



Friends of Congaree Swamp News

www.friendsofcongarree.org

Spring 2024

Save the date

Litter pickup

As a belated National Trails Day activity, Friends of Congaree Swamp members will meet at Bates Bridge landing on U.S. 601 on **Saturday, June 8**, to collect litter at the Congaree River boat ramp, parking lot and access road.

We'll meet at 9:30 a.m. and finish about 11 a.m. Depending on attendance and time, some of us may drive to other sites along U.S. 601 to clean those as well.

This is one of three regularly scheduled clean-ups that are part of the Adopt-a-Waterway program sponsored by Keep the Midlands Beautiful.

Keep the Midlands Beautiful will provide trash pickers, trash bags, gloves, etc. to assist with the clean-up and

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Persistence finally solves railroad low ford fill issue

In our Winter 2023 newsletter, we shared our initial discovery of the addition of new fill to an existing low ford at Running Creek by Norfolk Southern Railway Corporation to provide access to their railroad trestle through Congaree National Park.

After reporting the apparent violation to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, we awaited the results of their investigation. During the intervening period, we would occasionally check on the site and ask the Corps for progress on their investigation, but the Corps is famously tight-lipped until its investigations are complete.

Congaree National Park staff would sometimes forward emails from the Corps asking the park for information about the project: Was Norfolk Southern obeying

the Corps' stop-work order? Had fill been removed from the low ford? We would share what we observed on our periodic visits to the site, but the query did beg the question—why would the Corps rely on second-hand information from a non-profit they would not contact directly, rather than make site visits of their own?

We found out in March 2024 through Superintendent Greg Hauburger that the Corps had closed its investigation, and promptly issued a FOIA to review case documents. A chronology and analysis follows.

The Corps conducted a site visit promptly after our outreach in October 2022 and notified Norfolk Southern they were being investigated for a violation under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act—i.e., placing fill in a navigable waterway. A stop-work notice



Norfolk Southern trestle over Running Creek

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President's Corner

Dr. John Grego

Water quality sampling

I recently completed a S.C. Adopt-a-Stream workshop for water quality sampling volunteers who would like to become certified as trainers.

Adopt-a-Stream staff members are stretched thin and the Midlands area could use more trainers, but the proximal cause was the need to assist new efforts in Lower Richland to monitor air quality, water quality and water quantity.

This effort arose from state Department of Health and Environmental Control workshops in selected communities on disaster risk and resiliency funded through an initial Environmental Protection Agency grant.

At the Lower Richland workshops, discussions focused on October 2015 flooding and the possibility of toxic releases from local industries. Additional grant funding has been obtained to help put plans in place.

Robert Reese, Friends' new board member, worked with DHEC Environmental Justice



Streamside training

coordinator Keisha Long and University of South Carolina graduate student and DHEC intern Beata Dewitt and Adopt-a-Stream staff to coordinate Adopt-a-Stream training for Lower Richland residents and Lower Richland High School students.

In February, Friends of Congaree Swamp and DHEC held a workshop for Lower Richland residents, several of whom have been involved in local land development advocacy efforts. Robert Reese and Keisha Long actually completed the training as well.

Later, Lower Richland High School students participating in CEAL (Citizens Earning and Learning), a grant program organized by

Robert Reese, completed certification in another workshop co-sponsored by Friends and DHEC. Members of USC's Carolina Water Club provided logistical support during the training.

Access to water quality sampling equipment and supplies is one of the largest roadblocks to successfully adopting a site. Friends, for instance, does not own supplies but instead uses equipment funded by Richland

Soil & Water Conservation District. The CEAL program has purchased multiple kits, which will be available through local libraries.

Sampling site selection is another obstacle, as safe access to stream crossings along busy roadways is uncertain. Fortunately, Dominique Sanchez, a Mosaics in Science intern working under David Shelley's supervision in 2018, put together a comprehensive report on sampling conditions at every roadway stream crossing in Lower Richland, and we have worked with Beata Dewitt to identify the best candidate sites in that inventory.

Of course, we advocate for additional sampling sites within the park, and it is likely that a couple of these sites will be selected for monitoring.

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Dr. John Grego, President
Sharon H. Kelly, Editor

Good weather graces annual meeting

We had beautiful weather for the annual meeting March 10 at the Harriet Barber House grounds, hosted by SERCO (South East Rural Community Outreach).

A special tour of Denley Cemetery required coordination with Nancy Parr of Westinghouse, who arranged permissions and access. Some Friends members have family interred there, so this was a unique opportunity for a visit. Board member Neal Polhemus provided interpretation at the site.

Michael Robinson again served as host for a site visit to Goodwyn Cemetery. We prepared information from a survey of Goodwyn Cemetery conducted by the Chicora Foundation in 2011 at the request of SERCO.

Given the weather, more members than usual chose to enjoy the afternoon on the annual meeting grounds.

At our business meeting, we nominated continuing

board members LaBruce Alexander, Carolyn Hudson, Neal Polhemus and Tameria Warren for new three-year terms. We acknowledged retiring board members Michael Dantzler and David Schuetrum. In particular, we recognized David's many contributions since he burst onto the scene after his retirement 9 years ago.

Former chief interpretive ranger Gregory Cunningham, who has made invaluable contributions in organizing our various symposia in recent years, agreed to be nominated, as did Robert Reese. Robert, who grew up in Eastover and returned in 2018, has been active in environmental and social justice issues, and serves with Congaree Biosphere Region and the U.S. Biosphere Network. The entire slate of board members was approved by acclamation.

Greg Cunningham then presented Carrie Sinkler-Parker with the Order of the Cypress. Carrie first approached Greg in 2016 to participate in a modest program at libraries in Kingstree and



Greg Cunningham presents Carrie Sinkler-Parker with the Order of the Cypress.

Williamsburg, but plans blossomed through a National Park Foundation Every Kid in Parks Transportation grant, with over 900 students visiting Congaree National Park from Williamsburg, Clarendon, Sumter and Lee counties.

Friends of Congaree Swamp assisted through National Environmental Education Fund's Every Day Event Grant. Subsequent years brought more grants, and by 2020, over 6,000 children from Title One schools had visited Congaree National Park with Carrie accompanying them on every trip.

Carrie was generous and heartfelt in her remarks, thanking park interpretive staff Greg and Jon Manchester, calling out park volunteers Kate Hartley and Jeanie Prothro, and effusively praising Friends of Congaree Swamp for the modest part we played in her astonishing efforts on



Friends members listen during the business meeting.

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Journals help document park's history

By John Grego

Former park ranger Fran Rametta made his first entry in a periodic journal he maintained at the park in June 1980. We shared that entry in our Fall 2010 newsletter.

Fran's journal is one of many materials maintained as a physical archive at the park by Theresa Yednock. Neal Polhemus, motivated by the article, has visited the archive and studied both Fran's journals and ranger Guy Taylor's weekly management reports, among a host of other materials.

Guy's journals are interesting for a variety of reasons: they capture an era of co-management of soon-to-be park lands with Cedar Creek Hunt Club; they document the first park records of many features now familiar to us (and some we are still puzzling out); and they document early interactions with a host of park advocates, researchers and educators.

I made a brief exploratory visit to the archives this past winter, in part to document Fran's first Congaree Biosphere Reserve application in the fall of 1980. In scanning entries of interest by both Guy and Fran, I felt it would be interesting to share more of these entries as a regular feature in the newsletter. Even the simplest entry reference can lead to an article-length exposition, so I'll generally err on the side of brevity in these accounts. So pull out your John Cely

map and follow along.

The accompanying sidebar includes a portion of Guy Taylor's weekly management report for the week of December 4-8, 1978. On Wednesday, December 6, 1978, Guy accompanies L.L. "Chick" Gaddy on a foundational natural resources survey.

Chick has carried out natural resources surveys at the park for decades, both as a researcher and contractor. He is known to many Friends members as the author of *The Natural History of Congaree Swamp* with John Cely, our coveted gift book for \$100 donors.

The New Road is the

logging road that was cut south from South Cedar Creek landing when the Beidler family resumed logging in Congaree Swamp starting in 1969. The Kingsnake Trail follows the footprint of this road south to Bridge K.

The archeology survey crew would presumably have been led by James Michie of the University of South Carolina's Institute of Archeology and Anthropology, who published his archeological survey in July 1980. There are multiple cattle mounds near the New Road, with the closest being

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Excerpt from Guy Taylor's weekly report

Wednesday and Thursday, Dec. 6 & 7, 1978: I accompanied L.L. Gaddy while he worked on the Natural Resources Survey. On Wednesday we worked mainly in the "New Road" area.

We met the archeology survey crew and showed them the location of a mound near Horsepen Gut. They stated that they had located several sites in the area.

On Thursday, we took Gaddy's boat and the park boat and went to the Beidler Tract on the Congaree River. We left his boat at the mouth of Cedar Creek and took the park boat up river to the Cedar Creek cutoff known as the Mazique cutoff. We followed Cedar Creek to Tom's Creek, locating

a possible record Box Elder on the south bank of the creek.

By going up Tom's Creek, we located the north boundary, and checked much of the area adjoining the Georgia Pacific land. The creeks were all quite high and flowing rapidly.

An excellent site for a backcountry camp was located on the high ground near the north boundary. We saw the remains of two old roadbeds across cypress bogs. One was near the Brady tract and another across Cedar Creek from the lower cabin.

We were unable to locate a possible record Chestnut Oak reported by Mr. Burnside, but apparently did not go far enough down the Brady east line.

Forest tent caterpillar outbreak subsides

Despite a couple reports of massed caterpillars this spring, it appears the latest forest tent caterpillar outbreak has ended, lasting three years from 2021 to 2023.

Forest tent caterpillars are native to the U.S., but periodically experience explosive growths in population.

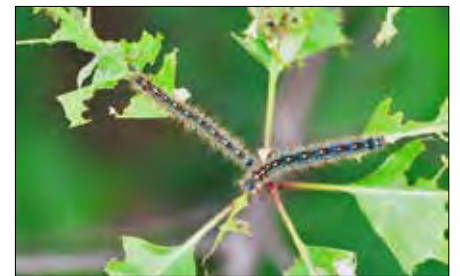
At the park, these outbreaks were most obvious along the low boardwalk, as Water Tupelo, one of their preferred host plants, were completely stripped of leaves in spring. A gentle rain of frass fell on unwitting visitors' heads, and caterpillars swarmed boardwalk railings, posts and benches.

The outbreaks rarely cause permanent damage to trees, and subside as caterpillars succumb to a combination of diseases, a variety of natural predators, and cold weather.

The previous outbreak



Above, a forest tent caterpillar encounters a skink as it searches for food. At right, caterpillars feast on tree leaves. Their feeding generally does not kill deciduous trees as they can produce another set of leaves during the same season. Healthy trees can tolerate two to three consecutive years of heavy defoliation.



at Congaree National Park was more than 20 years ago, from 2000 to 2001. Informal inquiries have not identified the outbreak that preceded that event, though we did uncover an historical outbreak in 1842.

As reported in our Spring

2011 newsletter, countless caterpillars crossing the rails brought a Louisville, Cincinnati and Charleston Railroad locomotive to a halt shortly after completion of a trestle across the Congaree River floodplain.

Journals

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the Big Lake cattle mound.

Guy then describes a Thursday boat trip with Chick. The boat trip took place during a time when Cedar Creek between Mazyck's Cut-off (here listed as Mazique Cutoff and elsewhere in Guy's reports as Zeke's Cutoff) and its mouth was still navigable. As John Cely and others have documented, that reach, starting with a massive logjam just beyond Mazyck's Cut,

can no longer be paddled.

The excellent backcountry campsite along Toms Creek near the northern boundary of the Beidler Tract could well be the landing at Jack Hole. The references to old road beds are a little cryptic, though John Cely notes a possible log dike across a cypress slough just upstream from the lower cabin.

The lower cabin of Guy's entries is John LeMoine's cabin, indicated as "J. LeMoine's cabin" on John Cely's map near the mouth of Cedar Creek. John LeMoine was a hunt

club member who operated a furniture store and was a skilled carpenter and wood carver. Like other hunt club members, he staked out a portion of the Beidler tract and built a shelter for personal use.

The record Chestnut Oak reported by Marion Burnside, manager of the Cedar Creek Hunt Club, presumably a Swamp Chestnut Oak, does not appear in any of the various big tree databases compiled by researchers at the park, including an early survey by Robert Jones.

Fill

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was placed on the site pending the investigation.

Norfolk Southern responded in November 2022, claiming the fill was intended to be temporary. Regardless of whether it was temporary, they then went on to argue that an exemption existed under Section 404, and whether or not that exemption applied, the activity would be permissible under a Nationwide Permit (i.e., a permit for wetlands fill with limited impact).

The Corps requested more information, asked for prior notification of any other maintenance activities, and responded that an Individual Nationwide Permit application was necessary for any improvement of the access road. There was considerable back-and-forth over whether the activity was exempt. The Corps cited a statute that maintenance activities did not allow for a change in the causeway design and required Norfolk Southern to show that they had satisfied all conditions for a 404 exemption.

Norfolk Southern's attorney responded with a lengthy argument that the work was exempt, and tried to establish that the access road was long-standing, though no evidence was provided to support the history of the low ford.

The Corps sought the legal opinion of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which stated that the improvements to the low ford did not meet the requirements for an exemption. In July 2023, the Corps notified Norfolk Southern that it agreed with EPA's interpretation of the Clean Water Act. The fill would need to be removed under a restoration plan, but could remain in place until maintenance to the trestle was complete.

The removal of more than 300 cubic yards of unauthorized fill was completed by October 2023. In fact, additional causeway fill was removed in order to improve the angle of approach to the low grade. In November 2023, the Corps notified Norfolk Southern that the case was resolved.

During negotiations, the Corps had suggested how

the pre-existing ford could be replaced through an Individual Nationwide Permit.

In December 2023, after the investigation was closed, Norfolk Southern followed up with a nationwide permit application to replace the existing gravel bed of the low ford—at the same elevation—with a concrete revetment mattress that would be more stable.

There was no public notification of this project, and it was quickly permitted, with concurrence from the state Department of Health and Environmental Control and the EPA in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

At the end of the day, the ford was restored to its pre-existing condition. Throughout the process, we have been disappointed that the Corps did not monitor the project on-site, and so could not fully confirm compliance.

Our observations about compliance were largely qualitative, and should not have been the sole source of verification outside Norfolk Southern and its consultants.

We contacted Southern Environmental Law Center in October 2022 when we first noted the causeway fill, and they counseled, once they learned the Corps had opened a substantive investigation, to wait for the Corps' process to reach a conclusion.

We have since shared the FOIA documents with SELC to have another set of eyes on the process and determine whether follow-up actions may be available.



Trail clearing crew

From left, Bob McGinness, Michelle Wilcox, Adam Elvington, David Scott and Julie Poppell helped clear the Oakridge trail in February. With fewer but larger crews, better saws, and webbing straps for dragging logs we are able to handle larger objects than in the past.



Spring bounty

It's been far too long since we last invited ethnobiologist Gail Wagner, left, to lead a hike as she did in March. She brought a cornucopia of visual aids, including baskets, traditional seeds, plants and nuts, and baskets and fibers. The theme for this hike was spring greens, as featured in the spring salad, above. Several of us were sent home with native and roadside plants for our gardens.

Save the date

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we will use the dumpster onsite 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, while cleaning litter along the way.

Big tree hike

On **Saturday, June 15**, we will travel west of the entrance road to visit big trees near the Hurricane Islands.

Along the bluff itself, we will stop by a newly identified Shortleaf Pine that is likely a state co-champion. We will then cross between Little Hurricane Island and Big Hurricane Island to visit a trio of Loblolly Pines, each more than 15 feet around.

We will continue around Big Hurricane Island to visit a band of old-growth Baldcypress, hiding in plain sight along the north bank of Cedar Creek. There will be other sights along the way, including traces of moonshining and hunting.

Meet at the Visitor Center at 9 a.m. This is not a long hike, though it will be off-trail and there will be one or two wet spots to negotiate. Regular hiking boots should be sufficient; bring a snack, insect repellent and water. This outing is solely for members of Friends of Congaree Swamp and will be limited to 25 participants.

To sign up for either of these events, contact John Grego at friendsofcongaresswamp@gmail.com or (803) 331-3366.

Meeting

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behalf of South Carolina's schoolchildren. We could not reciprocate the sentiment of her closing remarks more strongly: "In accepting this award, again, Friends of Congaree, you are a part of my life, but more importantly, you are a part of (the lives of) nearly 7,000 children. . ."

John Sparrow with the Oyster Bar roasted oysters from the Virginia tidelands, while numerous Friends members contributed roast vegetables, side dishes and desserts.

In addition to our SERCO hosts, we would like thank Carla and Robb Schmitt for the transport, storage and reheating of side dishes at their nearby family house.

And a special acknowledgement to the growing number of volunteers who enthusiastically assisted with set-up, registration, food preparation, beverages, and clean up, with apologies to anyone we overlooked: Cathy Adan, Kathryn Barton, Frank Barton, Mary Balbach, Jim Bulak, Mary Bull, Billy Easterbrooks, Stuart Greeter, Kate Hartley, Gerrit Jobsis, Michael Korash, and Kathleen Lewis.

Also, John Newman, Bailey Parker, Clay Parker, Jill Polhemus, Neal Polhemus, Dennis Poole, Philoma Skipper, Bill Stangler, Alice Steinke, Ted Steinke, Glenda Swearingen, Butch Thompson, and Angela Valvasori.



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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 _____ 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!

Friends of Congaree Swamp, P.O. Box 7746, Columbia, SC 29202-7746
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