Friends of Congaree Swamp

www.friendsofcongaree.org

January — March 2004

Congaree Boundary Expansion: What happens next?

A 4,576-acre expansion of Congaree Swamp National Monument (now Congaree National Park) was authorized November 2003 in the law which provides Fiscal Year (FY) 2004 Appropriations for the Department of the Interior, including the National Park Service. A map referenced in this law shows the land authorized for addition to Congaree National Park. This 4,576-acre expansion consists of four tracts, each of which bounds on the north bank of the Congaree River.

Land acquisition by the National Park Service is typically a two-phase process. Land must first be authorized for acquisition. Second, money is appropriated to purchase the land after the land is authorized for acquisition.

With the Congaree boundary expansion having been authorized in November 2003, the crucial next step is appropriation of money to purchase these tracts. Senator Hollings and Congressman Clyburn will be working in 2004 to obtain congressional appropriation of FY 2005 funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. (The federal government's FY 2005 begins October 1, 2004.)

Senator Hollings is a member of the Interior Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, so he is well-positioned to pursue land acquisition funding for Congaree National Park. However, because Senator Hollings will retire at the end of 2004, this is Senator Hollings' last year to obtain funding for Congaree and other land protection projects in South Carolina.

After Congress appropriates land acquisition funding, the National Park Service can purchase the Congaree tracts from willing sellers. The four tracts in the 4,576-acre expansion remain private property until they are purchased by the National Park Service.

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President's Corner

Dr. John Grego

With all the excitement over National Park status for Congaree Swamp, you may have noticed that no official dedication has yet taken place. Plans are now underway for the dedication, though details were unavailable at press time. While no one is ready for an official announcement, I would encourage you to keep your calendar open in late May.

In addition to the Park dedication, we are likely to have a concurrent open house for the Old-growth Bottomland Forest Research and Education Center (the Learning Center). Construction, much of it completed by the Park's Maintenance staff, is complete and the offices, labs and living quarters (short a couple mattresses) are equipped.

The Park has made a couple recent hires with a direct impact on the Learning Center. Bill Hulslander has taken over Bobbi Simpson's vacant position as Resource Manager. I had enjoyed a productive collaboration with Bobbi, and am looking forward to facilitating additional research at the Park with Bill Hulslander. Christina Hulslander, whose office is located in the Learning Center, will be the Education Coordinator, a position created through the Center's grant. The Hulslanders occupied similar positions at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in Louisiana. We plan to introduce them, and discuss their roles in the Park in our next newsletter.

Congaree Bluffs Heritage Preserve Update

The Congaree Bluffs Heritage Preserve is a 201-acre tract on the Congaree River in Calhoun County, across the river from Congaree National Park in Richland County. This parcel was purchased and protected in 2001 through cooperative efforts of the SC Dept. of Natural Resources (SCDNR), the Congaree Land Trust, Friends of Congaree Swamp, The Nature Conservancy, and the Calhoun Soil and Water Conservation District. SCDNR owns and manages the Heritage Preserve.

Efforts are underway to utilize Congaree Bluffs Heritage Preserve for conservation education. The 3-bay garage of a house on the property is being adapted to serve as a conservation education classroom. The end of March is goal timing to complete this work, funded by SCDNR and the Calhoun Soil and Water Conservation District.

The observation deck which formerly stood beyond the crest of the bluff has been removed because of concerns about structural integrity and safety. The deck was a favorite spot for visitors to enjoy the panoramic view overlooking the forested floodplain of Congaree Swamp National Monument. It was also a favorite spot for birders to observe birds flying above Congaree's forest canopy. A new, smaller observation deck will be constructed.

Upcoming Field Trips and Lectures

Kingsnake Trail/Creekside Hike

Sunday, March 21, 2004, 2:00 pm — 5:00 pm

Join us for a hike to explore attractions along Kingsnake Trail-we will make this a loop by walking back downstream along Cedar Creek. A couple highlights are right on the trail, including one of the largest cherrybark oaks in the Park, but others require modest off-trail excursions. We will visit landmarks such as Cooner's Mound (an old cattle mound), and Lost Lake. In addition, we'll stop at nearby research plots, where we'll talk about some of the diverse research conducted at the Park.

Participants should be in moderate physical shape. Bring water and a snack if desired; long pants are highly recommended. Jogging shoes or light hiking boots are appropriate. This hike is limited to the first 30 people to sign up. Call John Grego in Columbia at (803) 777-5110 (work) or (803) 783-9270 (home); Email: jrgrego@mindspring.com or grego@stat.sc.edu

Annual Harriott Hampton Faucette, Congaree National Park Big Tree Walk

Sunday, April 4, 2004, 1:00 pm — 5:00 pm

In recognition of Board member Harriott Hampton Faucette's memorable adventure in the swamp last year after her late arrival for a Big Tree walk, the Friends has decided to designate a Big Tree Walk each spring in her name. As Harriott would tell you, be sure to arrive on time!

This will be a 4-hour hike to see some of the big trees of the Congaree. We will cover a different section of the Park than on previous walks and see the recently named national champion loblolly pine, 167 feet tall, and if time allows, the national co-champion persimmon, 132 feet tall. We will also see many large sweetgums, cherrybark oak, green ash, and others.

This walk will be almost entirely on the trail (no log crossings!) but will be longer than previous walks, about 4-5 miles. Participants should be in good physical shape. Bring water and a snack if desired; although the insects should still be dormant, long pants are highly recommended. Jogging shoes or light hiking boots are appropriate. We will leave prompty at 1 PM so plan on arriving by 12:45.

This hike is limited to the first 30 people to sign up. Call John Cely in Columbia at (803) 419-9645 (work) or (803) 782-7450 (home); email: Jcely@clemson.edu

Hiking South Carolina's First National Park

Saturday, April 17, 2004, Time: Register for details

Join Coastal Conservation League members for a day of hiking in South Carolina's first national park. Congaree National Park protects the largest remaining tract of old-growth bottomland hardwood forest in the nation. We'll hear some of the park's history from Richard Watkins and Jane Lareau, who participated in the citizens' campaign of the mid-1970s to include this forest ecosystem in the National Park System. Pack a lunch and water. Bring binoculars if you enjoy bird watching.

Coastal Conservation League (CCL) members have first priority to participate in this outing. To register, contact Annette at 843-723-8035 (extension 10 if the voicemail system answers). Provide your name, phone number, the number of persons in your group, and whether you are a CCL member.

Events in Review

Congaree Swamp Fest

The 1st Annual Congaree Swamp Fest was sponsored this past November by the Lower Richland Ministerial Alliance, St. John Baptist Church of Hopkins, and Mt. Nebo Baptist Church of Gadsden. The Coordinating Committee, chaired by Richland County Council Chair Bernice Scott, held the Swamp Fest to promote tourism in Lower Richland County, and raise funds for a Family Life Center.

In addition to the local community, the event received the support of area representatives. Besides Chair Bernice Scott, Sixth District US Representative Jim Clyburn, District 21 SC Senator Darrell Jackson, District 73 SC Representative Joe Brown, and District 11 Richland County Council member Tony Mizzell sent their congratulations and best wishes to the organizing committee. Representative Clyburn's remarks foreshadowed an upcoming celebration for the Park: "Today I join you in celebrating the towering pines and diverse wildlife that populate Congaree Swamp, and eagerly await our next celebration at the dedication of this treasured national park."

Though the organizers had less time for publicity than they would have wished for this first-ever event, all parking areas, including a temporary lot along the powerline easement, were filled, and attendance was estimated at 400. The Reverend Sammy Wade and Kelvin Washington organized events on the ground, and the Park staff was out in full force to help out. In addition to Lower Richland barbeque, a fish fry, and vendors, the Swamp Fest included musicians, storytellers and a Congaree Swamp Yell contest on its program. Ranger Fran Rametta led continual boardwalk tours, and Reverend John Middleton of New Light Beulah Baptist Church guided a bus tour of Lower Richland historic sites.

The Friends participate

The Friends of Congaree Swamp registered as a vendor to help support the event. Special thanks to Virginia and Wilhelmina Winn for helping out on a clear, but cold and windy afternoon. At our table, we distributed membership applications, the most recent newsletter, and candy. We also got a lot of practice answering the question, "So, what does the Friends of Congaree Swamp do?"—the newly-completed picnic shelter immediately behind our table made a great visual aid. The boundary expansion had recently been in the news, and we had a map detailing the scope of the expansion. All comments we had on the expansion were positive, with many people pleasantly surprised with the possibility that the Park could eventually extend all the way to the Wateree River.

We also took the opportunity to start identifying community resources for an oral history project. The project potentially encompasses local history, cultural history and folklore, and the Congaree Action Now campaign that led to the creation of the Park. Though elements of the project are still tentative, identification of interview subjects is an important first step. We managed to compile a list of community members, both familiar and unfamiliar, to have at hand when the interviewing gets under way.

Though Richland County Council recently rejected a request for hospitality tax funds for Swamp Fest 2004, organizers have plans for a bigger and better event this year. The Friends recognizes what a great showcase the Swamp Fest was for both the community and the Park, and looks forward to helping out in upcoming years.

Research & Education at the Park

Friends of Congaree Swamp Sponsors Research Grants

Two years ago, the Friends had drafted a research application with the intent of regularly reviewing and supporting scientific and cultural research in the Congaree watershed. We had delayed the start of the program for a couple reasons. With the Old-growth Bottomland Forest Research and Education Center (the Learning Center) under construction, our first research priority was supplementary funding for the Learning Center's lab equipment (which proved to be unneeded). In addition, the Park's Resource Manager position was vacant, and so an integral research partner at the Park was missing. With the Learning Center almost complete, and a new Resource Manager hired in January 2004, we felt it was time to dust off the application, and start our regular grant support.

Research applications and information can be found at our website; please encourage both members and non-members to apply. We will start with modest grants (similar to our support of photo processing for Scott Zengel's Feral Hog project), and the first application deadline is April 20. Applications can be filed at any time, and we anticipate reviewing applications semiannually. Updated deadlines will appear on the website and in this newsletter.

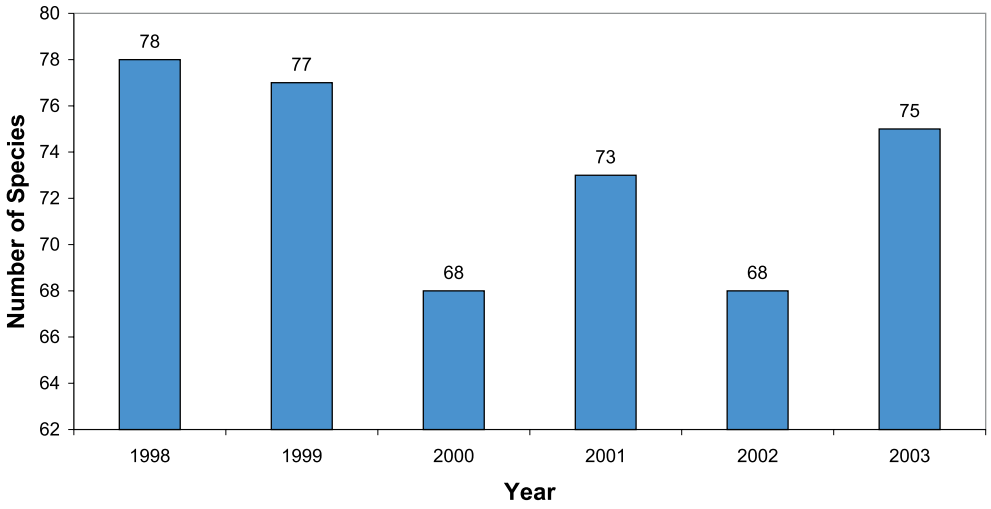
Congaree Swamp Christmas Bird Count

Birders converged on the after-hours parking lot at Congaree NP on 14 Dec 2003 for the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC). In all 12 people turned out ot count in the cold rain, a truly miserable day. Some folks counted the farmlands outside of the park in lower Richland and Calhoun Counties, and a party of two counted birds at Congaree Bluffs Heritage Preserve near Fort Motte. Six people counted just in Congaree National Park.

We had a very good count, despite the weather, turning up 75 species of birds. The most numerous species included 971 American Robins and a whopping 258 Ruby-crowned Kinglets. John Grego found many of the most unusual species during his walk along the western boundary, including a flock of 23 Wild Turkeys, 6 Mallards, and 4 Green-winged Teal.

— Robin Carter, compiler of the Congaree Swamp Christmas Bird Count.

Recent Congaree Swamp CBC Species Count



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Be a FRIEND: Get a Friend to Join Today!

Yes, I would like to support conservation of Congaree Swamp for future generations. Enclosed is my tax deductable contribution of $ _____ . Please make checks payable to ***Friends of Congaree Swamp***.

_____ $ 15.00 Individual _____ $ 50.00 Advocate _____ $ 500.00 Benefactor _____ $ 50.00 Nonprofit Org.
_____ $ 35.00 Family _____ $ 100.00 Partner _____ $ 1000.00 Patron _____ $ 1000.00 Corporate

_____ New Member _____ Renewal

Name(s): _____
Mailing Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Hm Phone: (____) _____ Wk Phone: (____) _____
E-mail: _____

I would like to work on the following committee(s):
_____ Field Trips _____ Fundraising
_____ Public Relations _____ Membership
_____ Education _____ Advocacy
_____ Events _____ Newsletter
_____ Research _____ Other: _____

In addition to my membership, I would like to give $ _____ as a donation to ***Friends of Congaree Swamp:***
In Memory of: _____
In Honor of: _____
As a Gift Membership to: _____

Please provide contact information so we can inform the person or family:
Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____

I would like to order the following items (proceeds benefit FCS projects): $_____ inclosed.
_____ copies of ***"Reflections of Congaree Swamp"*** CD screensaver for Windows 95 or higher @ ~~$14.95~~ ***Sale!*** $7.50 s/h included
_____ copies of the beautifully detailed ***"Map of Congaree National Park and Vacinity"*** @ $12.95 each/plus $3.50 s/h

Thank You For Supporting Friends of Congaree Swamp!
Friends of Congaree Swamp, PO Box 7746, Columbia, SC 29202-7746
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