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Preserve board considers I-73 deal

By Zane Wilson - The Sun News

The state Heritage Trust Advisory Board will meet in the capital Monday to consider a proposal for \$2,500 an acre for preserve land that will be destroyed by an Interstate 73 crossing.

Last week, the DOT and state Department of Natural Resources, which oversees Heritage Trust preserves, agreed on the price for the 30 acres expected to be taken by the highway crossing of the Little Pee Dee River on the Horry-Marion county border.

The agreement is a key element to federal approval of the environmental impact statement, or environmental plan, for the 30-mile portion of the road between S.C. 22 and I-95.

Because of the impending agreement, the state Department of Transportation expects to file its final environmental documents for federal approval in about a month.

The Heritage Trust board and state Budget and Control Board must approve the agreement, which will allow the DNR to buy 300 acres of new preserve land to make up for the loss on the Little Pee Dee.

The Budget and Control Board meets Sept. 25.

Board members were not available Wednesday, but in previous discussions they have said they will not stand in the way of the interstate, and that the proposed crossing is less damaging than other possible locations.

The plan is to build the bridge next to the existing S.C. 917 bridge.

The Little Pee Dee River Heritage Preserve crossing has been under discussion for almost a year. Preserves receive special protection under federal law so until the two agencies reached an agreement, the final papers leading up to a construction permit could not be filed.

Mitchell Metts, I-73 project manager for the state DOT, said after the plans are submitted to the Federal Highway Administration regional office in Atlanta, it could take about a month for them to be approved.

Other plans must be in place before the construction permit can be granted, Metts said. One of the major items is how to compensate for about 500 acres of wetland that will be damaged by the highway.

But even without the permit, rights of way can be bought and other plans drawn when the environmental documents are approved, he said.