



# Friends of Congaree Swamp News

www.friendsofcongarree.org

Spring 2022

## Save the date

### Adopt-a-Trail

On **Sunday, May 22**, we will be clearing our adopted trails prior to the park's Memorial Day weekend.

We will either be concentrating on pruning back spring growth for the mid-canopy species (holly, ironwood, pawpaw, etc.) or visiting far-flung trails to focus on larger limbs. We should see the red-and-yellow blooms of Indian Pink on some of our trails.

We will meet at the visitor center at 9 a.m. and finish in the early afternoon. Work gloves, light hiking boots, water, and a snack are recommended. If you have loppers, long-handled shears, or portable saws, bring them along. Park staff will provide gear if you do not have any.

### National Trails Day

As part of National Trails Day **Saturday, June 4**,

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## Park has new champion

By John Cely

A recent big tree find in Congaree National Park's "East End" has resulted in a new, unofficial (not yet confirmed by the state big tree coordinator) state champion overcup oak, *Quercus lyrata*, that significantly beats the previous champion, also located in the park.

On February 19, a group of Congaree big tree enthusiasts spent a day in the park's East End to look for potential new champion trees.

The East End consists of the old growth area around the park's original 1976 eastern boundary. It is one of the most isolated sections of the park and is best accessed by boat from the Congaree River.

Dave Schuetrum, Graham Norman, Neal Polhemus, and John Cely were joined by three tall tree hunters—Jess Riddle, Rachel Granade, and Tyler Phillips—who over the years have compiled an impressive list of the park's big trees.

Riddle discovered Congaree's national champion loblolly pine in 2001 while still a student at Furman University.

More recently, he has refined LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) imagery to determine the heights and locations of very tall super-canopy trees tucked away in remote locations throughout the East.

LiDAR is a remote sensing tool used to map detailed elevations of



*Big tree hunters pose in front of Congaree's new state champion overcup oak on Feb. 22. From left are Graham Norman, Neal Polhemus, Dave Schuetrum, Rachel Granade, Jess Riddle and Tyler Phillips.*

*See Champion, page 7*



# President's Corner

*Dr. John Grego*

## Park Leadership changes

K Lynn Berry will be leaving her position as superintendent of Congaree National Park for a post in California.

K Lynn has been at Congaree since November 2018. She has been selected as superintendent of historic parks in the Oakland area, including Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site, John Muir National Historic Site, Torpedo Factory National Historic Site, Rosie the Riveter World War II Homefront National Historical Park, and Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial.



*K Lynn Berry*

Two of the parks document labor history, and you are likely familiar with Betty Reid Soskin of Rosie the Riveter National Historical Park. Soskin recently retired at age 100 as an historical interpreter. She broadened interpretation at the site to include African-American women's contributions and challenges on the World War II home front.

I mostly interacted with K Lynn on development of the philanthropic partnership (see below). On many other matters, I found she gave admirable latitude to her staff, and we were often able to

work on projects primarily through staff contacts without her close supervision. Most recently, K Lynn organized a diverse coalition of Congaree Biosphere Region members in a Sustainable Communities project before her four-month detail to Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve.

Others in Friends have noted that the park appears to serve as a transitional park for those moving up the career ladder. Presumably both its smaller size and status as a national park prove attractive to applicants. Steve Akins, a health and safety manager for the National Park Service, is currently serving as interim superintendent at Congaree

Meanwhile, Gregory Cunningham, who has been chief of Interpretation, Education and Visitor Services for seven years at Congaree, announced he will begin work with the U.S. Forest Service as recreation program manager for Sumter National Forest and Francis Marion National Forest. Greg's new position will allow him to stay in state and he plans to remain active as a Congaree National Park volunteer.

Over the past couple years, I worked intensively with Greg on the Smithsonian Water/Ways exhibit and symposium, and then again as part of our close-knit organizing committee for Congaree Research Symposium 2022.

Greg was a pleasure to work with—unfailingly reliable and treating all obstacles with equanimity and resourcefulness. I will miss working with him on projects,, but look forward to running into him at the park.

## Partnership Agreement

Almost since the inception of Friends of Congaree Swamp, park superintendents have advocated for Friends of Congaree Swamp to sign a Philanthropic Partnership Agreement, a contractual arrangement between National Park Service units and their supporting organizations, including Friends groups.

The agreements focused narrowly on fund-raising activities with tight reins on Friends' activities, including publications. Such agreements were designed for the many Friends groups whose primary focus is fund-raising for their

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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

*See Grego, page 6*



*The salvaged bald cypress trunk has made its way to Congaree National Park.*

*It's been about a year since Santee Debris, a timber salvage company, contacted Friends about donating the section of bald cypress trunk salvaged from Lake Marion. Cut at the turn of the last century and covered by the lake in the 1940s, it was retrieved from the lake several years ago and delivered to the park on March 25.*

*This section is unusually well-preserved and displays original axe and crosscut saw harvesting techniques dating from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Santee Debris owner Larry Shuler and employee Art Kossov carefully choreographed the journey from Santee to the park, where it rests in a cradle built by park staff.*

# Thank you to Friends' supporters

We would like to thank all those who provided support to Friends of Congaree Swamp from January 2021 through March 2022.

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# Manchester Farms should use sewer line

Manchester Farms is seeking changes to its permit to apply treated wastewater to property it owns along Horsepen Branch in Hopkins.

Manchester Farms processes 5 million pounds of quail a year. It is seeking a revision in permit requirements for nitrogen in sewage discharged to spray fields from numerical standards to monitoring and reporting nitrogen levels.

Friends of Congaree Swamp reviewed the draft permit and permit rationale for Manchester Farms to apply treated wastewater.

The spray fields flank Horsepen Branch. Horsepen Branch is a tributary of Cabin Branch, which joins Myers Creek before Myers Creek empties into Cedar Creek and Congaree National Park at Banister Bridge.

The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control lists Cedar Creek as impaired for macroinvertebrates

and bacterial water quality.

As discussed in the permit and rationale, groundwater under one of the spray fields is contaminated and the spray field has been inactivated, while the groundwater at a second spray field has a history of violations for nitrate.

A 2015 draft permit held out the possibility of connecting to Richland County's proposed sewer line (to run along the edge of the property fronting Lower Richland Boulevard) to the Eastover Wastewater Treatment Plant with an option to waive the requirement if compliance with total nitrogen standards in the permit could be met.

That sewer line was completed along Manchester Farms' property in late 2020 and Manchester Farms now has the opportunity to connect to the sewer line, rather than continue to spray treated wastewater on land.

DHEC unfortunately waived

the requirement to connect to the new sewer line since groundwater nitrogen levels have steadily declined.

Though improvements have occurred on site, it's dismaying to see other private/public treatment plants now connected to the sewer line, while Manchester chooses not to do so.

We noted that the permit allows land application within 200 feet of Horsepen Branch and we instead requested a 300-foot buffer, which would provide superior water quality protection to Horsepen Branch.

As long as groundwater remains contaminated at any of the application sites, it threatens private wells and contributes to the degradation of water quality in Congaree National Park's watershed.

We recommend application should be phased out now that a hook-up to the Richland County sewer line is available.

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## Grego

*continued from page 2*

park partners, but were always a poor fit for Friends of Congaree Swamp with its roots in advocacy. Inevitably, the Friends board would decline to participate in partnership agreements.

The climate changed after a scathing 2019 Office of Inspector General audit of these partnership agreements between national parks and Friends groups.

The audit found abuses in use of Friends' donations by the National Park Service, including lack of oversight of funds, poor tracking and reporting of funds, unclear policy on the use of funds, and an uncertain accounting of Friends groups and their status.

As part of a response to the audit report, the park service resolved to accept donations and services only from non-profits that had formal philanthropic partnership

agreements. That meant Friends groups like ours that had avoided formal agreements were required to negotiate with the National Park Service.

We were presented with a simplified agreement, but still found some aspects onerous.

Fortunately, the park service negotiated in good will, and we found that some of our concerns were misplaced, while we could address others by proposing modifications to the

*Continued on page 7*

## Save the date

*continued from page 1*

Friends of Congaree Swamp members will meet at Bates Bridge landing along U.S. 601 at 9:30 a.m. to collect trash at the Congaree River boat ramp, parking lot and access road.

This is one of our required semiannual clean-ups as part of the Adopt-a-Waterway program sponsored by Keep the Midlands Beautiful. National Trails Day is sponsored by the American Hiking Society.

Keep the Midlands Beautiful will provide trash pickers, trash bags, gloves, etc. and we will use the dumpster on site to dispose of non-recyclables. Light hiking boots, plenty of

water, sun protection and a snack are recommended.

We will likely bird along Fork Swamp Trail afterwards.

### Kingsnake Trail Hike

We will visit sites near Kingsnake Trail on **Saturday, June 11.**

On previous hikes along Kingsnake Trail, we have visited the Moccasin Pond and Fishhook Slough bald cypress, Cooner's Mound and the Tear Pond Cherrybark Oak.

This hike along Kingsnake Trail and Fishhook Slough will revisit some of those sites, while including stops by a couple of the largest American Holly and Swamp Cottonwood measured in the park. Other highlights

could include Lost Lake, an active beaver lodge and a still site, time permitting.

Meet at the South Cedar Creek Parking Lot at 9 a.m.. Some parts of the hike will be off-trail through dense switch cane.

Sturdy hiking boots should suffice; bring insect repellent, snack or lunch, and plenty of water.

This outing is solely for members of Friends of Congaree Swamp and will be limited to 20 participants.

To sign up for either of these activities, contact John Grego at [friendsofcongareeswamp@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofcongareeswamp@gmail.com) or 803-331-3366.

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## Grego

*continued from page 6*

document.

Specifically, we found that restrictions on lobbying federal agencies did not apply to our typical advocacy efforts, that we were able to maintain the editorial independence of this

newsletter, and that we could maintain an independent Friends agenda on activities not specifically related to the park.

As part of the agreement, we will coordinate with the park on a work plan each year.

The work plan does not cover all Friends activities, but does

include goals for some of the park's projects, and allows us to advocate for favorite Friends projects to be placed on the front burner.

Though we do not anticipate issues, either party can withdraw from the agreement if difficulties arise.

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## Champion

*continued from page 1*

the earth's surface.

The dimensions of the big overcup oak are 288 inches of circumference at 4 ½ feet off the ground (or 24 feet, and exceeding the current champ's circumference of 19 feet by a whopping 5 feet), 113 feet tall,

and with an average crown spread of 108 feet for a total of 428 points.

For championship determination, points are assigned for each inch of circumference, each foot of height, and for every four feet of average crown spread.

Since points are weighted more towards girth than height,

many Congaree trees are at a competitive disadvantage because crowded growing conditions there result in trees putting out more vertical growth for sunlight.

The current national champion overcup oak, with 464 points, is located in a stream bottom in eastern Virginia.



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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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