



# Friends of Congaree Swamp News

[www.friendsofcongarree.org](http://www.friendsofcongarree.org)

Fall 2023

## Save the date

### Christmas Bird Count

This year's Congaree Swamp Christmas Bird Count will be held **Sunday, Dec. 17**, beginning at 7 a.m.

Christmas Bird Counts, conducted nationally each year since 1900, are the oldest citizen-science project in the country. A CBC is an all-day effort to find and identify as many wild birds as possible within a 15-mile diameter circle. This effort, which now includes more than 2,600 circles and more than 75,000 participants annually, is sponsored by the National Audubon Society.

The Congaree Swamp CBC (founded by Robin Carter in 1993) includes almost all the national park and adjacent areas, from Gadsden and Wateree in Richland County to Fort Motte and St.

*See Save the date, page 6*

## Proposed mitigation site would protect park lands

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently posted a public notice about a proposed mitigation bank adjacent to the park, the Griffins Creek Mitigation Site, that would be one of at least six sites of the larger Palmetto Umbrella Mitigation Bank proposed by Weyerhaeuser Company.

This “umbrella” bank is designed to provide mitigation credits at a selection of sites for any South Carolina project requiring mitigation.

Recently, Weyerhaeuser has successfully bid on a couple local projects, but had to forfeit its bid when it was unable to deliver the promised credits. At least a couple of these failed bids benefited Richland County, which was then able to sell credits from its public/private mitigation bank at Mill Creek in the Congaree floodplain upriver from Congaree National Park.

The 1494.2-acre site (see map page 3) is bounded by Griffins Creek Road to the north, Norfolk Southern railway and Congaree National Park to the west and Congaree National Park to the south. The 216.2 acre parcel to the south that Friends purchased then donated to the park with the assistance of several partners is actually a subdivision of the larger parcel considered for mitigation. The subdivision provided an upland buffer to Running Creek, and it is anticipated that the mitigation proposal will further protect park lands and improve water quality for Running Creek and its tributary streams, Singleton Creek and Griffins Creek.

In September, we provided comments on the mitigation plan. The plan claims to preserve 945 acres of forested wetlands (the green areas on the map) and replant 71 acres of previously-cleared wetlands; 318 acres of commercial planted pine will be converted to bottomland hardwood forest (the purple areas on the map). Over two miles of Griffins Creek would be restored, and almost one mile would be restored/enhanced.

**Timber harvesting on wetlands.** The application claims 945 acres of wetlands dominated by “mature” vegetation will be preserved, where the existing threshold for maturity is vegetation 10 years or older. We argued that was an exceptionally low standard

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# President's Corner

*Dr. John Grego*

## **Waters of the United States**

The Environmental Protection Agency recently issued new rules for Waters of the United States (often referred to as jurisdictional waters) as specified in the Clean Water Act to comply with the 2023 U.S Supreme Court decision in Sackett vs. EPA.

The Supreme Court decision upended a couple important guidelines developed during decades of case law that previously protected vulnerable classes of wetlands. We had reported on proposed changes to Waters of the U.S. during the Trump administration in our Fall 2021 newsletter. Since that time, the EPA had developed a new set of rules effective January 2023 that removed some of the changes proposed in 2021, but important elements of the new rules were suspended following the Supreme Court ruling.

Specifically, a change in the interpretation of “adjacent” waters and the jettisoning of the “significant nexus” standard established by Justice Anthony Kennedy in the 2006 Rapanos vs. United States decision greatly reduced waters protected under the Clean Water Act.

All recent rulings agree that Waters of the U.S. includes traditional navigable waters, relatively permanent waters connected to these navigable

waters, and additional relatively permanent waters connected to either of the above. Under the January 2023 rule, wetlands and waters adjacent to any of these jurisdictional waters would also be considered jurisdictional, where adjacency meant neighboring, bordering, or contiguous.

The new interpretation of “adjacency” requires wetlands to be adjoining other jurisdictional waters or have a continuous surface connection. Many of the numerous ponds, sloughs, and flats to be found in our large complex floodplains could fail to meet this criterion.

Waters with a significant nexus, either alone or in combination with similar waters, did not have to have a surface connection, but must be shown to have a chemical, biological, or physical effect on navigable waters. With the removal of this criterion, familiar local wetlands systems such as Carolina bays, stream headwaters and ephemeral streams would no longer be considered under U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ jurisdiction.

With so many waters now unprotected, attention turns to the states—efforts to restore protections to vulnerable wetlands and waters will be counter-balanced by efforts to enshrine standards no stricter than the new federal standards.

## **Rudy Mancke and Congaree National Park**

Rudy Mancke’s death brought an outpouring



*Rudy Mancke*

of genuine gratitude from a couple generations of South Carolinians inspired to learn more about South Carolina’s natural world

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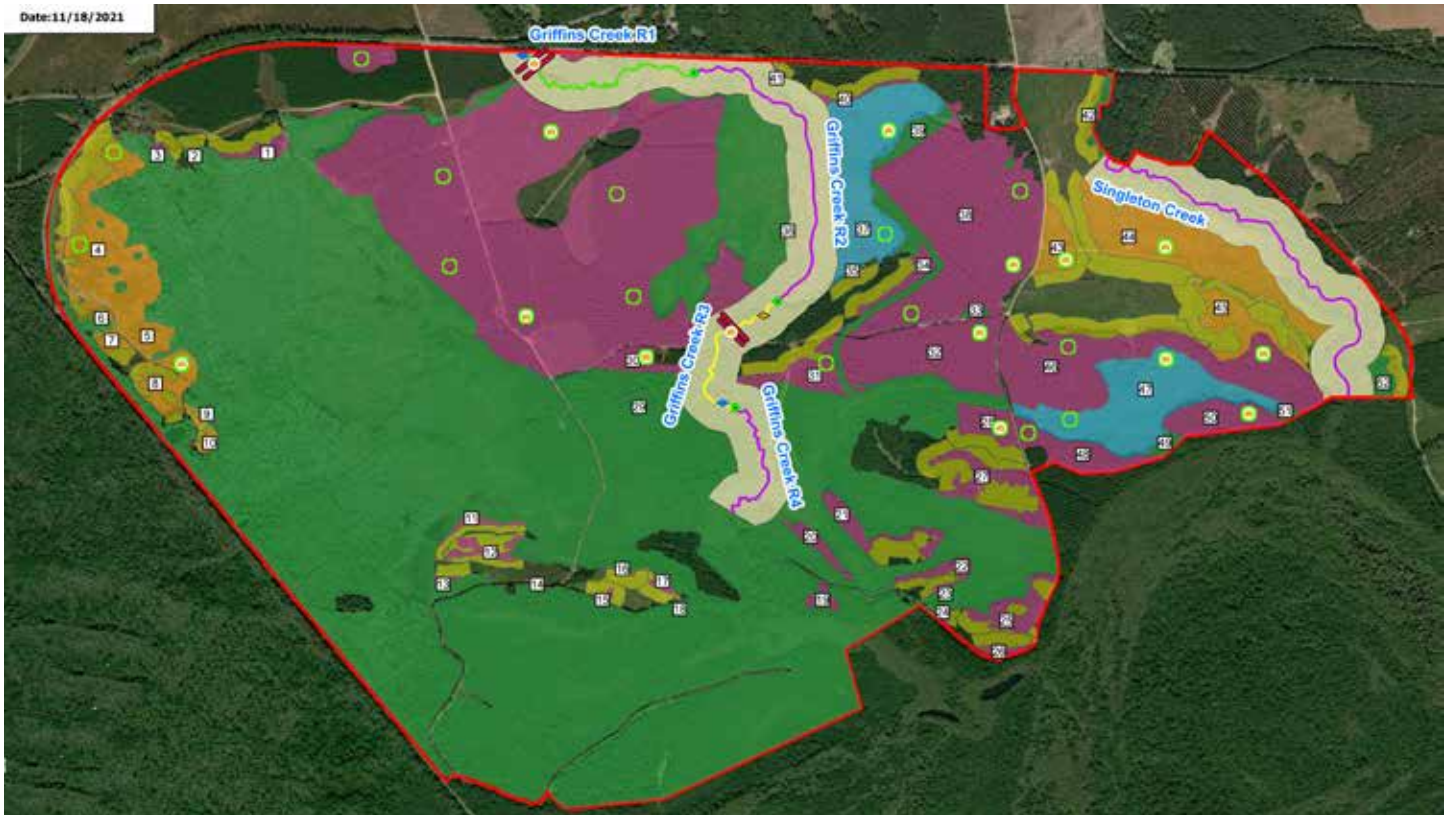
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Friends of Congaree Swamp advocates for Congaree National Park and its unique environment.

Dr. John Grego, President

Sharon H. Kelly, Editor

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## Mitigation

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for a property that has been in commercial timber production for decades.

The aerial photography provided in the report was insufficient to assess mature woodlands on the property, ending as it did in 1981. In examining more current aerial photography, portions of the tract had been harvested for timber regularly. Often these areas included the wetlands characterized as mature vegetation. Given the consistent and systemic pattern of logging on the site, we questioned whether the 945 acres are dominated by “mature vegetation.”

Proposed steps for restoring bottomland hardwoods included harvesting pine

then preparing planting beds. We were concerned that the existing planted pine uses raised furrows, which would have a detrimental impact on the natural hydrology of the site. In case the bed preparation was unclear, we asked that any existing raised furrows are leveled as part of the restoration process prior to planting hardwood seedlings.

**Stream Credits.** Curiously, the application chose not to claim available stream credits on Griffins Creek and a western tributary on the southern portion of the tract, perhaps because the waterways on this downstream portion of the Griffins Creek lack a clearly-defined channel. Nonetheless, it seemed a missed opportunity to claim additional stream credits.

Griffins Creek was divided into four reaches with separate

plans for enhancement, restoration, or preservation of each reach. Enhancement plans for one of the reaches included placement of woody debris to raise an incised channel and an improved culvert at an existing road crossing. Two of the reaches were to be preserved with 300-foot buffers maintained on either side of the channel. We agreed with the enhancement and preservation goals for those reaches.

The reach south of Griffins Creek Road was to be restored, but depended on cooperation with Norfolk Southern in order to improve existing railway crossings of the creek. There is a railroad bridge over the former main channel of Griffins Creek, but the channel is blocked by sediment runoff

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## *Annual Meeting*

*Friends of Congaree Swamp will hold its Annual Meeting and Oyster Roast Sunday March 10, 2024, (the first day of Daylight Savings Time) at the Harriet Barber House in Hopkins. In addition to access to the house and grounds, tours of natural and cultural history sites in the area will be arranged.*

*Registration materials will be shared in the near future.*



## **Mitigation**

*continued from page 3*

and diverted into a ditch that travels east along the north side of the railroad embankment.

Cooperation by Norfolk Southern appeared entirely speculative, though perhaps it is possible in this case since

channel improvements, rather than crossing improvements, would be the only activity on Norfolk Southern property. Even if improvements were to take place, we noted the existing bridge crossing at Griffins Creek Road itself was immediately upstream of the reach, thus preventing a

full restoration of the reach.

The report included no information about the final dispensation of the property upon completion of the project. We recommended an appropriate conservation steward given the sensitive location of the property as an upgradient and upstream buffer to Congaree National Park.



## **National Public Lands Day**

*On National Public Lands Day, Friends of Congaree Swamp members participated in one of our three regularly-scheduled litter pick-ups at Bates Bridge landing on the Congaree River, as well as other sites along the U.S. 601 corridor. Later in the day, we collected the Adopt-a-Waterway Group of the Year award from our sponsor, Keep the Midlands Beautiful. Participants included, from left, Carol Gist, Robb Schmitt, Maureen Boggs, Kenny Boggs, Alice Steinke, Mary Bull, Clay Parker, Bailey Slice Parker, Johannes Stratmann, and Ed Ingram. Not pictured: Scott Wietetcha.*



## SwampFest

*Congaree National Park and the South East Rural Community Outreach (SERCO) recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of SwampFest. Friends of Congaree Swamp has staffed a table every year of the event. The annual festival, held the first weekend in October, celebrates the Lower Richland community's longstanding ties to park lands. Pictured above, from left, are Park Superintendent Greg Hauburger, VIP Robert Bouknight, and Chief Interpretive Ranger Jon Manchester, who staffed a table adjacent to the Friends' table. Over the years, we have met festival participants like David Garrick, at left, with great stories to share about the area.*

## Grego

*Continued from page 2*

and to approach it with an open and inquiring perspective. And he was someone that many of us emulated, consciously or otherwise, on our visits to the outdoors.

At Congaree National Park, he was probably best known for leading the annual Harry Hampton Memorial Walk, a tradition first started by ranger Fran Rametta soon after Harry's passing. The walks

were well-attended from their inception, and served as many local residents' first experience with the park. And they likely contributed as much as any event to Rudy's reputation for nature walks that threatened never to leave the parking lot.

Rudy and Jim Welch visited then-Congaree Swamp National Monument in May 1987 to film an episode NatureScene, the beloved SCETV program that ran from 1978 to 2003,

first with Beryl Dakers and then with Jim as co-host.

Fran fondly remembers serving as reptile wrangler, as Rudy caught snakes or turtles and then Fran would recapture and position them when they wandered out of frame.

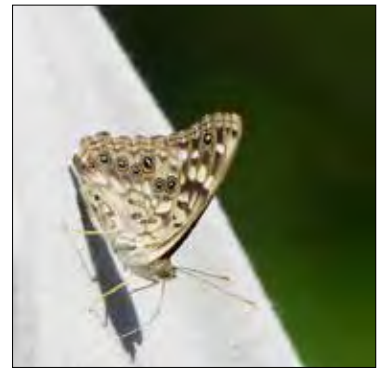
Taking place a couple years before Hurricane Hugo, the episode serves not only as a valuable historical resource of the park at the time, but as a chronicle of the pre-Hugo forest.



*Mating Gulf Fritillaries*



*Spicebush Swallowtail*



*Hackberry Emporor*

*We led one of three parties participating in the North American Butterfly Association August and September counts held by the Midlands Chapter of the Carolina Butterfly Society and Congaree National Park. All three parties saw much greater species diversity than usual during the August count. The September count produced its usual high species diversity, though no new species or rare sightings were added to the count database.*

## Save the date

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Matthews in Calhoun County.

The Congaree Swamp CBC often has among the highest counts in the country of Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Barred Owl, Blue-headed Vireo and others.

If you are a novice, an expert birder will lead you around the boardwalk in the morning, which is one of the park's best sites for interesting wintering species and permanent residents, including Winter Wren, Blue-headed Vireo, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Red-headed Woodpecker, and Rusty Blackbird.

Experienced birders can participate in one of our many parties spread throughout the circle. Those parties assigned to the main trail system will meet at the visitor center parking lot at 7 a.m. If interested, please contact John Grego

at (803) 331-3366, or email [friendsofcongareeswamp@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofcongareeswamp@gmail.com).

### Fort Motte Cliffs Hike

Come join us on **Saturday, Jan. 6** to learn more about the Calhoun County property we recently purchased from Kam Arant and donated to Audubon South Carolina. John Cely will lead a hike at Fort Motte Cliffs, featuring dramatic ravines and 150-foot cliffs that are over 30 million years old, overlooking Congaree National Park.

Meet at Congaree Bluffs Heritage Preserve parking lot off Turkey Track Lane (the second parking lot closer to the bluffs, not the first) at 9:30 a.m.

This is not a long hike, and will take place mostly along jeep trails. It should last until about 1 p.m. Regular hiking boots should be sufficient; bring a snack and water.

This outing is solely for members of Friends of Congaree Swamp and will be limited to 25 participants.

Contact John Cely at [cowasee@gmail.com](mailto:cowasee@gmail.com) to register.

### MLK Day of Service

As part of Martin Luther King Day of Service, Friends of Congaree Swamp members will meet at 9:30 a.m., **Monday, Jan. 15** at our Adopt-a-Stream site, Bates Bridge landing off U.S. 601, to collect trash at the Congaree River boat ramp, parking lot and access road.

Depending on attendance, some of us may drive to Bates Old River landing, Bates Ferry trailhead, Fork Swamp trailhead and Congaree Ferries pullout to clean those sites as well. We should wrap up about 11 a.m.

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, water, sun protection and a snack are recommended. Please contact John Grego at 803-331-3366 or [friendsofcongareeswamp@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofcongareeswamp@gmail.com) if interested.



# 2024 Congaree Research Symposium

Congaree National Park and Friends of Congaree Swamp are hosting the park's fourth research symposium on Thursday, February 1, 2024 and Friday, February 2, 2024—World Wetlands Day. The symposium will focus on the Congaree Biosphere Region, first established in 1983 and recertified in 2016. This event will take place at the University of South Carolina Pastides Alumni Center Ballroom. In-person attendance is anticipated.

## Thursday, February 1, 2024

6:00-7:00 PM **Reception**

7:00-7:30 PM **Welcome and Biosphere Introduction**

Opening remarks and overview of US Biosphere Reserve Network

**Gregory Hauburger** (Congaree National Park), **Cliff McCreedy** (NPS)

7:30-8:30 PM **Four Decades of the Congaree Biosphere Region**

**Fran Rametta** (NPS), **David Shelley** (US Forest Service), **Rachel Post** (DOI),

**Guillermo Espinosa** (SCDOT)

## Friday, February 2, 2024

9:00-10:15 AM **Session 1—Biodiversity and Conservation Research**

**Chair: John Kupfer**

**Robert Sobczak** (USGS)

**Janet Steele** (Clemson University): A thorny predicament: Assessing *Eleagnus* management strategies in wooded areas

**Joe Quattro** (USC): Population Genetic Structure for the Synchronous Firefly- *Photuris frontalis*

10:30-11:45 AM **Session 2—Integrating Local Communities in Research and Monitoring**

**Chair: Tamera Warren**

**Jessica Elfenbein** (USC): Shifting the Narrative: How Researching Congaree's Lumber, Wood Products and Forest Conservation Changes What We Know About SC's History

**Robert Reese** (Town of Eastover): The Lower Richland CEAL Collaborative: A STEM Social Justice Initiative

**Kirstin Dow** (USC): Heat Mapping in the Columbia Metro Region

1:00-2:15 PM **Session 3—Towards Environmentally Sustainable Regional Development in the Congaree Biosphere Region**

**Chair: John Grego**

**Jeremy Dertien** (University of Leipzig, Natura Connect): An Integrated Spatial Prioritization for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

**John Kupfer** (USC): Spatial patterns of conservation benefits, priorities, and barriers

**Lauren Doran** (Green Infrastructure Center): The Green Heart: Protecting and Connecting the Congaree Biosphere Region for Wildlife and People

2:30-3:45 PM **Session 4—Monitoring Data and Park Management Panel**

**Chair: Greg Hauburger**

**Gregory Cunningham** (US Forest Service), **Jonathan Manchester** (Congaree National Park), **Claudia Santiago**, (US EPA), **Liz Struhar** (US Forest Service).

4:00-5:00 pm **Session 5—The Future of Congaree Biosphere Region Panel**

**Chair: Cliff McCreedy**

**Marie Adams** (South East Rural Community Outreach), **Arik Jensen/Quinton**

**Epps** (Richland County), **Gregory Sprouse** (Central Midlands Council of Governments)

**Event Registration: [www.friendsofcongaree.org](http://www.friendsofcongaree.org)**





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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 _____
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_____ Partner \$100**	
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_____ Patron \$1000	
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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 - \$99, you may choose one of the following gift options:

- Baseball cap maroon \_\_\_\_\_ tan \_\_\_\_\_ tan visor \_\_\_\_\_  
Bandana with map of Congaree National Park gold \_\_\_\_\_ red \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*For a contribution of \$100 or more you may choose either a copy of *The Natural History of Congaree Swamp* \_\_\_\_\_ or one of the five gift options listed above. I do **NOT** wish to receive a membership gift \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to donate an additional \$ \_\_\_\_\_ .

**Thank you for supporting Friends of Congaree Swamp!**

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