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County buys land near Hagood Mill

Expansion expected to draw more tourists to site

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PICKENS — Pickens County will buy 35 acres across from Hagood Mill in a move that sets the site up to be a top tourist destination and a central piece of the county's efforts to grow tourism.

"That will allow the mill to have adequate parking for tour buses, as well as large gatherings for special events, plus the extra land will allow for additional exhibits to be placed at the site," County Administrator Chappell Hurst said.

Hagood Mill and its potential as an anchor site for the county were just part of the conversation at a recent tourism summit at Southern Wesleyan University where about 45 people gathered representing around 25 tourism-related groups — from museums and recreation sites to chambers of commerce.

Carla Whitlock, a board member for Tour Pickens County, a group that was formed by Pickens County Council to help direct and coordinate tourism efforts and that put on the tourism summit, said they are trying to "generate tax dollars for Pickens County and to be an economic development engine as well" including potential job creation down the road.

"I think it's fantastic," Becky Sweeney, of Eden Farms along Dacusville Highway, who was at the summit, said of the tourism efforts. "It's one of our wishes to get the word out about Eden Farms and why we opened the barn and what we offer there."

She said the countywide tourism push can help with that and said it will be great to have a united front in the tourism industry where people can recommend each other.

Dot Jackson, onsite director at Birchwood Center for Arts and Folklife near the entrance to Table Rock State Park, said tourism can have a tremendous impact for the county but "we are so miserably behind."

She said when visitors come to State 11, they can go miles "without a drop of gasoline, without a hot dog," describing the lack of resources, including sleeping accommodations, along stretches of the highway.

Hagood Mill is one potential "anchor site" that has been identified by the Tour Pickens County group, and Hurst said the purchase of the land grows the mill from its current approximate 10 acres.

He said the county purchased the 35 acres for about $350,000 from longtime residents and said the money came from the county's general fund.

He said plans include paved parking, additional restrooms and other attractions in the years to come. He said the new land will allow Hagood Mill to park several hundred cars.

"Having Hagood Mill there with its tradition can be a starting point for any tours that we develop in Pickens County," Hurst said. "It will be a great destination for people to come and then go up and visit the waterfalls and all the other areas up in the mountains."

Bob Brookover, executive director of the Clemson University International Institute for Tourism Research and Development, presented a tourism action plan at the summit that he created for Pickens County with Bill Norman, an associate professor at Clemson University.

The plan, which has been adopted by the Tour Pickens County group, includes recommendations ranging from tapping into the bluegrass culture in the county to having a community and hospitality education program that would include service sector employees, local residents and officials.