

# Oconee Conservation Bank board named

## Council adds 4 appointees to 7-member board

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**WALHALLA —** A leading conservationist is hopeful that the newly appointed Oconee County Conservation Bank board of directors will be able to meet for the first time before the end of the year.

Harold Thomas of Walhalla said Thursday that he sees the board meeting regularly as soon as funds start flowing into the Conservation Bank.

Thomas was a central figure in the remarkable effort that raised more than \$1.2 million five years ago to save property surrounding Stumphouse Tunnel and Issaqueena Falls from

falling in the hands of a private developer.

Thomas said he thinks it should be up to County Council to schedule a meeting so that board members could assemble, organize and elect their officers.

Council gave final approval to an ordinance creating the bank on Sept. 6.

This week, council appointed the remaining four board members.

Council Chairman Joel Thrift said Thursday that a meeting date would be selected after everyone selected has been notified and the appointment is accepted.

He said a meeting could take place before the end of the year.



FILE PHOTO

The saving of Stumphouse Tunnel in 2007 from falling into the hands of a private developer gave momentum to the creation of the Oconee County Conservation Bank. Council this week rounded out the selection of the Bank's board of directors.

The new appointees are Andy Lee, representing District 2 in Wal-

halla, Richard Harwell of District 5 and at-large members Bob Hill and



Edward Land. They will join previously appointed Shea Airey, Rocky Nathan and Marvin Prater on the seven-member board.

Thomas said he would not be surprised to see donations start coming as people learn Oconee created the Conservation Bank.

"The fact is, if one donor sends a check that'll get in the newspaper," Thomas said. "It won't surprise me that we'll get applications for

conservation easements coming in.

Funds from the bank, which in the future could be leveraged with grants from the South Carolina Conservation Bank once the economy turns around, would help pay up-front costs to property owners interested in permanently protecting their land with natural, cultural and/or historic value.

Thomas said future generations in Oconee would benefit from those types of conservation easements by ensuring clean air and water.

"People will thank us 25 or 50 years from now," he said.