Oconee County planners OK public land rezoning

Minority calls it unnecessary protection

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WALHALLA —An ordinance calling for the rezoning of a series of parcels as Public and Recreational Land District received less than enthusiastic support from the Planning Commission this week.

The issue sparked lengthy debate by planners Monday night on whether the Oconee County Council initiative was a case of over-protection of land already under federal and state control.

Some bluntly said it was a waste of time and attempted to punt it back to council without a recommendation.

The argument against Ordinance 2011-25 is that much of the land it would place into the PRLD zoning category, such as U.S. Forest Service property and state parks, already enjoys protection from those jurisdictions anyway.

"I think it's stupid ... send it back to council," Commission member Tommy Abbott said.

Commission Vice Chairman Howard Moore sided with Abbott.

sion approval. He said the ordinance would not affect federal and state mandates, and that it complies with the county's Future Land Use Map.

"We wasted money on printing these three papers," Moore said, waving a copy of the ordinance in his hands.

Abbott and Moore put a motion on the table to send the ordinance back to council. The motion failed by a 5-2 vote.

County Planner Aaron Gadsby recommended Commission approval. He said the ordinance would not affect federal and state mandates, and that it complies with the county's Future Land Use Map.

Gadsby added that if state and federal lands are sold in the future to private interests, the new owner would have to rezone the property to do anything, if the proposed use is not permitted under PRLD.

"We're actually protecting the land," said Commissioner Bill Gilster, who endorsed the ordinance.

Commissioner David Lyle said it is not unheard of for the federal government to sell land.

"If the government needs money, it's not beyond the federal government to sell it," Lyle said.

Moore said he doubted anyone on the Commission would see in their lifetime the federal government sell any land in Oconee.

However, Commissioners Andrea Heller and Gwen McPhail, along with Chairman Ryan Honea, added their voices in support of the ordinance.

County Council approved first reading of the measure in title only during a meeting Sept. 6.

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FILE PHOTO

Lake Jocassee at Devils Fork State Park in Oconee would be one of a series of parcels to be rezoned under Public and Recreation Lands District. The Oconee County Planning Commission endorsed the Oconee County Council-initiated plan this week.