Sassafras tower construction set

Work to start in fall on observation site

ABE HARDESTY
ANDERSON INDEPENDENT MAIL

An opportunity to scope out a spectacular view of the Upstate's western corner is another step closer to reality.

Construction of an observation tower atop Sassafras Mountain, which will provide a 360-degree view at South Carolina's highest point, is likely to begin in the fall.

Gil L. Stewart Architects LLC of Pickens drafted the design for the structure meant to straddle the peak at 3,553 feet above sea level. Bids for the construction are expected to go out by Aug. 15.

That makes spring 2017 a likely completion date, although Tom Swayngham, assistant chief of wildlife at the Clemson office of the Department of Natural Resources, hopes that construction might conclude more quickly.

"The objective is to have it completed by the end of the year. It all depends on the weather," Tom Swayngham said Friday. "It all depends on whether they can get the concrete poured before the temperatures get cold."

The tower will offer a view of the Blue Ridge Mountains of South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia. The initial phase, for which more than $500,000 has been raised, will include the observation tower and restrooms.

"It will be a beautiful view, unparalleled in this state," Swayngham said.

The new tower, 15 feet tall, is planned at the pinnacle of the mountain.

The present wood platform, built near the parking lot three years ago by Clemson University architectural students, will remain in place as an auxiliary deck, Swayngham said.

"It will be fine for this summer, but it need some repairs.

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Tower

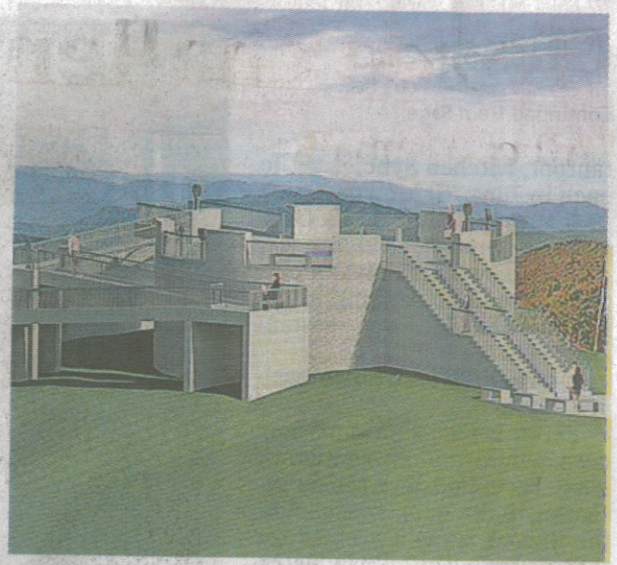
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We'll renovate it and we'll use it for folks who might not want to go to the taller tower," Swayngham said.

The present platform provides "about a 120-degree view" to the west, looking into North Carolina. When complete, DNR officials believe the planned observation tower will provide views of Greenville, Oconee and Pickens counties, as well as mountain peaks in Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee.

Phase II, which will require additional funding, will include improvements to the parking area, a picnic facility, accessory trails, informational kiosks and educational pavilions.Duke Energy, DNR, The Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund, The Felburn Foundation and anonymous donors contributed toward the project. DNR continues to seek funding for Phase II.

Sassafras Mountain sits on the state line with North Carolina and along the Continental Divide. It is one of the important features of the Foothills Trail (www.foothillstrail.org), a 77-mile footpath between Table Rock and Oconee state parks.



COURTESY DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Architects have completed their work on the Sassafras Mountain Observation Tower.