



# Friends of Congaree Swamp News

## Save the date

### Christmas Bird Count

The Congaree Swamp Christmas Bird Count is slated for **Sunday, Dec. 14**, beginning at 7 a.m.

Christmas Bird Counts, conducted each year since 1900, are the oldest citizen science project in the country. The event is an all-day effort to find and identify as many wild birds as possible within a 15-mile diameter circle.

This national effort, which now includes more than 2,300 circles and 71,000 participants annually, is sponsored by the National Audubon Society. Results may be reviewed at [birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count](http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count).

The Congaree Swamp CBC, founded by Robin Carter, includes almost all the national park and adjacent areas, from Gadsden in

*See Save the date, page 6*

## Proposed sewer system would help Cedar Creek

While Richland County and the Lower Richland community debate a proposed new sewer system, Cedar Creek's water quality problems within Congaree National Park and the surrounding area continue.

Cedar Creek is South Carolina's only Outstanding National Resource Waters, but it has tested positive for fecal coliform contamination and heavy metals in its sediments. Earlier this year, the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control listed Cedar Creek as impaired and placed it on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 303(d) list.

Numerous upstream problems contribute to deteriorating water quality in Cedar Creek and Myers Creek. The proposed Lower Richland Sewage Project would resolve most of these threats while serving other Lower Richland customers.

Friends of Congaree Swamp has obtained the preliminary engineering report for the project in an attempt to understand its benefits and possible problems. We

have shared the report with others, including Congaree Riverkeeper, which has taken an active role in highlighting the water-quality problems in the Cedar Creek watershed.

The report discusses potential customers for the sewer service, some of which have well-documented problems with water quality:

- **Hopkins Elementary School** has an on-site sludge treatment plant that discharges into Horsepen Branch, a tributary of Myers Creek. The plant's permit states that it is considered a temporary facility that should be retired. It operates under a consent order, has a long history of violations and could pose a safety risk to students.
- **Hopkins Middle School** has an on-site treatment lagoon that discharges into Cedar Creek. It's also a temporary facility operating under a consent order with a history of violations and poses a potential safety risk to students.

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# President's Corner

*Dr. John Grego*

## Swampfest

There were a couple modest epiphanies at recent events that had a small but profound effect upon the way I look at the park and local community.

At the recent Swampfest, organized by the South East Rural Community Outreach (SERCO), we found that several of the visitors to our table were from African-American Recreational Vehicle clubs along the coast. I had no idea how well-organized these clubs were, or that so many existed.

The National African-American RVers Association has numerous member clubs and four of those attended Swampfest: South East Georgia Coastal Cruisers, The Innovators of N.C. and S.C., Fun Seekers RV Club of Augusta Ga., and the New Horizon RV Club. Marie Adams, a member of the Friends board and SERCO board chair, indicated that 40 RVs were parked at the Harriet Barber House for three days, and the RV clubs had already scheduled a return for next year. I swung by the Barber House on my way home, and was greeted by a phalanx of large motor homes. It was fascinating to see the extent to which Swampfest's regional reach had expanded, and to learn of a heritage and ecotourism audience I barely knew existed.

## Aquatic Critters hike

Another interesting experience occurred during our Aquatic Critters hike.

Staff from the S.C. Department of Natural

Resources started the morning by electroshocking in Cedar Creek at South Cedar Creek Landing, after which hike leader Dr. Jim Bulak was interested in exploring another area.

As it happens, the muck swamp to the east of the landing and north of the creek includes one of my Champion Tree sectors. During trips to that sector, I noticed that a small stream that enters the muck swamp at the bluff does not simply disappear in



*Swampfish*

the swamp, but remains a stream all the way to Cedar Creek.

We hiked to the stream, which is only about six feet wide and several inches deep as it enters Cedar Creek. It did not look promising, but the DNR staff knew better. As the other hike participants used dip nets and sieves for macroinvertebrates, Jim and Evan Cartabiano collected several new species for the day from the tiny stream.

In addition to a few Redfin Pickerel and a Tessellated Darter, a couple real prizes were collected: several Banded Pygmy Sunfish and a single Swampfish (yes, that's actually its name).

It's one thing to hear that different habitats at the park will host different communities, but it's quite another to experience it on such an intimate scale.

## Philips Electronics

When DNR's notice of a NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) permit renewal for Philips Electronics crossed my desk, the notice seemed inconsequential—a minor surface water discharge for treatment of a groundwater contamination problem.

A review of the draft permit confirmed a surface water discharge from an air-stripping column designed to remove 1-1 dichloroethane from groundwater. The permit rationale though, did discuss the 7Q10 for the Lower Saluda River, and this became an opportunity to review flows on the Saluda, similar to our review of the 7Q10 for the Broad River at Alston in 2013.

The 7Q10, a baseline low flow standard, is

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Friends of Congaree Swamp advocates for Congaree National Park and its unique environment.

Dr. John Grego, President

Sharon H. Kelly, Editor

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# 'Adventure' punctuates annual meeting

There's always an adventure associated with a Friends' annual meeting.

This year, it was a locked gate blocking the road to the meeting site at Congaree Bluffs Heritage Preserve.

Fortunately, Jerry Bright happened to have the right contact information on his phone. Rescue, however, was an hour away.

Resourceful Friends members carried coolers, chairs and registration supplies to the education center and picnic shelter in 80+-degree heat so we were reasonably comfortable while we waited.

Once the appropriate S.C. Department of Natural Resources employee arrived on his white horse (read green DNR truck) with the key, we were ready to roll.

John Cely led a hike east along the bluffs for spectacular views of the park across the river, concluding with a visit to the small Carroll family cemetery at the preserve. We

returned the hospitality of adjacent property owners, the Whitmores and Arants, by inviting them as guests to our festivities. Dr. John Nelson also conducted a botany tour that visited some of the species along the bluff edge.

At our business meeting, we recognized several guests, including park staffer Corinne Fenner, former park employee Dr. Theresa Thom and her family, Calhoun County Councilwoman Pamela Claxton, DNR employee Jim Edwards, Calhoun County property owners Jackie Whitmore and his family, Doraine and Luther Wannamaker, Kam and Sam Arant, Sarah and Webb Carroll, and Nancy Smith.

Departing board member Virginia Winn was recognized with a plaque for her many outstanding contributions over the years to Friends of Congaree Swamp.

We closed the meeting by electing new board member



*Friends President John Grego presents a plaque to Virginia Winn commemorating her long-time service on the board.*

Erich Miarka, program coordinator of Gills Creek Watershed Association, and re-electing incumbents Brusi Alexander, Carol Kososki, Carolyn Hudson, Lynn Teague and Marie Adams.

After our business meeting, members convened under the oyster tent to enjoy Bulls Bay clusters provided by Bryan Tayara of Our Local Catch.

Andy Fiffick served roasted chicken from his big grill, and other board members provided chili and roast vegetables to round out the feast.

We would like to thank the numerous volunteers, including Mary Bull, Carol Gist, Bobbi and James Osborne, Jean Prothro, Claire and David Schuetrum, Alice and Ted Steinke, George Teague, Mitch West and Friends board members for their contributions to the meeting.



*Andrew Thom, son of former park staffer Dr. Theresa Thom, enjoys an oyster with a little help from Mom.*

# Feral hog management draft plan released

The park recently released a draft Feral Hog Management Plan and Environmental Assessment for public comment.

The proposed plan aims to improve protection of both cultural and natural resources at the park, improve the park's wilderness character, and safeguard visitors to the park.

The discussion of alternatives under the Environmental Assessment included a "no action" alternative and an ambitious preferred alternative.

The "no action" alternative would continue the park's arrangement with U.S. Department of Agriculture, which has been effective at local control but is not systematic enough to have an impact on the feral hog population.

The preferred alternative envisions direct park supervision of feral hog control with a wider variety of control measures on a much greater scale. Friends of Congaree Swamp and other advocacy groups and resource organizations were supportive of the park's preferred alternative.

Some of the measures, including trapping and shooting, are currently used

by the USDA in feral hog control, but would simply be carried out on a larger scale. Trapping and shooting the hogs is most effective when an entire *sounder* (a herd of hogs led by adult sows) is lured to a corral-style trap. This process



Photo by Rhonda Grego

*Feral pigs root in the snow at Congaree National Park.*

requires scouting, pre-baiting and a lot of patience. It would be a more seasonal tool, while shooting could be carried out throughout the year, either on foot, from a blind, or a tree stand, day or night.

The park has a lengthy set of protocols for hunts to protect visitor safety. Dogs could be used for hunts, but only for tracking. There is a danger that hunting dogs would harass species other than wild hogs, which precludes their widespread use.

Some feral hogs would be trapped and collared, both to support research and to assist with tracking. When released, so-called "judas" pigs could lead park personnel to feral hog herds. Friends' comments requested that these collared hogs be sterilized before release.

Some measures are designed specifically to protect cultural resources, including cattle mounds, and critical habitat for endangered species. Protective fencing and curtain barriers, such as those used in Hawaiian parks, would only be temporary.

Friends noted concerns that these temporary measures could create a nuisance if not retrieved in a timely fashion in the event of prolonged flooding.

It was interesting to review the park's discussion of rejected control methods that had some surface appeal but are not practical on closer examination.

Can sterilization or contraceptives be used? There are currently no effective contraceptives for feral hogs.

Public hunting? Even if it were allowed at the park, it would not be effective in controlling hogs because of their high reproductive rate, and management of hunts

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# Volunteers needed for web site, database

We need volunteers to work on our web site and maintain our membership database.

Among other tasks, the database manager prepares and mails quarterly membership renewal letters, prepares mailing labels for newsletters, and maintains updated email files. Our current database manager can help train the new volunteer in the software needed for these tasks.

Our web site—[www.friendsofcongarree.org](http://www.friendsofcongarree.org)—does not

need be updated constantly, but does need to be redesigned, in part to accept donations, membership renewals and event registration.

The web site volunteer(s) should have experience with either web design or content management.

Our current database manager and web site manager are anxiously standing by to assist in the transition.

If you can help, please contact John Grego, [jrgrego@sc.rr.com](mailto:jrgrego@sc.rr.com).

## Hogs

*Continued from page 4*

would be prohibitive.

Could trapped hogs be donated for food? Federal regulations require even donated meat to be inspected, and feral hogs at the park have been found to carry swine brucellosis, a bacterial infection that causes reproductive problems, and pseudorabies, a swine viral disease prevalent in feral hogs, though not domestic herds.

All hogs, whether trapped, trapped then shot, or shot, would have prescribed data (e.g., gender, condition, appearance, location) collected from them. Blood samples would be drawn from some to test for swine brucellosis and pseudorabies. Carcasses could be made available for research purposes,

including collection of blood, skin and hair samples.

Protocols would be developed to test the effectiveness of feral hog management, including research transects to study damage from rooting, or reuse of the feral hog monitoring plots that Scott Zengel monitored through 2008, supported in part by a Friends of Congaree Swamp research grant.

Perhaps the biggest question about the preferred alternative was the cost. The USDA program was suspended during sequestration, and its cost was one-tenth the projected cost of more than \$200,000 for the first year of the proposed alternative. Costs would decline in subsequent years.

Superintendent Tracy Stakely explained that the park has put in a request for an increase in base funding to cover the program cost.

## Grego

*continued from page 2*

used to ensure that the water quality of a stream receiving a surface water discharge is not unduly affected, even during prolonged periods of low flow.

The 7Q10 at Philips Electronics discharge was averaged from an upstream gage at the Saluda Dam spillway and a downstream gage near I-20. Both figures seemed reasonable—240 cubic feet per second upstream, and 304 cubic feet per second downstream. I had feared the 7Q10 might be set to the minimum discharge standard adopted as part of the Saluda Dam FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) relicensing—500 cubic feet per second—so it was good to see the standard was actually based on the gages' history.

After an initial analysis, the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control provided background on the calculations, which used data starting from the adoption of a minimum discharge standard from 1989 through 2009. I added data from 2010-2013, which included a couple drought years and low average weekly flows below the mandated minimum discharge, but found that the two standards hardly budged and did not need to be updated.

Given the minimum discharge policies in place since 1989, it was expected that Lower Saluda River flows would be less susceptible to drought than other rivers and that proved to be largely true, but it never hurts to check.

## Save the date

*continued from page 1*

Richland County to Fort Motte and St. Matthews in Calhoun County.

Last year's Congaree Swamp CBC had the highest count of Wood Duck in the country and the highest count of Pileated Woodpeckers in the country for the second consecutive year. We often have high totals for other woodpecker species, Barred Owl, Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, blackbird species, and others.

Last year, with the addition of a very productive territory north of the park, we recorded 108 species—easily the highest total in the history of the local count.

Expert birders will accompany novices around the boardwalk and Bluff Trail in the morning. Both are excellent sites for some of the park's most interesting wintering species and permanent residents, including Winter Wren, Blue-headed Vireo, Brown Creeper, Red-headed Woodpecker, Rusty Blackbird and Fox Sparrow.

You may stay as long as you like—many participants stay for a few hours, but some will bird all day.

Meet at the Visitor Center parking lot at 7 a.m. for this free event. If interested, email John Grego at [jrgrego@sc.rr.com](mailto:jrgrego@sc.rr.com).

### Red Bluff Road Ramble

Friends will sponsor a hike Saturday, Jan. 17, 2015, along Red Bluff Road, beginning at 9 a.m.

The road runs along the



*Birds likely to be found during the Christmas Bird Count include the Ruby-crowned Kinglet, left, the Hermit Thrush, bottom left, and the Barred Owl.*



northern edge of the park between South Cedar Creek and Griffin Creek roads. It is regularly intersected by jeep trails that lead to attractive beech bluffs along Cedar Creek through pine forests the park actively manages with controlled burns.

Rather than travel along the road itself, which is not in the park, we will hike along a firebreak cut by park staff and explore Cedar Creek along the designated jeep roads.

Depending on time, we may hike to the farthest jeep trail and visit Elder Lake. There are several home sites along the way to investigate, including at least one we have not

visited before on a field trip.

This hike will be mostly along jeep roads and fire breaks; there may be some wet spots to negotiate. Participants should be in moderate physical shape.

We will meet at 9 a.m. at the South Cedar Creek Road canoe/kayak landing parking lot and then carpool to the western end of Red Bluff Road. The hike should last until about 2 p.m. Bring water and a snack and a couple extra layers—weather is unpredictable in mid-January. Light hiking shoes or boots are appropriate.

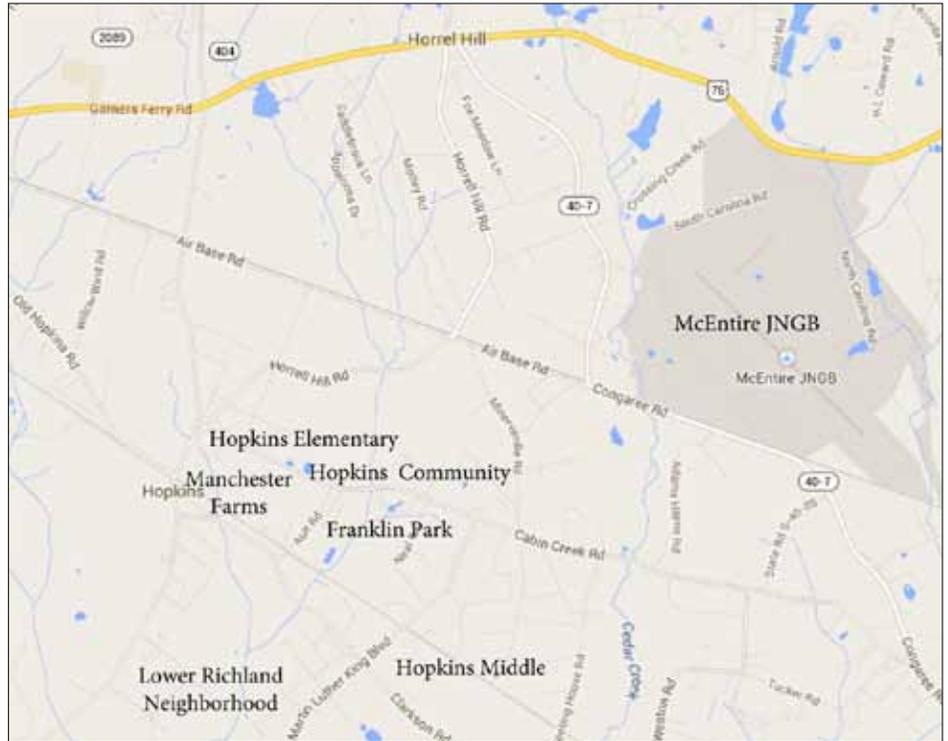
To register, email John Grego at [jrgrego@sc.rr.com](mailto:jrgrego@sc.rr.com).

# Project

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- **Franklin Park Subdivision** is a community of 50 homes with an onsite wastewater lagoon currently operated by Richland County that discharges into Cabin Branch, a tributary of Myers Creek. No upgrades are planned to the current system.
- **Hopkins Community** is northeast of Hopkins and located in the Cabin Branch watershed. These homes are on septic systems, though the number of failing septic systems is unknown. The new system would serve approximately 245 homes.
- **Lower Richland Neighborhood** is southeast of Hopkins along Cabin Branch with at least 80 failing septic systems. The new system would serve approximately 85 homes.
- **Manchester Farms** is a quail farm that treats wastewater onsite and pumps it to a spray field in the Horsepen Branch watershed. The owner has shown some interest in connecting to a regional system.
- **McEntire Joint National Guard Base** has its own treatment plant that discharges to Cedar Creek. Base command has shown some interest in connecting to a regional system.

The sewer project would collect wastewater from the schools, businesses, homes, and McEntire Joint National Guard Base in Lower Richland



in addition to the Garners Ferry corridor currently served by City of Columbia's wastewater treatment system. Wastewater would be piped and pumped east to Richland County's Wateree River Wastewater Treatment Facility near Eastover. The treatment plant currently handles an average of 80,000 gallons of wastewater a day but is permitted for 250,000 gallons a day and could be upgraded to one million gallons a day.

Local residents have been concerned that the new sewage treatment plant could spur growth in the area and the draft engineering plan does anticipate that could happen. But the cost of the tap fee and requirements that properties with failing septic systems would need to connect to the system have been particularly controversial.

However, the county will pay the tap fees for all homes with failing systems and all lower

and middle income homes that choose to connect to the system. An even more general waiver is under consideration. In addition, Hopkins Elementary and Hopkins Middle schools and the Franklin Park neighborhood already have existing systems and will not have to pay tap fees. The county will use grant funds to reduce the monthly service rate so that it will be more affordable for Lower Richland residents.

In sum, the project will immediately address multiple pollution problems that have plagued the Cedar Creek watershed for years. Richland County has taken several steps to address residents' concerns with cost, though the impact of the project on growth will remain a continuing concern.

Such concerns could be addressed through appropriate land-use planning, though that is yet another perennial hot-button topic in Lower Richland.



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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) \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Benefactor \$500  
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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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