



Friends of Congaree Swamp News

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Spring 2015

Easements along Cabin Branch first step toward improving water quality

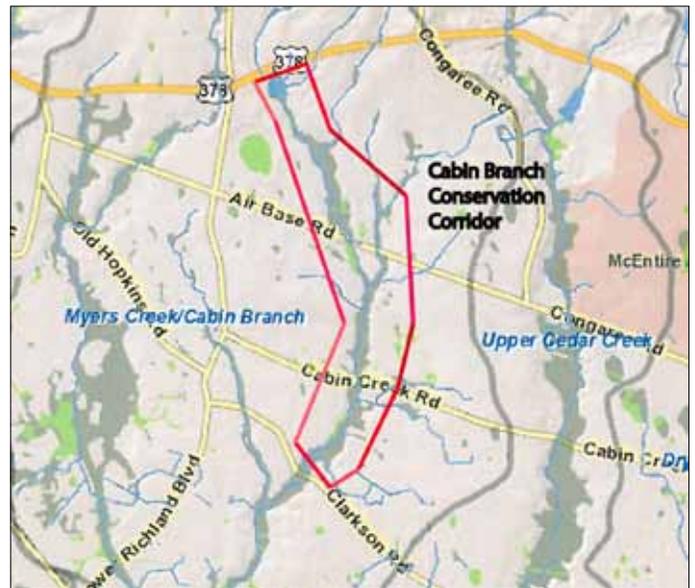
Efforts to mitigate water quality problems in streams entering Congaree National Park are moving forward, despite delays in the proposed Lower Richland regional sewer system.

Using storm water funds, Richland County purchased almost 604 acres from the Hopkins family last fall as a water quality improvement project. Most of the acreage adjoins a 2.5 mile reach of Cabin Branch, a tributary of Myers Creek that joins Cedar Creek at Bannister Bridge in the northwestern corner of the park. The county also holds conservation easements that comprise almost 128 acres of protected land along Cabin Branch.

The Richland County Conservation Commission recently proposed a more focused concept—the Cabin Branch Conservation Corridor—and asked for the county’s endorsement. The first phase of the corridor would protect four miles of Cabin Branch from Garners Ferry Road south to Clarkson Road, primarily

through voluntary conservation easements. The corridor would

See Cabin Branch, page 6



Save the date

The 41st annual North American Butterfly Association Butterfly Count will be held **Saturday, June 13**, from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Congaree National Park staff members David Shelley and Frank Henning and Carolina Butterfly Society members Marty and David Kastner are organizing the annual event.

Participants will spend the day conducting field observations counting butterflies along the trail



See Butterflies, page 6

INSIDE

President’s Corner.....	2
Dawn Chorus.....	3
New floodplain maps	4-5



President's Corner

Dr. John Grego

Membership volunteer

We continue to look for a volunteer to replace Mary Beth Jeffords, who has served as our membership database manager for two lengthy tenures.

Among other tasks, the database manager prepares and mails quarterly membership renewal letters, prepares mailing labels for newsletters, and maintains updated email files.

It helps to know Microsoft Access and document-merging in Word, but Mary can provide on-the-job training.

Please contact me via email (jrgrego@sc.rr.com) and I'll be happy to discuss details with you (though not as happy as Mary).

Park staff

The park has been steadily replacing several recently departed staff members.

At least one of the new division heads has a strong Congaree National Park connection. Liz Struhar, fire planning specialist for the park service's Southeast Region, was hired to replace Terri Hogan as chief of Resource Management. Liz jogged my memory in a recent email, writing that she had worked as a research intern (then

known as Liz Mickler) at the park under the supervision of Bobbi Simpson, helping to compile historic flood gage data on the Saluda, Broad and Congaree Rivers during the controversy over the FEMA flood maps back in 1999-2000.

In 1999, I had FOIA'ed gage data from USGS archives in Fort Collins, Colo., and was taken aback by the boxes and boxes of paper output delivered to USGS's Water Resources Division office in Columbia.

Liz made copies of the gage data for important floods, including 1928, 1929, and 1936. The 1929 data was particularly useful in teasing out the effect of the not-yet-complete Lake Murray Dam during the September-October 1929 floods.

She went on to write her senior honors thesis at USC on the controversy over the Flood Insurance Study and Flood Insurance Rate Maps before moving on to her first job in the park service at Big Cypress National Preserve and Everglades National Park.

It was more than a little interesting to renew contact with her within days of release of the new preliminary Flood Insurance Study for Richland County (see page 4).

U.S. 601 Corridor projects update

The park service made additional progress on the Bates Ferry Trail shortly after our Winter 2015 newsletter report. The bullet-pocked gate was replaced and moved farther down the trail, the old hunt club shelter at Bates Ferry landing was removed, and trail markers (#7—for the seventh trail in the park's trail network) were installed.

Progress slowed to a crawl with late winter/early spring floods, but will pick up with the recent arrival of Bill Reilly, the park's new chief of maintenance. Bill feels confident that the trail can be officially dedicated in June.

We hope to coordinate that dedication with

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Dr. John Grego, President Sharon H. Kelly, Editor

See Grego, page 7

Dawn Chorus with memories of Robin

The 11th annual Robin Carter Dawn Chorus Walk, held on International Dawn Chorus Day May 3, included a visit from a couple very special guests: Robin's sisters Patty Sentor and Janice Evans. We again thank trip leader Donna Slyce, who led the walk, as she has every year since Robin's death in 2008.

At the breakfast, Prof. Curtis Derrick read his poem "Song" which has been published in the local literary magazine "Jasper" and re-printed here. Derrick, a member of the Midlands Technical College English faculty, was inspired by Robin's field recordings at the park.

Prof. Caroline Eastman, Robin's widow, announced that she had made arrangements to share Robin's archival material, including sound recordings and more than 20 years of field notes, with the University of South Carolina.

See Dawn Chorus, page 7



Summer Tanager



Robin Carter's sisters, Patty Sentor, left, and Janice Evans, at the Dawn Chorus.

Song

In memoriam, for Robin Carter

*Shall I tell you what it's like,
listening to your Congaree Park
recordings—
now that you're gone?
Near and distant bird songs,
the swamp's incessant
call and response.
Mosquito sorties
buzzing the microphone
like exclamation marks.
Avian host resounding
through forest vault's
slow growth of time.
With warm feelings
I hear your hand—
or is it
merely wind, some breath of air
come through the trees—
as you raise the mike like a wand
or conductor's baton—head cocked,
better to absorb
the wren, the sparrow,
the chickadee;
flicker, sapsucker,
crow and kinglet;
that pileated now, high up,
drumming holes
through bark;
warblers, mockingbirds,
grosbeaks, jays, waxwings—
every call familiar
to you, enthralling—*

*headphones tuned
to heaven's frequency—
your choir, digitized then,
resurrected by laser now
from the remoteness of numbers.
I listen in highest fidelity
and wonder—once-diagnosed
with your own demise,
scanning that vault, sun sifting
through the crosshatch of branches,
was it heartbreaking to hear
perhaps for the last time
or was the joy still as pure,
as penetrating,
seeding heart and mind alike
the way light there
seeds the ground,
never blinding,
dappling instead—
song called out and inward, too,
to anyone hearing as I do—
both anthem and requiem—
ancient, primeval, distilled with modern
recording, soaking into the bone,
making bone ring
on the wavelength of crystal—
the key of life
so elemental that, even laid to rest,
once tongue and bone are dust,
the chorus reverbs, echoing time
taut as a humming wire,
stayed and unstayed between us.*

Jasper Magazine, Jan/Feb 2015,
Volume 004, Issue 003

New maps put floodplain back in news

With the release of the preliminary Flood Insurance Study (FIS) and Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) for Richland County, floodplain development will again be in the news for the foreseeable future.

The studies have only been available online since April 30, and much more careful study of them will

be needed, but some initial impressions can be shared.

THE NEW FLOOD zones and special flood hazard areas were strongly influenced by the 2011-2014 effort by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to develop consistent national standards for flood mapping, as published in the November 2014 Standards for Flood Risk Analysis and Mapping.

While the standards were being developed, there was tremendous pressure from political and development interests, along the Mississippi River in particular, to loosen rules for mapping behind uncertified levees, and that influence is evident in the new guidelines.

As a reminder, Columbia

Continued on next page



The map depicts Section 1. The green area is owned by the University of South Carolina Development Foundation; the blue area is owned by the City of Columbia; and the gold area is Heathwood Hall. The purple areas are owned by Columbia Venture.

Floodplain

continued from page 4

Venture owned more than 4,500 acres of Richland County floodplain land along the Congaree River behind three different systems of agricultural dikes—Section 1 (see map) has the tallest dikes and ranges from USC's property on the Congaree River floodplain to I-77. Section 2 lies between I-77 and Gills Creek, while Section 3 lies south of Gills Creek and includes Beckham Swamp Road.

NOTE THAT COLUMBIA

Venture was not the only property owner with land behind the dikes—others owned land in each of the three sections.

Columbia Venture sold more than 3,200 acres of this land from 2006 to 2011, most of it to limited liability corporations owned by Kirkman Finlay. It still owns 1,100 acres in Section 1 (see map) and 100 acres in Section 3.

So what does the new study show? From the Midlands' perspective, the most salient new standard is that non-accredited levees (the dikes are once again designated as non-accredited levees in the preliminary Flood Insurance Study) can now be treated as though they provide a measure of flood protection

and any floodway will be placed at the riverside toe (edge) of the dikes unless communities request otherwise.

REVIEWING THE NEW guidelines and flood maps, almost all the Congaree River floodplain is a Special Flood Hazard Area, and the flood way does lie along the riverside toe of the dikes for some portions of the floodplain.

Interestingly, large portions of the floodplain on the riverside of the dikes are no longer in the flood way; modeling will need to be studied to understand why the flood way would not lie along the dike.

There is another odd feature as well—none of Gills Creek's main channel in the Congaree River floodplain downstream from Bluff Road is designated flood way, though large portions of the Gills Creek floodplain are designated floodway upstream from Bluff Road.

THE 1 PERCENT chance flood for the Congaree River has been adjusted slightly downwards, from 292,000 cubic feet per second to 286,000 cubic feet per second.

The flood way and base flood elevations (height of the 1 percent chance flood) on the Lexington County side of the river will be released shortly.

They should be similar to the current base flood

elevations and the flood way, since both studies for Lexington County assume the dikes on the Richland side remain intact rather than breached.

THOUGH THE proposed maps appear to improve prospects for floodplain development, remember that many in the Midlands felt that a legal opinion was at least as important in discouraging development as was placement of the levees themselves in the flood way.

That opinion, requested by Richland County, said the county could not escape liability for development in the floodplain should the levees fail.

The preliminary Flood Insurance Study and Flood Insurance Rate Maps are available for study at <https://hazards.fema.gov/femaportal/prelimdownload/searchResult.action>.

RICHLAND COUNTY'S floodplain manager indicates that a county forum is tentatively scheduled for late June. After these public meetings, a notice will be placed in the Federal Register, followed by notification of the county administrator, and publication of notices in the local papers and on FEMA's website.

Once these steps are taken, a 90-day appeal period will begin.

Save the date

continued from page 1

system and within various habitats of the park. The count will last until about 4:30 p.m., weather permitting. Please come for all or just part of the day. We will meet at 9 a.m. at the Harry Hampton Visitor Center.

All ages and experience levels are welcome. Appropriate clothing is

required of all participants, including long pants and closed-toed shoes that attach to the feet. Sun protection, bug spray, water, snacks, and a sack lunch are recommended. Binoculars are recommended as well, but not required. A limited supply of binoculars will be available for use during this program, and these may be reserved ahead of time at the

front desk.

This program is free, but space is limited. Advance reservations are requested. For more information please contact David Shelley, education coordinator of the Old-Growth Bottomland Forest Research and Education Center, at david_shelley@nps.gov or (803) 647-3966.



Red-banded Hairstreak



Zebra Swallowtail

Cabin Branch

continued from page 1

protect a buffer of at least 300 feet along both sides of the creek, an optimal width for improving the creek's water quality while benefiting wildlife habitat and protecting the extensive and often undevelopable floodplain and wetlands along the creek.

The corridor would also engage under-represented groups in land use and land stewardship discussions, one of the major goals of the county's Preservation Land Management Plan, adopted in November 2014.

Although the corridor will focus primarily on water quality improvements, there is an opportunity

for hiking trails on the Hopkins property and the potential for a greenway through the corridor.

Depending on the community's reception, a second phase could lead all the way to Bannister Bridge on Old Bluff Road, linking the Lower Richland community ever closer to the park.



An alligator and a turtle share a sunny log near the Bates Bridge boat landing off U.S. 601.

Photo by Jerry Griggs

Dawn Chorus

continued from page 3

She also sought volunteers to help include Robin's complete set of sightings in eBird's database.

Several participants

branched out into the park afterwards to gather their sightings as part of the Spring North American Migration Count for Congaree National Park.

They saw more than 80

species, including three flocks of Anhingas near the Bates Bridge landing off U.S. 601, one flock with 54 birds.

And they came across an alligator sunning on a log with a turtle for company.

Grego

continued from page 2

the dedication of the new Congaree River Ferries historical marker at the Sampson Island pullout on the east side of U.S. 601.

Nancy Stone-Collum, Conservation Program coordinator for Richland County, is in contact with the S.C. Department of Transportation to obtain proper permissions for installation of the sign there.

Nancy, Dick Watkins, and others worked on wording of the sign with S.C. Department of Archives and History

staffer Ehren Foley. It's quite a puzzle to piece together eleven 36-character lines on each side—no hyphens allowed—and the last line on the first side has to end in a complete sentence!

The sign will be somewhat isolated in the short term, but a nearby slough often attracts wildlife and provides an opportunity for an accompanying interpretive panel.

And if the jeep road to Sampson Island is ever developed as a trail, the large pull-out could become a real focal point of the U.S. 601 corridor.

Additionally, we have contacted S.C. Department of Natural Resources to improve the primitive boat landing at Bates Old River, the two-mile long oxbow lake that was the main channel of the Congaree River until the great flood of 1852.

The current landing is used primarily by local fisherman, though recreational canoers and kayakers visit it too. Bates Old River provides an easy paddling experience while offering views of alligators, wading birds, osprey and other raptors, and songbirds foraging among the willows.



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Please keep your information current to receive special notices about field trips, events, scheduling changes and acknowledgements in addition to a quarterly newsletter.

*For a contribution of \$35 or more, you may choose one:

- Baseball cap maroon _____ tan _____
- Tan visor _____
- Bandana with map of Congaree National Park gold _____ blue _____ red _____

**For a contribution of \$100 or more you will receive a copy of "The Natural History of Congaree Swamp."

In addition, I would like to donate \$ _____ as a gift.

Thank you for supporting Friends of Congaree Swamp!

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