

50,000 acres near Jocassee to be sold

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LAKE JOCASSEE, S.C. — South Carolina has three years to raise millions of dollars to save a natural paradise; North Carolina's deadline isn't yet known.

Duke Power Co. has given South Carolina until 2000 to raise \$80 million to \$10 million to purchase 85,000 acres of wilderness along the north shore of Lake Jocassee.

The utility also plans to sell 15,000 acres in southern North Carolina.

"Because of the size and natural resource values of the Lake Keowee-Toxaway river systems,

this project will be considered the most significant conservation project in the Southern Appalachian Mountains in the latter half of the 20th century," said John Garton, senior biologist with Duke Power.

The steep topography of the gorges, combined with a hard granite bedrock and some of the most abundant rainfall in North America, prompted Duke Power to begin buying land here in 1918, utility officials told the Times-News of Hendersonville.

Over the years, the utility purchased most of the land from Table Rock State Park to the edge of

Chattooga River watershed on the Georgia state line.

Studies showed the best potential sites for future hydro-power development are concentrated on the west edge of the property near Bad Creek and Coley Creek, prompting Duke to sell off the lion's share of the Jocassee watershed.

"We found we can hold a smaller part of this land and really cover our future," Garton said.

The South Carolina Heritage Trust program in November announced plans to pay \$1 million for the first 1,000 acres in the Laurel

Fork watershed, which includes part of the Foothills Trail.

"This is an unprecedented opportunity," said Dr. James A. Timmerman, director of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources. "For years the Duke and Crescent lands around Lake Jocassee have been the number one large area protection project for our Heritage Trust program."

Earlier this month, South Carolina's Legislature approved the \$10 million sought by Gov. David Beasley to help buy the tract in Pickens County.

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B-2