

County parks receive \$550K grant for 218-acre property

Land could nearly double size of Chau Ram Park in Westminster

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SENECA — The Oconee County Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department is closer to securing funding to buy 218 acres of property adjacent to Chau Ram Park in Westminster after getting a grant for more than \$500,000.

On Thursday, parks,

recreation and tourism director Phil Shirley told the PRT Commission at a business meeting a \$550,000 grant from the S.C. Conservation Bank had been approved.

“This is an incredible piece of property,” Shirley said. “This kind of opportunity doesn’t happen often, and it’s been a good process.”

Shirley said property owners had originally asked for \$998,000 for the property, but agreed to an appraised price of \$765,000.

Shirley said Oconee County Council is planning to discuss funding for the remaining \$215,000 needed to complete the purchase at its May 21 meeting.

“We plan to utilize non-expended funds to cover the gap between grant funds and funds needed to purchase the property and fulfill all due diligent

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Chau Ram Park in Westminster could be set to nearly double in size after the Oconee County Parks Recreation and Tourism Department recently received a \$500,000 grant.

items such as closing costs, updated property survey and conservation easement costs,” Shirley said. “Funds will be repaid to Oconee County through local ATAX revenues over the next five years.”

He said the grant was given to Naturaland Trust, which applied for the grant on the county’s behalf.

Should the project receive additional funding, Shirley said Naturaland Trust would deed the property over to the county after a conservation easement and closing on the property.

“This will go to county council May 21, and this is something we’ve talked to them about,” Shirley said. “They’re aware of how it’s moving and they will have to approve us paying it back over those five years and accepting it from Naturaland Trust.

Chau Ram Park is approximately 250 acres, and the potential addition of 218 acres from the adjacent property would be “a big addition,” according to Shirley.

“A number of people went to bat for us in showcasing why we should showcase that property,” Shirley said. “We’re grateful for the entities who helped us, and once we get it on board, we’ll master plan that property in terms of the conservation easement.”

Shirley said the property is being surveyed, and he anticipated “more trails, river trails, bank fishing opportunities, expanded campgrounds and mountain biking opportunities” from a future master plan.

“Any implementation of the master plan would be money dependent,” Shirley said. “It’ll just be as funds are pulled for it.”