BREAKING OUT

Farm saved through conservation

Seneca couple agree to protect 244-acre property

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A retired Seneca doctor has given South Carolina an early Christmas present.

The gift of green space, from Dr. Joe James and his wife, Sandra, is one that will last forever. The Jameses have entered into a conservation agreement to permanently protect their 244-acre property, Chestnut Return, in rural Seneca.

"I was determined to never develop the land while I was alive," James said. "It wasn't hard to do this."

James bought the land from its second-owners in 1983.

James said the land previously was part of a 4,000-acre plantation and before that is was Cherokee land. Now, the farm is rolling Piedmont hardwood forests and fields with views of the Blue Ridge Mountains, along with frontage on Coneross Creek.

It's also home to five experimental orchards filled with 250 American chestnut trees. Those trees are Phytophthora-resistant American chestnut hybrids.

James, a retired orthopedic surgeon and member of the board of directors of the Bennington, Vt.-based American Chestnut Foundation, has been at the forefront of those trying to restore the trees that were nearly eliminated by blight.

"That's pretty significant to have this use in perpetuity," said Jac Oliver, a land protection specialist with



/ Upstate Forever

The 244-acre Chestnut Return farm in rural Seneca will be protected from development forever under terms of its conservation agreement.

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- Learn about Upstate Forever and protecting land with a conservation agreement, at: www.upstateforever.org
- For information about the Oconee County Conservation Bank, visit: www.oconeecountyconservationbank.org
- Find out about efforts to crossbreed American chestnut trees to blight-resistant Chinese chestnuts at: www.acf.org

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Upstate Forever, which helped broker the conservation agreement.

Upstate Forever, a regional conservation organization which works to promote sensible growth and to protect special places in the Upstate, now has conservation agreements on 68 properties, covering 12,600 acres in 10 Upstate counties, Oliver said.

This latest agreement comes with some tax savings, Oliver and James said, but that isn't the main reason to do it.

"It's not really a good business idea," James said, "but it's a good idea to save God's creation. You wouldn't do it if you didn't love the land."

Under terms of the agreement, the land can't be developed for industrial, commercial, retail, residential subdivisions, mining or similar uses. But the land can be used for traditional uses like hunting, fishing, farming and harvesting timber.

James' four daughters each get 2 acres of land in the midst of the farm for their use under the terms of the agreement.

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