

# Divided by a river

SOUTH SALUDA'S FUTURE DEBATED



KEN OSBURN / Staff

Owen Johns and other residents near a stretch of the South Saluda River near Table Rock are concerned that conservation groups' plans to change the flow of the river could cause flooding and erosion.

## Conservation groups' plan sparks fears of floods, unwelcome visitors

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CLEVELAND — A plan to spread hundreds of dump-truck loads of rocks along a three-quarter-mile stretch of the South Saluda River near Cleveland has stirred local residents who fear changes would lead to flooding and erosion and attract unwanted visitors to the river at night.



SUZIE RIDDLE/Staff

Officials with Upstate Forever, Naturaland Trust and the Natural Resources Conservation Service said the plan would improve the river by creating a desirable fishing area, and it would protect it by limiting access as well as likely decrease erosion.

The debate over the quiet, slow-moving waters is

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# RIVER

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gathering steam. One state permit has been appealed, and Pickens County plans to meet with the government agencies involved to ensure all the mandated studies have been done and the proper permits issued.

At the heart of the controversy is a plan to construct "vanes" of rock across a stretch of the river, to break up its flatness and ultimately, advocates of the change say, improve the trout habitat.

Naturaland Trust's Frank Holleman, who is well-known for his advocacy for natural areas in the Upstate, said the project was proposed as a trout-habitat enhancement by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, a part of the federal Department of Agriculture.

"This project is like many, many others that have been done throughout the Southeast and in South Carolina and in this part of South Carolina to improve the habitat and the ecology of waters, particularly trout streams," Holleman said.

He said the project calls for rock to be placed in the river to create vanes at or below water level, which will create pools and ripples.

"The problem with the South Saluda there is that over time, it has been

straightened by agriculture or by road building or by something in the past," he said. "Instead of being a trout stream that normally has pools and ripples, it's fairly flat and fairly straight and fairly shallow. ... The goal is simply to improve the quality of the river."

Some residents, though, worry that the plan could permanently damage the river, not help it.

"Our main concern is the fact that that river channel handles the water that comes off of Table Rock Reservoir," said Lib Tickle, a resident who owns a horse farm near the stretch of river where the work is planned. "To us, that river is our flood-relieve channel. It's nice, and it's wide, and it's flat, and the water hits it and it rolls right through there."

The addition of tons of rock could change that, Tickle fears.

"The people upstream are concerned it's going to flood them out" she said. "Me, downstream, I'm concerned all those rocks are going to wind up in my backyard."

Another concern is people congregating on privately owned land along the river with campfires burning in the woods near it, and people using the property leased by Upstate Forever as a party spot, Tickle said.

The river serves as the border between Greenville and Pickens counties. After hearing residents' concerns, Pickens County officials have planned a meet-

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An information-gathering meeting starts at 7 p.m. April 11 at the county administration building, 222 McDaniel Ave., Pickens.

ing with several of the agencies involved – including the state Department of Health and Environmental Control and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – to learn more about the project and to ensure it has gone through the proper permitting process.

"There's a lot that we don't know," Pickens County Administrator Chappell Hurst said.

There's probably no larger point of contention than the project's objective. Tickle and other residents have told County Council the work is being done to create a "kayak trail" along the stretch of river that runs along property owned by Upstate Forever board member Dianne Culbertson that she leases to Upstate Forever.

Holleman denied that.

"This project has nothing to do with kayakers," he said.

Culbertson said she bought the property with her husband, who has since died. She said her husband approached the Department of Natural Resources at the time, and the agency agreed to stock the stream with trout.

"When we bought that property, we bought it for fishing," she said. "We allowed the public to come in and fish, because they had

done it a long time. We don't intend for there to be partying or driving or anything out-of-the-way, certainly. It was just to allow people to fish."

Holleman believes some residents simply don't want to share the river.

"My main concern is that some people think they own the river and it's not for public use," he said. "Nobody owns that river. It's a public resource."

Lynne Newton, a district conservationist with the conservation service, could not say how much rock the project would require, nor could she say how much it is expected to cost. She said it would be paid for with federal and private money.

John Tynan, co-director of Upstate Forever's Clean Air and Water Program, said plans for the project call for "controlling some access problems." The project will "put a number of gates in place so that vehicles can't get right down next to the river."

There will also be signs, he said, urging people to respect the property of others along the river.

DHEC spokesman Adam Myrick said the restoration project is covered under two U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' permits and a third permit, for construction in navigable waters, from DHEC.

The agency approved the permit, Myrick said, but an appeal by local residents has landed it on the Administrative Law Court docket for April 20-21.