

By Mike Foley
Staff Writer
mfoley@greenvillenews.com

Bears and turkeys, wildflowers and birds will now have more human company in the **Nine Times Preserve** in northern Pickens County.

Just in time for **Earth Day**, the Nature Conservancy has dedicated a newly built **2-mile trail** on the 560-acre parcel off S.C. Highway 11. The trail, which serves as a link between two logging roads, provides hikers — along with wildflower enthusiasts, birders and hunters — access to the land that includes Cedar Rock and Little Pink mountains.

"Everything here is biologically significant," said Kristen Austin, the Nature Conservancy's S.C. Southern Blue Ridge project director, during a preview of the trail and Preserve last week.

"Clemson professor Patrick McMillan identified **134 wildflower** species on this parcel, and we had an avid birder document 110 bird species either nesting or resting here."

The biological value to the land is in part due to it being located in the crease where the Piedmont land mass butts against the **Blue Ridge Mountains**, Austin said, giving it a great diversity. And that diversity is well preserved because the land tract had no trails except a handful of old logging trails, which limited public access except to some locals who hunted the land.

In addition to the main trail, a separate, quarter-mile wildflower trail alongside a creek bed is overloaded with spring wildflowers, such as the rare — and spectacular — sweet white trillium.

"We're excited about that trail," Austin said.

Nine Times Preserve protects wildflowers, wildlife

New trail gives access to 560-acre parcel in northern Pickens County



A small spring provides a tiny, dripping waterfall alongside the trail. The land is in the crease where the Piedmont land mass meets the Blue Ridge Mountains.

"It's beautiful and it's easily accessible. You could probably get a wheelchair down it since it's so flat."

The 560 acres were part of a nearly 2,300-acre parcel that Crescent Resources, a division of Duke Energy, had on the market. While the other 1,700 acres across the street from the preserve were still for sale, Austin said the group that came together to save the Preserve — a coalition that includes The Nature Conservancy, Upstate Forever, the South Carolina Conservation Bank and

private donors — couldn't afford the entire parcel.

"Luckily, this real estate market had both good and bad," she said. "The good is that the market is down and no one else can afford it now either."

Because the land has been hunted for generations, it will remain a Wildlife Management

SUNDAY, APRIL 22, 2012 THE GREENVILLE NEWS

BREAKING OUT



Stepping stones provide a stream crossing along the new trail in the Nine Times Preserve in northern Pickens County. PHOTOS BY MIKE FOLEY/STAFF

VISIT NINE TIMES

For directions and a trail map, go to www.nature.org/south-carolina.

Area, designated by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources. But hunters won't be the only visitors, Austin expects birders to flock to the area.

"We've found neotropical bird species here," she said. "Some nest and some just rest on their way farther north."

Peregrine falcons have also been seen on the parcel. But as much as Austin expects birders, she also said those who appreciate trees and wildflower enthusiasts will have a budding interest, too.

"We have more tree species here in the southern Blue Ridge than in the whole continent of

Europe," she said. "We have more than 130 trees, and with those, you get abundant wildlife."

The trail is steep in sections; the logging trails are even more so. There are numerous creek crossings, as the trail climbs and dips through several forest habitats and through sections where flowering rhododendrons arc overhead. Overall, Austin said she'd rate the trail as moderate.

"For hikers, this is a good, little mountain getaway," she said, pausing before one of the numerous bolder outcrops found along the trail. "Summer probably isn't the best time to visit because it can get a little hot. It's a three-season hike. In winter, it would be a great destination when higher elevations are iced over."

BREAKING OUT CALENDAR

This week

PADDLE: The Patriot Challenge is Saturday in Charleston. It includes a 3- or 6-mile kayak, canoe or SUP (stand-up paddleboard) race. Info: www.charlestonpatriotchallenge.org

BIKE: The sixth annual Wheels for Meals benefit ride for Meals on Wheels is Saturday starting at 8 a.m. at Furman University. Distances: 25, 43, 62, 100 miles. Info: <https://mowgrmvl.ejoinme.org/?tabid=325825>

BIRDING: Enjoy a morning of birdwatching Saturday at Table Rock State Park during the spring migration to see what species call the mountains home. Bring binoculars. Fee: \$5 per person. Pre-register by calling 864-878-9813, or e-mail trocksp@scprt.com

BIKE: Issaqueena's Last Ride starts in Walhalla on Saturday and includes distances of 32, 61 and 100 miles. Info: www.ilrsc.com

Upcoming

HIKE: Take a moonlit hike to see the sunrise from atop the outcrops of Table Rock on May 5. Hike begins at 3 a.m. This is a strenuous, 7.2-mile, round-trip hike. Fee is \$25 per person. Register or get more info at 864-878-9813, or e-mail trocksp@scprt.com.

TRIATHLON: The Clemson Triathlon is at 8 a.m. on May 12 at the Foothills Family YMCA. Distances are: 750-meter pool swim/11-mile bike/5K run. Info: www.setupevents.com

■ Submit events to Breaking Out News, c/o The Greenville News; P.O. Box 1688; Greenville, SC 29602 or email mfoley@greenvil-lenews.com.