



Friends of Congaree Swamp News

www.friendsofcongarree.org

Spring 2019

Save the date

Summer butterfly count

The summer North American Butterfly Association Butterfly Count will be held **Saturday, June 8**, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Congaree National Park's Dr. David Shelley 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 system and within various habitats of the park.

The count will last until about 3 p.m., weather permitting. Please come for all or just part of the day.

We will meet at 9 a.m.

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New superintendent brings diverse experience to park

Congaree National Park's new superintendent arrived last fall with a wealth of diverse experience and a genuine love of nature.

K. Lynn Berry "has a remarkable background in community and environmental planning as well as cultural resource management and public involvement processes," said Bob Vogel, the National Park Service's Southeast regional director.

Berry has a bachelor's degree and master's degree in cultural anthropology and a master's degree in city and regional planning in addition to work experience in state and federal government and private consulting.

"All of that led up to this job," she said. "I'm most interested in the intersection of culture and nature. With parks, you get to see that intersection; the impact of human history on the landscape.

"I'm right where I want to be."



Superintendent K. Lynn Berry

Her background gives her the perspective to understand the economic impacts and drivers on amenities and how the amenities affect community values, she said.

"I enjoy thinking through how city officials and the convention and visitors' bureau think about natural heritage as assets," Berry said.

With that in mind, she hopes to work with local officials and the community to raise awareness and enthusiasm about the park.

She's an avid paddler and improving paddle trails within

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President's Corner

Dr. John Grego

Conservation Commission grant

The Richland County Conservation Commission recently notified Friends of Congaree Swamp that its Community Conservation grant application for \$2750 to extend Fork Swamp Trail had been approved. A special thanks to John Cely for representing Friends before the commission.

The current Fork Swamp Trail was constructed by park staff using funds from a REI grant awarded to Friends in 2017. The extension would follow Bates Old River to its mouth on the Congaree River, then follow existing jeep trails back to the current trail, forming a two-mile loop (see our Winter 2018 newsletter for a map). Very little additional trail-clearing would be needed, and most of the cost of the grant would pay for bridges over two small guts that drain into Bates Old River.

On a related matter, the current Fork Swamp Trail lacks highway signs on U.S. 601, making it difficult for casual visitors to find the trail. We provided some assistance and encouragement to the park last year to ensure

that signs would be placed similar to those along U.S. 601 for the Bates Ferry Trail, but turnover in senior park staff delayed coordination with the S.C. Department of Transportation, which requires an encroachment permit for any signs placed in its roadside easement.

We are anxious for a second set of signs to be placed along U.S. 601 to highlight recreational opportunities available on the park's property along the U.S. 601 corridor.

We're number 3!

Given last winter's flooding and the inability to survey the park's trail system, the Congaree Swamp Christmas bird count did not have its usual high totals of woodpeckers and some wintering species, but the 32 Barred Owls recorded for the count tied us for third among the 2500 count circles—a rewarding result given that our floodplain parties would certainly have added to that total if they had been able to walk their usual routes.

Berry

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the park is a priority as funding becomes available.

She has a “profound sense of gratitude” for Friends and its respect for the history of the park.

“The relationship provides a nice opportunity to build upon,” she said.

Berry's partner, Lynn Margaret, is partner in an architectural firm in Atlanta and they commute on weekends. Berry is renting in the Earlwood area of Columbia but is considering renting an apartment in that part of town.

What she'd really like to do, though, is build a “tiny house, maybe 400 square feet.

“It'll be on a chassis so it won't leave a permanent mark on the landscape,” she said.

Friends of Congaree Swamp News is published quarterly by Friends of Congaree Swamp, P.O. Box 7746. Columbia, SC 29202-7746. It is distributed free by mail to Friends members and other interested parties.

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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

Congaree's sloughs and creeks provide delightful setting for spring paddle

By John Cely

Friends had a delightful paddle outing on April 6. The weather was beautiful—overcast skies to give the place a special ambience yet warm enough to ward off the chill.

We put in at the very primitive canoe launch that goes to Bates Old River next to U.S. Highway 601. Water levels were ideal, with the USGS gage at the 601 bridge over the Congaree running at 79.4.

Congaree's sloughs and creeks are at their finest this time of year—the black water reflecting the feathery green foliage of tall cypress trees was mesmerizing.

We also admired the natural sculpture of ancient tupelo trees. Their enlarged buttresses and twisting shapes added to the atmosphere.

Each old tupelo exuded character; nearly all had broken tops or crowns with lots of cavity space for numerous critters to den and raise young.

We were also impressed by the winding sculpture of maple trees growing from the stumps of old growth cypress cut more than a hundred years ago. We did see a few lone old growth

cypress survivors, trees that didn't quite measure up for the harvest back then but now provide a clue as to what these picturesque water bodies once looked like.

We passed by the old antebellum dike, built by enslaved African Americans, that crosses Running Creek Slough just south of Big Lake. This is one of the park's many mysteries—who was the plantation owner that had it built? When? And what was its purpose?

The rock ford dam that cuts across the east end of Big Lake was fortunately still under high water so no portaging was necessary. This ford was built in the 1980s by Georgia-Pacific to gain access for tree harvest south of Running Lake.

We continued on into Big Lake and then, just west of it, Little Lake. The names of these beautiful lakes, representing natural



Paddlers glide along Singleton Creek

openings in Running Lake of a few acres, date back to the 1700s when early surveyors started laying out land grants to the first English settlers.

Little Lake had a small great blue heron/anhinga rookery on its north side. The birds were nesting in tall tupelos near the edge of the lake.

We saw a few brown water snakes trying to warm up in the bushes overhanging Singleton Creek and several paddlers spotted prothonotary warblers, recently arrived from their tropical wintering grounds.

I think all the participants would agree that there was no finer way to spend a Saturday morning in central South Carolina.

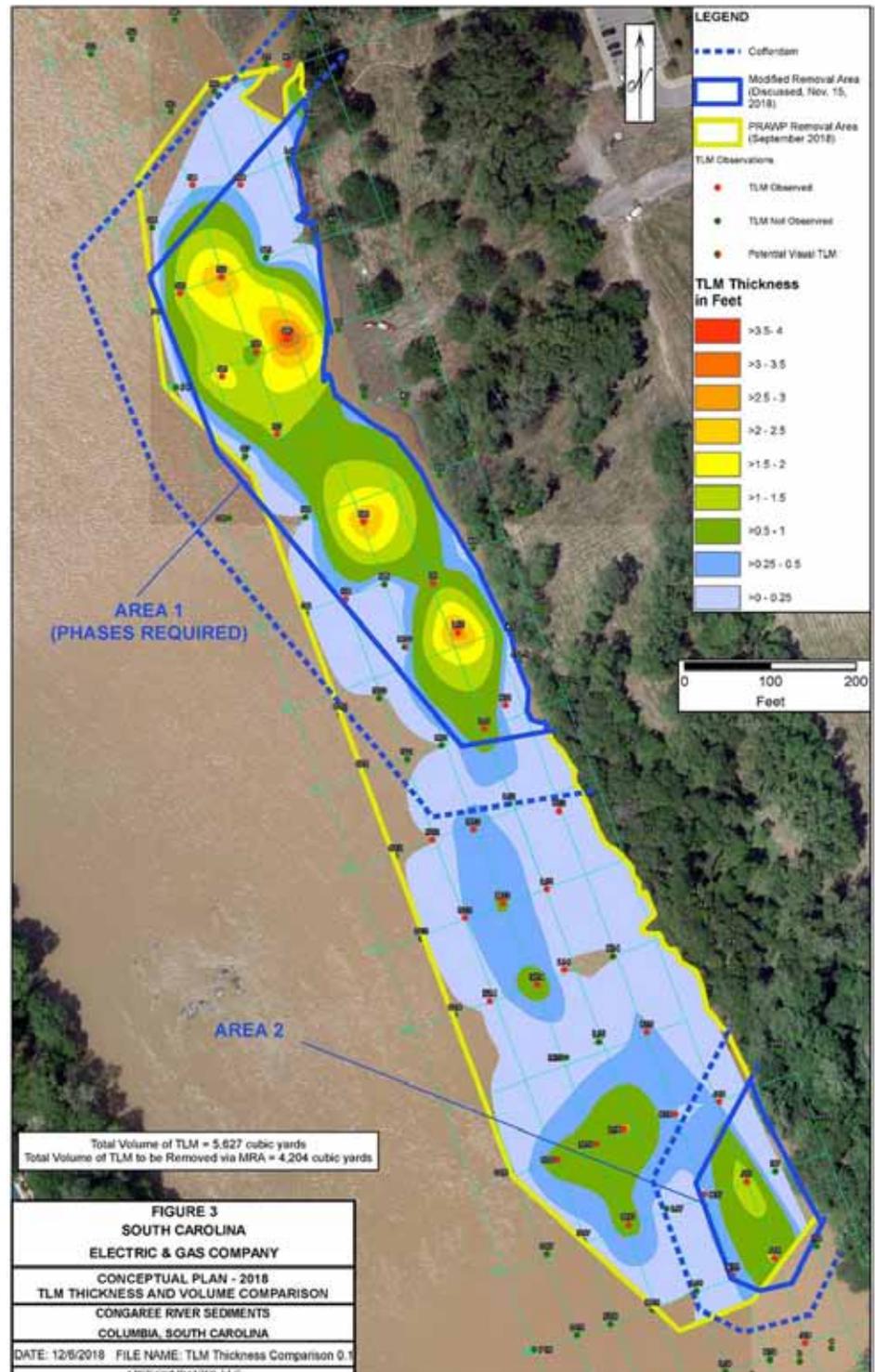
Congaree coal tar plan awaiting action

We last reported on Congaree coal tar in our Spring 2017 newsletter, summarizing documents received from a FOIA request. At that time, the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control and SCANA's sediment cap plan had received a poor reception owing to many factors.

One of the more important issues was the low level of environmental review, with DHEC requesting and receiving from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers a review under a nationwide permit, rather than a more thorough review under NEPA (National Environmental Protection Act).

DHEC claimed it had abandoned a more thorough coal tar removal plan because the Corps of Engineers had indicated that the construction of coffer dams to assist with removal would not be permitted. In fact, the Corps had never taken a definitive stance on the topic, and has made it clear in correspondence that it would take no definitive stance in the absence of a permit application.

With considerable prodding from the Congaree Riverkeeper and Southern Environmental Law Center (including the filing of an intent to sue DHEC, the Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency), DHEC revisited the option of tar removal beginning in November 2017. In March 2018, DHEC sought guidance from the Corps on four issues:



Graphic shows areas of coal tar deposits in the Congaree River

- Why the Corps requested a study of coffer dam impacts for low flows,
- Why the Corps found the impacts of the low-flow analysis to be unacceptable,
- Whether a one-foot rise under low-flow analyses would be acceptable, and

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Coal tar

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- Whether the nationwide permit for the sediment cap could be extended while additional removal/remediation options were explored.

The Corps was quite guarded in its response. It prefers not to speculate on its actions in the absence of an actual permit, and so did not provide specific guidance on DHEC's questions. It argued that DHEC reached its own conclusions on the Corps' actions. While the Corps had numerous concerns about the tar removal plan, it did not categorically rule that the coffer dam construction presented an unacceptable risk.

Lacking specific guidance from the Corps, DHEC nonetheless held stakeholders meetings throughout 2018 with the Congaree Riverkeeper and Southern Environmental Law Center, SCANA and its contractors, the City of Columbia, the Governor's office, and Guignard Associates and their legal advisors. Guignard Associates owns much of the riverfront between Gervais Street and Blossom Street and maintains an interest in both the coal tar clean-up and its potential impact on the riverfront.

By September 2018, SCANA's consultants prepared and submitted a modified removal plan,

and most sides had reached agreement on the plan, which was based on an improved understanding of the thickness and extent of both the tar plume and the sediment that covered it.

The modified plan received DHEC's approval in February 2019 and was presented to the general public in April 2019. In addition to discussing findings on the extent of the plume itself, results of an April 2017 surface water quality study and three subsequent semiannual water quality monitoring events in 2017-2018 were shared. The water quality surveys tested for a wide variety of coal tar by-products at sites upstream of the plume, at the plume, and immediately downstream of the plume. DHEC staff found no evidence of contaminants from the plume in any of the sampling events.

DHEC also reported on its 2017 aquatic macroinvertebrate bio-assessment (think of caddisflies, stoneflies, and mayflies) and freshwater mussel sampling. The quality of the aquatic community was found to be excellent both upstream of the plume and downstream of the plume, with some differences in the community composition due to differences in the river substrate. The results are reassuring in the short term, but all parties remain committed to some form of remedial action.

The modified plan would construct two coffer dams over

two phases. The first coffer dam would be similar in extent to the first of three coffer dams under the original plan and remove the most substantial portion of the plume, while the second coffer dam would be small in extent and remove a hot spot close to the riverbank. Combined, 73 percent of the coal tar by volume would be removed.

One hotspot in particular would not be removed because it lies in deeper water and farther from shore. Modeling by SCANA and its contractors suggested that construction of a coffer dam extending from the riverbank to this more remote hot spot would increase water levels unacceptably high at low-to-moderate flows, and increase the risk of erosion to the West Columbia/Cayce riverbank.

Sentiment at the public hearing favored removal of the entire plume, though at least one participant argued for the sediment cap, since its installation would have far less impact on the riverbank.

Congaree Riverkeeper Bill Stangler indicated that those studying the problem had wracked their brains for a full removal plan that they felt the Corps would ultimately approve, but had not found a practical solution to full removal.

DHEC notes that there will be several permits needed for the process to move forward with opportunity for public comments and appeals along the way.

Remembering Hollings' impact on the park

There were many accounts of the far-reaching legacy of Senator Ernest (Fritz) Hollings after his death on April 6, 2019; Friends of Congaree Swamp would like to note his impact on Congaree National Park.

In the 1976 legislative session, Sen. Hollings, Rep. Floyd Spence and Sen. Strom Thurmond all introduced bills to create Congaree Swamp National Monument and secure land acquisition funding, though it was eventually Spence's bill that advanced.

The story of the bill's passage is one of last-minute reprieves and hair's-breadth rescues on the part of park advocates and South Carolina's congressional delegation, as exemplified by Hollings' actions. He arranged a one-year halt to logging while bills were under consideration, helped to arrange a Senate subcommittee hearing on the Congaree bill, and expedited the bill in the Senate by arranging a last-minute compromise with Sen. Bennett Johnston of Louisiana to ensure the Congaree bill would be taken up during the 1976 legislative session.

The Congaree bill was the last bill passed by the Senate in 1976, and subsequently signed by President Ford



Sen. Ernest F. "Fritz" Hollings

on October 18, 1976.

In 1988, Hollings co-sponsored Thurmond's bill to expand the monument's authorized boundary by 7,000 acres, to place most lands within the original boundary in the National Wilderness Preservation System, and designate most lands within the expansion as Potential Wilderness.

As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Hollings secured an appropriation for land acquisition even before Congress approved the Congaree bill. As Dick Watkins noted in his remarks during the National Park dedication ceremony on Oct. 25, 2004, this pre-emptive appropriation was considered "extraordinary" at the time by Washington-based environmental professionals.

In 2003 and 2004, Hollings

used his position on the Interior Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Appropriations to add a couple important measures to the 2003 appropriations bill: the redesignation of Congaree Swamp National Monument as Congaree National Park, and a 4,576-acre authorized boundary

expansion.

With the Congaree boundary expansion having been authorized in November 2003, Hollings and Congressman James Clyburn worked in 2004, Holling's last year in office, to obtain congressional appropriation of \$6 million in FY 2005 funding for land acquisition from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which was used to purchase the 2,395-acre Beidler Tract at the east end of the park.

For all these actions across decades to assist the park, Friends of Congaree Swamp awarded the Order of the cypress to Sen. Hollings in 2005. We are grateful to Hollings and all members of the South Carolina delegation who worked across the aisle to protect this extraordinary natural and cultural resource.

Save the date

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American Snout

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. Butterflies like the sun, so bring sun protection and plenty of water.

Bug spray, snacks, and a sack lunch are also recommended. Close-focus 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, Director of the Old-Growth Bottomland Forest Research and Education

Center, at david_shelley@nps.gov or (803) 647-3966.

Botany hike

Join us **Saturday, June 22**, for a botany hike along the trail to Sampson Island, an ancient dune in the Fork Swamp floodplain. We likely will not reach Sampson Island itself, but there is an interesting variety of habitats along the way.

The first part of the hike weaves in and out of a power line cut, skirting the edge of open wetlands. The trail then turns into floodplain forest, skirting the bank of Bates



Lyreleaf sage



Killdeer

Old River before turning southeast toward Sampson Island, an open sandy ridge.

There will be an opportunity after the hike to look for alligators and wading birds in the sloughs along U.S. 601.

Prof. John Nelson, retired chief curator of the University of South Carolina's A.C. Moore

Herbarium, will lead the botany tour. Participants should be in moderate physical shape with a tolerance for sunshine.

Bring water, sun protection and insect repellent; long pants are recommended. Jogging shoes or light hiking boots are appropriate.

We will meet at 8:30 a.m. in the parking lot for the Fork Swamp Trail off U.S. 601, then cross U.S. 601 to pick up the trail to Sampson Island. The hike should last about four hours.

To register, contact John Grego, (803) 331-3366 or friendsofcongareeswamp@gmail.com.



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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.)

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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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