourage the members of our local community, particularly the young people, to go green and support *Upstate Forever*, which is a driving force in the green revolution of the Upstate South Carolina.” Visit their impressive website, [www.evolvegreen.org](http://www.evolvegreen.org), to learn more. There, you can learn about global warming, check out the cool Evolution Green t-shirts, and get the details about their “Spring Clean and Go Green” garage sale planned for March 21, 2009 at the Anderson County Farmer’s Market Pavilion. All proceeds will be donated to *Upstate Forever*. Way to go, Caleb and Madison!

### 8. What To Do about Drugs in our Water Supply

A series of investigative reports by the AP earlier this year has raised concerns about the “presence of minute concentrations of pharmaceuticals in the nation’s drinking water supplies, affecting at least 46 million Americans,” primarily due to unused medications being flushed down toilets. “Researchers are finding evidence that even extremely diluted concentrations of pharmaceutical residues harm fish, frogs and other aquatic species in the wild. Also, researchers report that human cells fail to grow normally in the laboratory when exposed to trace concentrations of certain drugs.” (*Savannah Morning News*, 9/15/08, <http://savannahnow.com/node/574196>)

In response, several *Upstate Forever* members have asked about the safe disposal of medications. Here are some options:

- Remove medication from container, dissolve in a small amount of water and dispose of with trash going to a landfill; the landfills are lined and therefore less likely to affect water supplies.
- If medication was obtained from a hospital or drug store pharmacy, ask if they have an in-house pharmaceutical recycling program.
- Free Clinics *may* take medications in tablet form delivered in their original containers. The Greenville Free Medical Clinic is located at 600 Arlington Avenue, Greenville, SC 29601; their phone number is (864) 232-1470. Other clinics are located in Taylors, Berea, Simpsonville, and Greer.

### 9. Farmers Should Take Care in Wetland Alteration

South Carolina farmers are urged to talk with conservation officials before draining any wet areas or bringing new land into production. Farmers should be cautious with managing wetlands in their fields since their eligibility for USDA farm program benefits could be at stake.

Since the passage of the 1985 Farm Bill, provisions have been in place to protect our nation's wetlands and highly erodible cropland. Altering a wetland for the purpose of making production of an agricultural commodity might cause a farmer to become ineligible for USDA program benefits. So, before taking any action around wetlands, farmers are urged to check with local Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) staff. Landowners are also encouraged to ask NRCS staff about voluntary conservation programs that include financial assistance as an alternative to farming wetlands, which helps minimize the impact these wet areas have on farming operations. For more information, visit [www.sc.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp.html](http://www.sc.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp.html).

## 10. Upstate Forever Wins Leadership Award

*Upstate Forever* has received the 2008 "Leadership in the Private Sector" award from the South Carolina Chapter of the US Green Building Council for our work in promoting green building and sustainable communities. We were honored at an awards dinner on October 16. Thank you!

## 11. Upcoming Upstate Forever Events

Tuesday, December 2

A Dickens of a Christmas

Downtown Spartanburg, SC, 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Stop by *Upstate Forever's* Spartanburg office at 100 E. Main Street to enjoy some refreshments and listen to the Celtic performers Laurel and the Lads, as part of this festive event in and around Morgan Square in downtown Spartanburg. For more information, contact [spartanburg@upstateforever.org](mailto:spartanburg@upstateforever.org) or call (864) 327-0090.

## 12. Lots o' Links

**Arbor Day is December 5.** That's right, in South Carolina, the best time to plant a tree is in early December. TreesGreenville is seeking volunteers to conduct 50-minute tree-planting programs at Greenville County schools. [www.treesgreenville.org/NeighborWoods.html](http://www.treesgreenville.org/NeighborWoods.html)

**Arkwright Cleaning Up.** Spartanburg's Arkwright community has become a model for communities from Savannah, Georgia, to Seoul, Korea, on forming community partnerships to address health, educational and economic issues. You may remember a [profile](#) of Harold Mitchell and the Re-Genesis project there which was published in the June 2003 *Upstate Advocate*. [www.goupstate.com/article/20080918/NEWS/809180345](http://www.goupstate.com/article/20080918/NEWS/809180345)

**Furman Stays Green.** For the second consecutive year, Furman University has been named one of the nation's most environmentally conscious colleges and universities by *KIWI* magazine. [www.furman.edu/press/pressarchive.cfm?ID=4234](http://www.furman.edu/press/pressarchive.cfm?ID=4234)

**Cycling Pays Off.** The Wall Street rescue plan includes tax credit for bike commuters. [www.nytimes.com/2008/10/10/us/10bike.htm?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/10/us/10bike.htm?_r=1&oref=slogin)

**National Park(ing) Day in Spartanburg.** Parking spaces in downtown Spartanburg were temporarily transformed into public parks. [www.goupstate.com/article/20080920/NEWS/809200338](http://www.goupstate.com/article/20080920/NEWS/809200338)

### 13. Quote of the Month

“The people of the Upstate have not discovered Nine Times yet, but when they do, they’ll want to give *Upstate Forever* and The Nature Conservancy a big old bear hug.”

-- Dennis Chastain, venerable Pickens County conservationist, speaking about the recent conveyance of the Nine Times property by *Upstate Forever* to The Nature Conservancy for a nature preserve, quoted in *The Greenville News*, 10/7/08

### *Upstate Forever*

---Promoting sensible growth and the protection of special places in the Upstate---

