New trail could bring Nine Times more visitors

Preserve seeks to keep impact low by linking existing logging roads

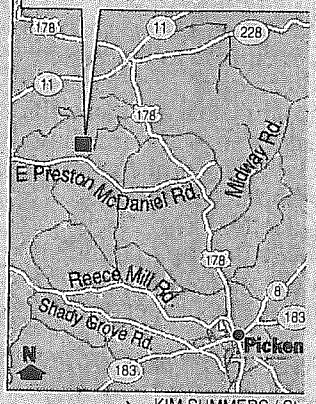
By John C. Stevenson
STAFF WRITER
jstevens@greenvillenews.com

PICKENS — Karen C. Hall knows the beauty of Nine Times Preserve. She's hiked in the 560-acre tract between the Holly Springs and Sunset communities. She's seen the striking flora and witnessed the "spectacular" variety of birds there.

"It's really a wonderful place to visit," she said. "It's got a granite outcrop that offers some really spectacular views, and there's some amazing flora that occurs on top of that rock outcrop that you don't see everywhere. It's really lovely."

But Hall is more than just an avid hiker and outdoors enthusiast. She's also director of the South Carolina Master Naturalists Program, a part of the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service. And in her capacity as a naturalist, Hall expressed concern about the effect of tourists on the tract.

The Nature Conservancy is building a hiking trail at the 600-acre Nine Times Preserve in Pickens County.



KIM SUMMERS / Sta

"These days, we have to be so concerned about our native environments," she said.

Ecological impact is also a priority for The Nature Conservancy, which owns the tract and which is holding a public meeting to receive input on plans to create a two-mile looping trail that would begin off E. Preston McDaniel Road, south of State 11.

To create two miles of trail, only about a half-mile of new trail will be cut, according to Kristine Hartvigsen, a spokeswoman for The Nature Conservancy.

"The beauty of it is that (the new trail) is connecting existing logging roads, and that way we have the lowest impact on the environment and the diverse ecosystems that we have there," Hartvigsen said.

The trail project will cost around $20,000, Hartvigsen said, with 80 percent of that coming from a competitive grant through the Recreational Trails Program of the state Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. The other 20 percent will be paid for by an anonymous donation, she said.

IF YOU GO

What: A public meeting about a proposed trail project of the Nine Times Preserve
When: 6 p.m. today
Where: The Vineyards Fire Department, 111 Granny Gear Road, Sunset