



Friends of Congaree Swamp News

www.friendsofcongarree.org

Winter 2016

Save the date

Congaree geology from bluff to bluff

On **Saturday, Feb. 27**, learn about the complex geology of the Congaree River valley from the man who wrote the book—Congaree National Park employee Dr. David Shelley, education coordinator for the Old-growth Bottomland Forest Research and Education Center. On this day-long trip, we will set aside Congaree River Floodplain ecology and instead focus on the surrounding uplands—and we’ll never have to get our feet wet. We will meet at 9 a.m. at the Congaree Bluffs Heritage Preserve and will visit that site and private property on the valley’s southern bluffs. There we will study upper Coastal Plain deposits. As we retrace our steps, we will visit

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Park begins banner year

As the cool winter nights give way to longer days and milder weather, staff at Congaree National Park and park partners are gearing up for an eventful year filled with programs which will be sure to enlighten and inspire!

2016 marks the Centennial of the National Park Service but also the 40th anniversary of Congaree National Park, originally established on October 18, 1976 as Congaree Swamp National Monument. Many of the programs will tie in with these important milestones

2016 marks the Centennial of the National Park Service and the 40th anniversary of Congaree National Park.

and daily programs will provide

the visiting public with a wide range of opportunities to experience park stories. Several signature events will showcase these stories and will include a number of special programs.

New citizens will be welcomed at naturalization ceremonies, the wonders of the nighttime natural world will be on full display during Owl Prowls and firefly programs, and the stories of the past will come alive through costumed living history and demonstrations. Wonderful, wild, winged creatures of Congaree will be the focus during International Dawn Chorus Day and Bioblitz, which will provide the opportunity for the public to learn about birds and to be truly engaged with their national park through citizen science and educational programs.

Beginning in March, the Harry Hampton Visitor Center will be open seven days a week. The visitor center will prove to be a hub of activity with a wide range of regularly scheduled programs including historical demonstrations, kids activities, and porch talks in the screened porch near the Boardwalk Trail.

Majestic trees, lush wilderness, and riveting stories of area history will be the focus of guided hikes which will be offered on weekends. These hikes will visit numerous locations in the park, including the newly established Bates Ferry Trail. “Roving Rangers” will be roaming park trails and frequent gathering spots to provide information and assistance to visitors.

2016 is sure to be a banner year with a little bit of something for everyone—a great year for everyone to “Find Their Park!”

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President's Corner

Dr. John Grego

Dominion natural gas pipeline

In our Summer 2015 newsletter, we reported on the 8-inch natural gas pipeline that Dominion Carolina Gas Transmission planned to construct from an existing pipeline at the DAK Americas plant on the Calhoun County side of the Congaree River to the International Paper plant on the Wateree River.

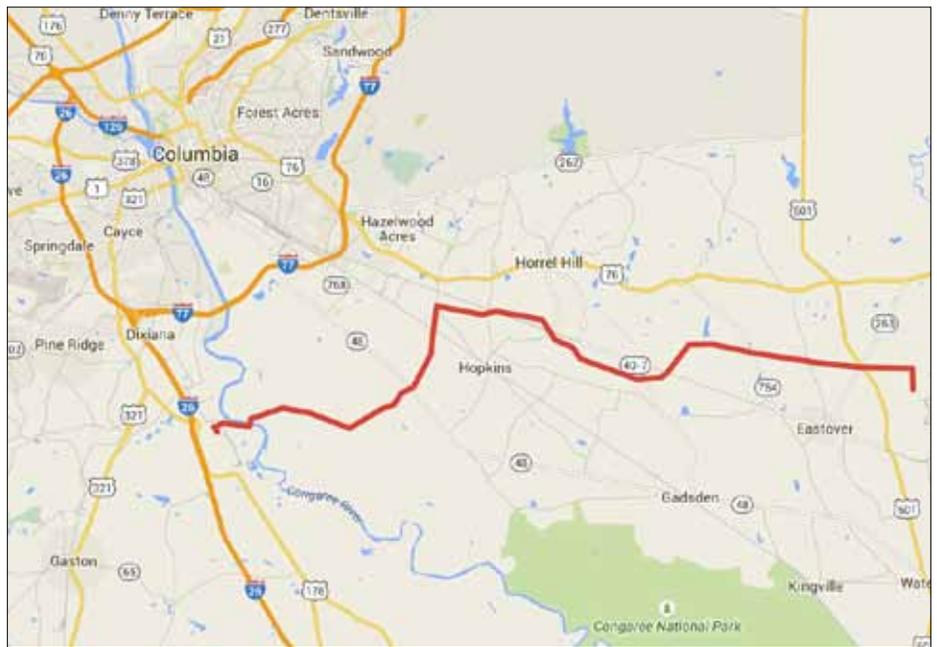
The pipeline's route (see map) would cut across the Congaree River floodplain and cross numerous streams in Lower Richland, though horizontal directional drilling would be used to effectively tunnel under the Congaree River and all intervening wetlands and creeks in the pipeline's path.

In a response to a request for public input prior to drafting of an environmental assessment by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the Friends of Congaree Swamp had posted public comments on FERC's website. Our public comments at the time discussed the timing of horizontal direction drilling, possible mitigation projects, the width and number of access roads, and portions of the pipeline path that strayed from existing utility easements.

Since that time, there has been correspondence

between interested parties, dominated by voluminous requests and exchange of information between FERC and Dominion Carolina, all available to those who filed or registered at FERC's website.

While some organizations and agencies, including the Congaree Riverkeeper, simply filed comments as we did, others have intervened or protested. St. Matthew Baptist Church's protest has received coverage in The State, while other protestors and interveners have included Cloaninger Trust (property owners near International Paper), Belle Grove (the site of our 2015 Annual Meeting), Beckham Swamp, and the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.



When Friends of Congaree Swamp objected to further fragmentation of the Congaree River floodplain, Belle Grove was actually the affected property—the new pipeline path would leave an existing easement to cut across Mill Creek and bisect that property.

We were initially pleased to see FERC request an alternatives analysis for the route through Belle Grove, but were then dismayed when Belle Grove dropped its intervention in late December. We do not know the details of the settlement with Dominion Carolina, but felt that Dominion's alternatives analysis for the pipeline route through Belle Grove was deficient and

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

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Regularly Scheduled Programs, March 5 – December 18, 2016

Fridays

11:30 a.m. Ranger-led hike

Saturdays

9:30 a.m. Nature discovery hike
10:30 a.m. Lakeside chat with ranger at Weston Lake
11:30 a.m. Hike with a ranger
2:00 p.m. Porch talk or demonstration

Sundays

9:30 a.m. Nature discovery hike
2:00 p.m. Porch talk or demonstration

Canoe Tours, April 1 – September 5, 2016

Friday/Saturday/Sunday

9:30 a.m. Guided canoe tour
1:30 – 4:30 p.m. Mini canoe tour

Canoe Tours, September 9 – November 27, 2016

Friday/Saturday

1:00 PM Guided canoe tour

**Guided canoe tours will meet at Harry Hampton Visitor Center; mini tours will meet at South Cedar Creek Canoe Launch (first come, first served).*

Periodic Special Programs (To be offered at different times throughout the year)

Owl Prowl
Bluff Hike
Heritage Hike (Campfire Chronicles)
Bates Ferry Trail Hike
Tree Trek
Auditorium programs
Birding hikes

Special Events

These events will have a variety of special programs, exhibits and activities available for park visitors. Specific schedules will be developed for each event.

2/26 and 6/17 Naturalization Ceremony
5/1 International Dawn Chorus Day – birding event with Friends of Congaree Swamp
5/2–5/22 Bioblitz
5/15–6/15 Synchronous fireflies
8/25 and 8/27 Founders Day
9/30–10/1 SwampFest
10/18 –10/22 Anniversary of Congaree National Park

For more information about programs and activities please call the Harry Hampton Visitor Center at (803) 776-4396 or visit www.nps.gov/cong.

Christmas Bird Count nets 94 species

The Congaree Swamp Christmas Bird Count, first organized by Robin Carter in 1993, recorded 94 species this year. We also observed two species within three days of the count, Painted Bunting and Eurasian Collared-Dove, which are recorded as “count week”

observations—a sort of consolation prize for Christmas Bird Counts.

Flooding inhibited some of our parties, but we were quite fortunate not to encounter the extreme conditions that have occurred multiple times this fall and winter.

Though we had good coverage, we did not post big numbers of some of the species for which the count circle is best known, perhaps because the prolonged fall and winter flooding affected birds in the floodplain.

Nonetheless, with more than 2,000 counts in the country, our count of 87 Pileated Woodpeckers is likely to be one of the top three and the count of 32 Barred Owls could well be in the top five.

We added three new species to the count, including an immature Golden Eagle seen soaring over Red Bluff Road. This is the first Golden Eagle recorded at the park

since 2007, when the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker search team recorded multiple sightings, perhaps of the same bird Robin Carter had observed at Congaree Bluffs earlier in the season.

In addition to the eagle, new species included a pair of Bufflehead seen in flight and heard vocalizing by Kathleen O’Grady and Alice Steinke at Dry Branch Hunt Club and a Common Gallinule that responded to playback by Dennis Forsythe before dawn at the St. Matthews

sewage ponds.

A special thanks to our volunteers. We particularly enjoyed hosting members of Carolinas Nature Photographers Association on the Boardwalk and Sims Trail in the morning.

Volunteers were Nirmal Agarwal, Ron Ahle, Molly Bonnell, Mary Bull, Roger Buenzow, John Cely, Brad Dalton, Himadri Dasgupta, Steve Dennis, Ray Derrick, Caroline Eastman, Carol Jaworski, David Egleston, Dennis Forsythe, John Grego, Jerry Griggs, Kenny Herring, Parkin Hunter, Dale Hutto, Frances Mack, Nina Reid Mack, George McCoy, Steve McInnis, Susan McInnis, Carl Miller, Cathy Miller, Ann Nolte, Kathleen O’Grady

(co-organizer), Miriam Oudejans, Richard Sasnett, David Schuetrum, Donna Slyce, Warren Steckle, Alice Steinke, Cindy Tufford, Dan Tufford, Carol Wade, Ray Wade, Dick Watkins, Barbara Watson and Julian Watson

The list of species and counts appears below. There are some wonderful observations here, though notable misses included Canada Goose and Gray Catbird.

Species Count

Pied-billed Grebe	5
Double-crested Cormorant	1
Anhinga	1
Great Blue Heron	4
Great Egret	1
Black Vulture	79
Turkey Vulture	103
Wood Duck	55
Mallard	3
Bufflehead	2
Bald Eagle	2
Golden Eagle	1
Northern Harrier	3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2
Cooper’s Hawk	1
Red-shouldered Hawk	31
Red-tailed Hawk	12
American Kestrel	15
Merlin	1
Wild Turkey	8
Common Gallinule	1
Killdeer	60
Greater Yellowlegs	2
Lesser Yellowlegs	3
American Woodcock	9
Ring-billed Gull	2
Rock Pigeon	59
Eurasian Collared-Dove	count week
Mourning Dove	113
Eastern Screech-Owl	3
Barred Owl	32
Great Horned Owl	11
Belted Kingfisher	6
Red-headed Woodpecker	16



Hermit Thrush

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New fire management plan

Park preparing environmental assessment

Congaree National Park will be preparing an environmental assessment for a fire management plan to replace its 2004 plan. As part of the environmental assessment development, the park held two information sessions in January to get public input on fire management at the park.

Mixed loblolly, hardwood and longleaf pine forests in the park's uplands range east from the entrance road to the Bluff Campground, beyond Dry Branch to Garrick Road and then pick up again from South Cedar Creek Road east along Red Bluff Road.

For those who have visited the uplands, current fire management practices at the park have not achieved the park's goal of restoring a longleaf/loblolly savannah.

Working within the constraints of the 2004 management plan, the park has had difficulty thinning existing pine plantations, encouraging longleaf pine reseeding, controlling pine bark beetle infestations, restoring an open understory, and staying ahead of the ever-aggressive sweetgum. Sweetgum is a native tree but it's a scourge to the efforts to restore an open pine woodland.

The new fire management plan will include more

aggressive measures for thinning existing woodlands and suppressing competitors to young longleaf pine. The plan's goals overlap with longleaf pine restoration efforts, though topics such as replanting pine are not an explicit part of fire management procedures.



Pine forest

Friends of Congaree Swamp prepared comments that generally endorsed more aggressive fire management techniques. The South Carolina Wildlife Federation and Conservation Voters of South Carolina co-signed the comments we presented to the park. We discussed a wide range of topics, but will focus on a few below.

Bluff Ecotone Management. In portions of the uplands, the park's firebreaks run right to the edge of the floodplain, often because the park is simply following the footprint of

planted pine acreage. In such instances, we felt it would be appropriate to restore a more typical bluff ecosystem of mixed hardwoods and pine. John Cely has noted that the rapidly declining Wood Thrush breeds in these mixed hardwood bluff ecosystems and experience suggests that other species rely on this bluff ecosystem. We endorsed buffer widths of 300 feet for their substantial wildlife benefits.

Mechanized equipment. The park's preferred alternative suggests use of masticators (think "bush hog") with low impact treads to clear small trees and saplings on a landscape scale up to 100 acres.

These masticators could be used for longleaf pine restoration or protection as well as firebreaks. Park personnel indicate that staff from Kings Mountain National Military Park used the equipment with great success. To protect the resource, we felt it imperative that park staff or other National Park Service personnel manage mechanized equipment themselves. We have too much experience in contexts outside the park with carefully-outlined vegetation management plans that are then

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Save the date

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interesting gravel deposits along a powerline cut before crossing the river to study terraces north of the floodplain.

Bring a lunch, snacks and water and be prepared for winter weather. The short steep hike at Congaree Bluffs will be moderately strenuous. Registration is limited to 15 participants with preference given to members of Friends of Congaree Swamp.

Contact John Grego to register friendsofcongaresswamp@gmail.com, or (803) 331-3366.

Trail clearing

On **Saturday, March 5**, we will be clearing our adopted trails (Boardwalk, Sims Trail, Weston Lake Loop Trail, Oakridge Trail) and other trails of fallen limbs, switch cane, flotsam, and intruding branches. Our winter work-day theme is Yellow-throated Warbler, and we will be listening for these early migrants on the trail.

We will meet at the Visitor Center at 9 a.m. and will finish in the early afternoon.

Work gloves, light hiking boots, water, and a snack are recommended. If you have loppers, long-handled shears or bow saws, bring them along. Friends members and park staff will provide gear if you do not have any.

Contact John Grego at friendsofcongaresswamp@gmail.com or (803) 331-3366 if interested.

Dawn Chorus set May 1

This year's Robin Carter Dawn Chorus Walk will be held Sunday, May 1, beginning at 5:30 a.m. at the Congaree National Park Visitor Center. Donna Slyce will lead the walk.

The walk is named for Robin Carter, who established most of the annual birding events at the park. Robin started the walk in 2005 and passed away in 2008. The event celebrates and continues his legacy. It is held each year on International Dawn Chorus Day.

The early start provides an opportunity to hear the pre-dawn sounds of owls, nightjars, and migrating thrushes before the dawn chorus, which begins a half hour before sunrise. Birds observed during the Dawn Chorus will be included as part of the North American Spring Migration Count day at the park. Stick around if you would like to help out!

The walk will be followed by a free breakfast at 7:30 a.m., organized and prepared by Friends members.

Contact John Grego, friendsofcongaresswamp@gmail.com, (803) 331-3366.

Birds

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Red-bellied Woodpecker 118
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 60
Downy Woodpecker 45
Hairy Woodpecker 7
Northern Flicker 160
Pileated Woodpecker 87
Eastern Phoebe 91
Loggerhead Shrike 8
White-eyed Vireo 4
Blue-headed Vireo 23
Blue Jay 61
American Crow 181
Fish Crow 3
Carolina Chickadee 123
Tufted Titmouse 108
Red-breasted Nuthatch 1
White-breasted Nuthatch 15
Brown-headed Nuthatch 39
Brown Creeper 5
Carolina Wren 185
House Wren 14
Winter Wren 22
Golden-crowned Kinglet 121
Ruby-crowned Kinglet 271
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 4
Eastern Bluebird 79
Hermit Thrush 48
American Robin 777
Northern Mockingbird 30
Brown Thrasher 9

European Starling 39
American Pipit 12
Cedar Waxwing 37
Orange-crowned Warbler 5
Yellow-rumped Warbler 143
Pine Warbler 104
Palm Warbler 2
Black-and-white Warbler 6
Common Yellowthroat 6
Eastern Towhee 50
Chipping Sparrow 226
Field Sparrow 11
Vesper Sparrow 1
Savannah Sparrow 32
Fox Sparrow 10
Grasshopper Sparrow 1
Song Sparrow 296
Lincoln's Sparrow 1
Swamp Sparrow 27
White-throated Sparrow 264
Dark-eyed Junco 31
Northern Cardinal 169
Painted Bunting count week
Red-winged Blackbird 8340
Eastern Meadowlark 59
Rusty Blackbird 3
Common Grackle 4388
Brown-headed Cowbird 17
Purple Finch 4
House Finch 10
American Goldfinch 158
House Sparrow 10
Total Species 94
Total Count 17808

Assessment

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carried out by under-trained contractors to trust such an approach on park lands.

Herbicide. The park's preferred alternative included applying herbicide, which would naturally give one pause. Actually, park staff has extensive experience applying foliar herbicides to invasive species, including Chinese privet, in the floodplain. Methods include application to cut stumps as well as backpack and mist sprayers. The park would apply herbicide to control sweetgum in 5–10 acre plots per year. Our understanding was that foliar herbicide would only be used, and is most effective, on small saplings. We supported limited application to encourage

protection and establishment of young longleaf pine. We noted that application to privet was typically done in winter when most non-target species would be dormant. Application to control sweetgum would have to take place during the growing season, so particular care would be needed to avoid harm to non-target vegetation.

Wilderness. The uplands are a patchwork of wilderness and non-wilderness. Qualitatively, there is little difference in the uplands areas under fire management control that are alternately designated wilderness or non-wilderness. Though we would otherwise be gravely concerned with fire management plans including mechanized equipment and herbicides in wilderness, there seems little reason to apply

different standards to wilderness within the scope of the park's fire management plan.

Wildland Fire Management.

The park's 2004 Fire Management Plan emphasized wildland fire suppression, even in the floodplain. The scoping document indicates that wildland fire could be allowed to burn, but only "in specified areas under limited conditions." Given that most floodplain wildland fires are lightning strikes that affect only single trees and their immediate environs, the park's restrictions against wildland fires in the floodplain seemed overly restrictive.

We look forward to the park's release of the environmental assessment and the opportunity to comment on it. Thanks again to our partners for supporting our comments.

Pipeline

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shared those concerns with FERC. Cloaninger has also withdrawn its intervention, while Beckham Swamp remains actively interested in appropriate use of Beckham Swamp Road as an access road to the transmission line, and continues to question whether the project is even necessary.

SCDNR filed a letter that shared our concerns with habitat fragmentation, the timing of pipeline construction and its effects on river species.

SCDNR's list of concerns added some interesting details on often-overlooked fish species in the tributary streams of the

Congaree River, including flat bullhead, sawcheek darter, seagreen darter, swampfish, and robust redhorse. That initial letter was followed by a formal intervention by SCDNR.

We were quite encouraged by SCDNR's action, since they are sometimes reticent to move beyond their advisory role on permitting issues. Comments from Friends of Congaree Swamp, SCDNR, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and others must have had some effect, since Dominion Carolina now indicates that all drilling will take place from June through November, rather than in the spring, which should reduce effects upon spawning and migrating fish.

Some of our concerns about access roads and easement widths for roads, construction and wetlands rights-of-way have been resolved favorably in the interim, while we await FERC's release of its environmental assessment to learn whether major concerns related to mitigation projects and the pipeline route through Belle Grove will be addressed.

Though Dominion Carolina requested an accelerated release of the environmental assessment, FERC has not yet released it. We will continue to follow the traffic on FERC's website and consider a coordinated response with other organizations to the environmental assessment.



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Yes, I want to support conservation of Congaree Swamp for future generations. Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution of \$ _____ . (Please make checks payable to Friends of Congaree Swamp.)

_____ Individual \$15 Name(s) _____
_____ Family \$35 * Mailing address _____
_____ Advocate \$50 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
_____ Partner \$100 ** Phone _____ Email _____
_____ Benefactor \$500
_____ Patron \$1000
_____ Nonprofit \$50
_____ Corporate \$1000

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!

Friends of Congaree Swamp, P.O. Box 7746, Columbia, SC 29202-7746
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