

Walking in sunshine



Sherry Skinner and her dog, Buddy, enjoyed the sunny, 70-degree day with a walk at the Walhalla Depot Park on Friday afternoon. The unseasonably warm temperatures brought people outside to enjoy the weather before another predicted rainy weekend throughout the Upstate. To see the five-day forecast, turn to page **A2**.

CAITLIN HERRINGTON | THE JOURNAL

OCONEE COUNTY

Two more trails proposed for Oconee County

BY JASON EVANS
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Oconee County's portion of the Palmetto Trail continues to evolve.

The Palmetto Conservation Foundation

held a drop-in meeting Thursday night at the Walhalla Depot to brief the public about two proposed hiking trails in Sumter National Forest.

The 4.6-mile Ross Mountain Passage of the Palmetto Trail will run

parallel to Ross Mountain Road. Hikers and bikers will be able to travel from Stumphouse Mountain Bike Park to Oconee State Park.

The 3-mile Cherry Hill Passage, for hiking only, will connect Oconee State Park with

Cherry Hill campground.

"This will allow us to get from Oconee Station, Oconee State Park, coming in to the Stumphouse project," foundation executive director Natalie Britt said.

"Our goal today is, as we continue to connect as many of our public lands as we can, we are hopeful to apply for a Recreational Trail Program grant."

The South Carolina

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TRAILS: Hikers excited for new terminus photo opportunities, according to official

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Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism administers the grant program.

"Our hope tonight is to get some input from the public," Britt said. "We've been engaging with them a whole lot for the past two years on this initiative."

The proposed trails will provide "critical connectivity" for the Palmetto Trail, Britt said.

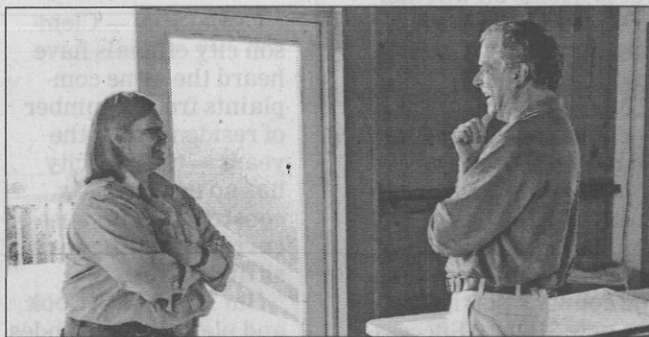
"And also bring people into Walhalla and downtown," Britt said. "We want our hikers and bikers using the businesses downtown."

Hiker Ernie Lombard attended the meeting. As a property owner in Mountain Rest, he said he also was interested in learning more about the trails from an economic standpoint.

That was also a point of interest for other attendees.

"We're going to need camping," resident Dan Pollock said. "We're going to need parking — and these people eat and drink."

A former president of



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Sumter National Forest Recreation Manager Amanda Walrod speaks with local resident Ernie Lombard during the Palmetto Conservation Foundation's drop-in meeting Thursday in Walhalla.

Walhalla Partners for Progress, Pollock has been involved in the effort to bring the trail into Walhalla.

"We'll be ready to open Stumphouse in probably May," Britt said.

Foundation trail coordinator Jim Majors said another phase of trail building will begin at Stumphouse this summer.

As portions of the trail are completed, Britt hopes they will "build momentum" for future phases.

"We're a small nonprof-

it, so we kind of have to do things in phases," Britt said. "Our hope is as we connect these dots, we're moving slowly but surely to downtown."

Pollock agreed.

"We've got so much going on, from the Pickens County line to Stumphouse, that none of us can engage in any more in terms of resourcing, in terms of building, in terms of designing — we're just maxed," he said. "As Stumphouse gets

further along, we'll return our focus to Walhalla."

Britt said she's already hearing from Palmetto Trail thru-hikers about Walhalla.

"They're excited to have that photo opportunity at a terminus in Walhalla," she said. "We want to, in the next several years, create that iconic experience. You've just finished 500 miles or that look of 'Oh my gosh, I'm about to hike 500 miles!' We're really excited to start working toward that."

Interest in trails continues to grow, she said.

"The opportunity to get outside in your own backyard or within your own state is something that people really buy into," Britt said. "Whether you're a hunter, whether you're a fisherman, whether you're a runner, whether you want to go out with your dogs, your kids, paddle, bike, that's the great thing about what we're doing. We're trying to make it accessible for everybody."