

Federal funds to rehab trail to local waterfall

BY CAITLIN HERRINGTON
THE JOURNAL

WESTMINSTER — The Oconee County Planning Commission learned of a U.S. Forest Service project Monday night that would increase safety at a favorite waterfall trail.

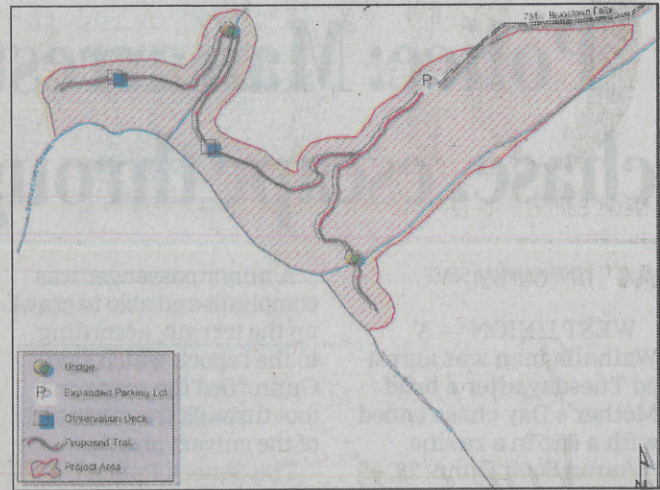
Located between Westminster and Long Creek, Brasstown Falls sees daily visitors to its three separate water-

falls on a trail that was user-made, according to a USFS memo. To get feedback on the project, the forest service reached out specifically to the planning commission.

It was a welcome idea to commissioner Alex Vassey, who said he recently visited the falls with his family.

"I took the kids one

SEE TRAIL, PAGE A5



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

The Brasstown Falls trail off U.S. Highway 76 is a steep, user-made access to the multi-level waterfall. The U.S. Forest Service recently identified the trail as one that should be improved for sustainability, access, safety and water quality. Current plans include two bridges over the creeks and view platforms at the falls.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The public is welcome to comment on the Brasstown Falls project, though input must be submitted by June 6. Written comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider. Written comments should specifically mention the "Brasstown Falls Trail Construction and Dispersed Camping Management."

Responses will be kept as part of the public record, including names and addresses, and anonymous comments are accepted, though information about the project can't be sent to unnamed respondents.

Emails can be sent to Andrew Pickens District Ranger Robert Sitzlar at SM.FS.r8fmsapcom@usda.gov. Handwritten comments can be mailed to Robert Sitzlar, District Ranger, Andrew Pickens Ranger District, Sumter National Forest, 112 Andrew Pickens Circle, Mountain Rest, SC 29664 or faxed to (864) 638-4490.

Questions about the project should be directed to recreation program manager Amanda Gee Elrod at the same address or by calling (864) 638-4463.

RED LOCKS TO TAKE OFF (E-Y-J)
Top Guns Mini-Storage, Salem
Beginning on May 22, 2017
Ending on May 22, 2017
Compiled on May 28, 2017 at 08:12 AM



TRAIL: No county money involved in project

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time, and it's not an easy hike," he said.

Andy Gramling wanted to make sure that the county wouldn't be monetarily involved in the project, and planning director Adam Chapman said it was all federally funded.

"The park service is using some funds they have ... and they wanted input on basically making the trail better, having some platforms similar to Whitewater Falls and making the trail more accessible," Chapman said. "As we're all in the same area together, they're just looking for our input."

The approximately 11.5-acre project would expand parking by six vehicles and create a new access trail, viewing decks and bridges to cross the creek, according to the U.S. Forest Service memo.

For the most part, those who hiked beside the falls created the trail alongside the creek, making it unsustainable and prone to dangerous slopes and slippery spots. It has also exacerbated erosion, the memo said.

The original trail would likely be blocked, seeded, mulched and otherwise made inaccessible, though "a rigorous trail" at the bottom would still allow visitors to hike

down to the lower falls.

Emergency services wants to ensure the new trail is "as accessible as possible for their Gators and ATVs to go rescue the inevitable person who slips off the falls, unfortunately," Chapman said.

The upper level is relatively easy to access, but the falls downstream are connected by what Vassey called a gulley that follows the creek.

The steep terrain means safety lines have to be set up prior to any type of rescue, county interim fire chief Scott Krein said. It takes approximately six people per quarter-mile of trail to stage a rescue operation, he said, and most

trail guides indicate Brass-town is a short 0.3 miles.

Camping sites along the trail were also largely created — and expanded over the years — by the people who used them, leaving bare locations "eroded down to mineral soil." Flooding is a concern for the creek-side sites, as well as protection of the riparian zones.

Designated camping areas would be created in the area in to align with the Sumter National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP) guidelines keeping them away from trails, roads and water sources.

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