

Official: Walhalla

bike park could be unique in US

Logo unveiled for 'epic' new system

BY JASON EVANS
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Walhalla's Stumphouse Mountain Bike Park will be part of an "epic" mountain biking trail system and could attract riders from around the country, according to an official.

"Mountain biking is the fastest-growing sport in the U.S. for both (people) under 20 and over," Palmetto Conservation Foundation executive director Natalie Britt said. "It's a great thing."

Britt spoke during an Oconee County Chamber of Commerce luncheon in Seneca on Thursday

afternoon, updating chamber members on the plans that involve Stumphouse, Walhalla and the Palmetto Trail. The Palmetto Trail's Upstate terminus is located at Stumphouse Park in Walhalla.

A few years ago, the foundation began looking at needs in the Upstate, Britt said.

"One of the greatest needs in the Upstate was a lack of mountain biking," she said. "There really wasn't an epic system."

The foundation realized that Stumphouse could become a "game-changer for Oconee County and the Southeast," Britt said.

"This moved really fast," she said.

Britt thanked Mayor Danny Edwards and Walhalla City Council "for their faith and trust in a small nonprofit."

"They made the first investment," she said. "Sometimes that's what it takes — one person to believe, and you put a little bit of money behind it. You have to invest in your own community for other people to invest. That's what the city of Walhalla did."

Walhalla's initial \$20,000 has spawned more than \$600,000 in additional investment in Stumphouse. The project is progressing quick-



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Palmetto Conservation Foundation executive director Natalie Britt told those in attendance at an Oconee County Chamber of Commerce luncheon in Seneca on Thursday that the Stumphouse Mountain Bike Park in Walhalla could become a national destination.

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Walhalla officials unveiled the new logo for Stumphouse Mountain Bike Park Thursday. Pictured, from left, are Councilman Dennis Owens, Mayor Danny Edwards, Councilman Tjay Bagwell and city administrator Brent Taylor.

PARK: Britt says biking had \$30.2M impact in Western NC

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ly, with 4 miles of "some of the most epic single-flow trail you could ever imagine" now open, Britt said.

AmeriCorps workers are clearing away the next 6 miles of trails, slated to open in late 2018 or early 2019.

"This is going to be an epic project," Britt said. "Right now, we have 20 miles of trail system that's scheduled or looking to be built out at Stumphouse."

But the ultimate goal is to connect Devils Fork State Park to Stumphouse via trails.

"That's almost the potential of 50 miles of single-track mountain biking," Britt said. "That would be the largest mountain bike system in a condensed area in the United States. That will make this not just a regional destination, but a destination for the entire country."

Public-private partnerships will continue to fund that, she said.

"It will take time," Britt said. "It will take investment, but we're working toward that."

The foundation has received a \$100,000 grant that will allow it to start building from Oconee State Park to Stumphouse.

"You will be able to camp at Oconee State Park, a stunningly beautiful state park, bring your bikes and ride your bike into Stumphouse, get on that system and then ride back," Britt said.

A study released last year by the Outdoor Alliance looked at the impact of mountain biking in North Carolina's Pisgah National Forest.

"In the Pisgah National Forest, the Nantahala and Western North Carolina, mountain biking alone, for visitors, had a \$30.2 million economic impact in 2016," Britt said. "Western North Carolinians that live there spent an additional \$18 million directed to mountain biking."

In addition, the study found that 366 full-time jobs directly related to mountain biking were created in that part of North Carolina, she said.

"We're going to make that happen up here," Britt said. "That's what we're moving toward."

Mountain bikers want local restaurants, good beer and places to stay after a day on the trails, she said.

"We're making that map to success," Britt said. "But it's going to take all of us together. We've got to look at the downtowns, we've got to look at the facades, we've got to look at making businesses welcoming to mountain bikers."

At the end of the luncheon, Walhalla officials unveiled the official logo for the Stumphouse Mountain Bike Park.

"We are really, really grateful to the city of Walhalla for helping us with a lot of the things that are going on," chamber chair Darlene Greene said. "They have been one of our initial investors in this project and are continuing to support our efforts in making this a new opportunity for all of Oconee County."

Paid for by the foundation, the logo was created by local artist Libby Imbody.

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