'Natural' part of Oconee County's vision plan coming into focus

FOR THE JOURNAL

"Natural Choices," the conservation component of Oconee County's future vision plan, has made serious progress on nine objectives outlined as part of the visioning process that was completed some nine months ago.

That was the consensus reached at the recently held inaugural Natural Choices committee meeting.

Oconee County went in search of a vision in 2007 and, through a series of community meetings, surveys and online contributions, developed a plan that outlines 96 goals for economic, educational, cultural and quality of life initiatives over the next 20 years.

The Natural Choice component of the plan focuses on preserving and enhancing the county's natural beauty and resources. West Union resident Alice Wald is leading this portion of the visioning effort.

Wald said the first meeting attracted 10 of the current 15 vision partners. Among those were: Oconee Forever, S.C. Forestry Commission, Oconee State Park, Friends of Lake Keowee Society, Earth Blooms, Moresun Designs, Clemson Area League of Women Voters, Advocates for Quality Development and the Foothills Chapter of the Sierra Club.

"We are pleased to report that almost all of the nine Natural Choice objectives have seen success," Wald said.

To the goal of protecting the county's natural environment she cited establishment of the county scenic highway ordinance; approval of a Zoning Enabling Ordinance; an Earth Day celebration; a panel discussion on the vision initiatives of Anderson, Oconee and Pickens counties; the Adopt A Highway program, as well as the education of elementary age children on litter reduction; the placement of trail signs in the Clemson Experimental Forest; and development of a PowerPoint presentation on the Natural Choices initiative.

'The demand for locally-grown items continues.'

Alice Wald
Natural Choice vision leader

Regarding the goal of preserving our lakes and rivers, Wald pointed to efforts to identify water contamination; the cleaning up of failing septic systems and improved rules for septic tank use; clean up of the lake and plans for an "Adopt An Island" program.

As far as establishing and protecting green spaces and historical sites, Wald said initiatives continue to identify all waterfalls in the county and connect them by a hiking trail. She added that Oconee State Park is working with the S.C. Heritage Corridor to increase awareness of the history and earlier work of the Civilian Conservation Corp in building the park, and also noted that the Spirit of Oconee monument has been erected and dedicated by the Cherokee Bear Clan.

The first Carolina Foothills Heritage Fair had ticket sales of 7,800 and some 1,400 public school children participated in educational programs at the fair, which, Wald said, goes to the committee's efforts to preserve farms and promote farming values.

"The demand for locally grown items continues," she said, pointing to the expansion of the Seneca Farmers Market.

"Three years of hard work have brought success for a small local organic flower garden business, and several significant parcels have been protected by Upstate Forever and Oconee Soil and Water Conservation District," Wald said.

Groundwork also continues toward the establishment of a County Conservation Bank including the signing of a resolution by some 20 organizations.

Anyone wishing to schedule the Natural Choices PowerPoint for a group or club, or become involved in the committee's work may contact Wald at (864) 638-9123 or at waldam@aol.com.



Alice Wald of West Union chairs the inaugural meeting of the Vision 2028 Natural Choices committee. The event attracted 10 of the current 15 vision partners, who assisted in an assessment of progress toward the committee's objectives.

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