

Let's Ruin a River for the Agenda

A person's property is a projection of life itself; its an extension of the person's life, energy, and ingenuity. The families owning property along the South Saluda River take care of the land. Now they are being pushed around, ignored, and their concerns over a reckless project discounted. A public-private partnership with big plans and a time table has little concern for longtime residents along the river.

Environmental groups that opposed a similar project to re-channel the North Saluda River when a golf course proposed putting rock vanes into the river, now are pushing through a similar project along the South Saluda River. To justify putting 335 dump truck loads of rock into the South Saluda River to create 30 rock cross vanes, the applicants bundle the real purpose with a cover story of helping trout. The real story is to support a new tourism venture that features kayaks. The public notice identifies Naturaland Trust as the applicants. Pushing the project is none other than those defenders of the environment, Upstate Forever.

Check a website for the Blue Wall Centre, and they already are advertising a kayak trail that goes right through a stretch of non-navigable waters in the South Saluda River. An expensive and risky project is needed to get the South Saluda River ready for the kayaks. The homeowners along the river are going to have to get used to strangers and litter and medical emergencies.

DHEC refused to hold a final hearing for the DHEC PN SC 10-023 project and awarded the project permit. DHEC failed to notify all property owners of the proposed project. Now a South Carolina Administrative Court hearing is set and is the last chance to stop the insanity. The applicants also want to build a parking lot and public toilets. These items were not submitted in the project application. Campsites, litter, trespassing, traffic, parking and public safety are not the concern of DHEC. They approved the project, but the collateral damage is not their concern. Trees at intervals along the river must be removed to allow truck and track hoe access. The trees resist soil erosion along the river bank. It is all beyond DHEC control or concern.

Many similar projects in North Carolina rivers wreaked havoc. No state agencies reviewed what happened to South Carolina's Eastatoe River or the Middle Saluda. South Carolina DHEC is not disposed to investigate. The expensive rock vanes could not stand up to the rushing water, deteriorated, and then eroded the river banks. The stated purpose of preventing erosion was never achieved. After seven years, no agency checked the results and no one documented the problems the poorly installed rock vanes caused on river. A private citizen took the initiative to learn the ultimate outcome of putting rock vanes into a river. People living along the Eastatoe River are unhappy. Similar projects in North Carolina failed: lack of durability of arms and sill; lack of grade control and bank protection where the structures exist and downstream too. Many rock vanes just washed away. These projects added up to millions of dollars and failed.

When these types of projects do not fail, they still require maintenance. Who is going to pay for the rock vane maintenance? What budget is going to provide maintenance funding for the river? What agency is responsible for periodic inspections? Based on the Eastatoe River experience, none and none.

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Published Tuesday, 5 March 2013 10:00
Hits: 6747

River engineering structures are not incorporated with a clear understanding of the river variables they can create river instability. Structure failures happen with designs incompatible with the "rules of the river." Structures are often selected and installed without an understanding of sediment transport and violate the dimension, pattern and profile of the stable river. If it is not done exactly right, problems develop years later. Then who is responsible? Besides the tax payers, who will pay for the expensive repairs? What are the homeowners along the river to do?

Dredging the river to install rock cross vanes will dump sedimentation into the river. The project may cause upriver flooding. Re-channeling the South Saluda River changes the river flow. Narrowing the channel will reduce water flow from 11,000 gallons per minute to 7,300 gallons during heavy rains. With greater pressure comes greater erosive power. .

Causing erosion and flooding along the property owner's river banks is okay with the project applicants. Upstate Forever is only too happy to harass and deny the homeowners their property rights. Gaining control of land is their objective. Upstate Forever and other non-government organizations milk the SC Conservation Bank and Federal Grants for funds to make land purchases. Who is Upstate Forever? And who will they be 30, 40 or 50 years from now? Why do they get to control so much South Carolina land? Are we supposed to believe their narrative? Upstate Forever does not answer to the citizens of the state. They are not the government and subject to corruption investigations. What is the remedy for corruption in a Non Government Organization?

The property owners have asked for a Hydrology study by the Dept. of Transportation because of the impact on the highway that runs close to the river. The Geer Highway, Rte 11, right of way is 20 feet from the river's edge. Power poles and lines run between the river and the highway. Any erosion will create major problems. The property owners also want the South Carolina State Insurance Commission to study the project's potential to cause river flooding.

DHEC was told the river is not navigable due to rocks and downed timber, but they dismissed that as a technicality and not a DHEC problem. If the water is navigable, then the government can place easements on the portions of private property where the river runs. How would you cope with an endless parade of strangers moving through your back yard and across your property because the government forced an easement? The invasion that includes drinking and littering already started since Naturland Trust purchased the project property. Now the homeowners have to be exposed to lawsuits if anyone gets hurt on their land. A good government protects private property, not change it so the owner is burdened with problems. But wait, the Greenville County government gave \$10 million dollars

from the tax payers as seed money to start the venture. Sorry homeowners, your interests are subordinate to the public-private venture.

The SC Conservation Bank website includes some spin from the project promoters claiming the "neighboring landowners have consented to allow foot traffic to access the river." Lib Tickle who is

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one of these neighbors said outright to George Schackel from Naturland Trust that she definitely did not want anyone on her property. It is a farm with livestock and equipment. Its not a place for the public to play. About 72 families formed a group, the Saluda River Roots, to resist the project.

Our tax dollars are spent on a public-private venture that benefits only a subset of the population, but the entire taxpaying population gets to pay for it. If the Blue Wall Centre and all the planned tourism can bring in new revenue for the County, will that translate into lower property taxes? If not, then what is the benefit to the taxpayers being used to help fund the project? We know it is of no benefit to the Saluda River Roots. When the Greenville County Council, Upstate Forever, DHEC, Naturland Trust, the Greenville Convention And Visitors Bureau team up to plan a big venture, the losers are the homeowners, the river, and the taxpayers. Which one of these central planners is responsible when the damage finally manifests itself?