State preserves picturesque land in Oconee County

Rose Hills Farm property protected for enjoyment of future generations

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WALHALLA — A 336-acre tract bordering Oconee Station State Park that features a picturesque waterfall is being preserved for the enjoyment of future generations thanks to a conservation easement agreement announced Thursday by Upstate Forever.

Protection of the Rose Hills Farm property is a feather in the cap of the South Carolina Conservation Bank and Upstate Forever, a nonprofit group that promotes smart growth and the preservation of special places.

The conservation easement allows the property owner, John Ivester, to keep the property with his heirs, while also preserving it for the enjoyment of others by limiting development of the land. In return, Ivester enjoys compensation from the state Conservation Bank and increased tax benefits in 2009.

The transaction has yet to be recorded in the Oconee County Register of Deeds. Financial details were not provided.

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

The Conservation Bank approved the Ivester property for funding in 2008, but state budget cuts delayed transaction that threatened the future of the Rose Hills Farm tract and other tracts targeted for conservation throughout the state.

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

Dedicated to conserving natural resource lands, wetlands, historical properties and archaeological sites, the Conservation Bank has provided pivotal funding for conservation easements and land purchases to protect properties such as Stumphouse Mountain north of Walhalla, the Nine Times Tract in Pickens County, Firefly Forest and Lake Conestee Nature Park in Greenville County.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF UPSTATE FOREVER

The 336-acre Rose Hill Farms property can be enjoyed for generations to come after the state moved to protect the land through a conservation agreement with the owner.