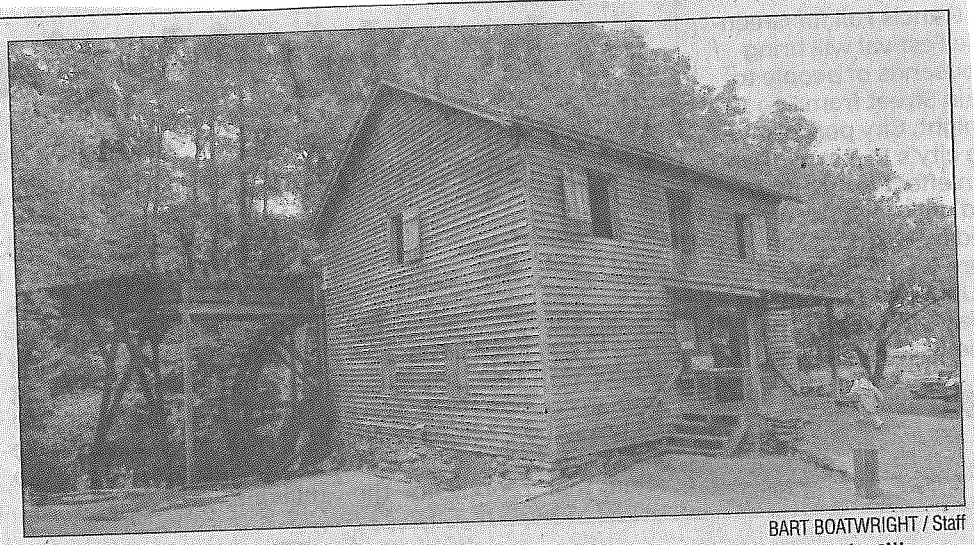


BART BOATWRIGHT / Staff

Pickens County is looking at ways to promote the grist mill at Hagood Mill near Pickens and other sites as tourist destinations.

Tour Pickens County gets peek at new visitors plan

New tourism board meets, hears ideas from Clemson institute

By Julie Howle
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An effort moving forward to help grow tourism in Pickens County is casting an eye toward utilizing the area's already rich resources — from lakes and mountains to its culture, heritage and sports attractions.

Bob Brookover, executive director of Clemson University's International Institute for Tourism Research and Development, which is doing a strategic product development plan for Pickens County, said the area has enough attractions to make people look at taking a week's vacation to the Upstate.

"This can be a nice vacation destination," he said.

Brookover presented recommendations in a preliminary draft of the plan to the board of directors of Tour Pickens County. The group was formed by Pickens County Council earlier this year to help direct and coordinate tourism efforts and just held its first official meeting.

He said the plan for Pickens County still needs to be presented to County Council members but said the draft includes recommendations to create a master plan to enhance and expand Hagood Mill, including parking at the site, and a long-term goal to develop Sassafras Mountain.

In 2006 the state underwent a planning process to come up with a tourism action plan, which Brookover said was done by Tourism Development International out of Ireland. TDI also did the Upstate region's plan.

"We are going to have to think regionally and work with other counties throughout the Upstate," Brookover said, describing how officials and tourism groups will have to work together within and outside county lines for efforts to be successful. "Tourists don't know what Pickens County is."

The draft plan for Pickens County includes recommendations to create a convention and visitors bureau or some other overall organizational structure for tourism and hiring a full-time executive director for tourism, according to Brookover.

Dick Krull, elected as chairman of the volunteer board, said he hopes they can do some of the things suggested as high priorities, including at some point having an executive director or someone to lead the efforts.