Oconee tract to be preserved

Land borders Oconee Station State Park, Sumter National Forest

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A conservation agreement will protect a 336-acre parcel of land bordering Oconee Station State Park and Sumter National Forest for future generations, Upstate Forever said Thursday.

The tract is part of Rose Hill Farms, owned by the John Ivester family, which worked with Upstate Forever and the state Conservation Bank to protect the property rather than sell it.

"Rose Hill Farms is one of those 'top priority' properties and the protection of this land is really a reason to celebrate," said Dana Leavitt, Upstate Forever's land trust director.

Rose Hill Farms includes seven tributaries of Oconee Creek along with access to the 50-foot-high Lee Falls in Sumter National Forest in Oconee County.

The privately owned tract approved for funding by the SC Conservation Bank board is a scenic buffer and wildlife corridor that consists of beautiful rolling hills and steep ravines, hayfields and pastures.

"The state Conservation Bank program was essential to our decision to protect this land so we can continue grazing cattle and managing for wildlife. I hope this program receives increased support so other landowners have the opportunity to participate in conserving their land," Ivester said.

The tract will remain private property; however, under the conservation agreement it can't be developed, said Jacqueline Oliver, land protection specialist with Upstate Forever.

Future but not yet funded plans include a possible hiking trail that would be open to the public to provide access to the waterfall on the adjoining national forest land, Oliver said.