



Friends of Congaree Swamp News

Save the date

Butterfly count

The North American Butterfly Association September count at Congaree National Park occurs at the peak of butterfly diversity in the park; other fauna and flora put on a show as well.

This year's count will be held **Saturday, September 16**, starting at 9 a.m. Marty and David Kastner, members of the Midlands Chapter of the Carolina Butterfly Society, are organizing the annual event.

Participants will spend the day counting butterflies within various habitats in the park. The count will last until about 3 p.m., weather permitting, though you can help out for just a couple hours or stay for the entire day.

We will meet at the Harry Hampton Visitor Center then split into teams. All

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Friends helps to protect Calhoun County tract

By Dick Watkins

In July 2023, Friends of Congaree Swamp successfully completed a multi-year collaboration with the landowner and Audubon South Carolina to permanently protect 400 acres on the south side of the Congaree River, in the Fort Motte community of Calhoun County.

Congaree National Park is entirely north of the Congaree River. The river's forested floodplain is narrower south of the river with towering bluffs at the floodplain's edge. Nearly all lands along the south side of the river are in private ownership.

Among such riverfront tracts is the 400-acre Arant tract. It is only 150 feet downriver from S.C. Department of Natural Resources' 201-acre Congaree Bluffs Heritage Preserve and one mile upriver from the American Revolutionary site of Fort Motte.

The Arant tract has 0.7 mile of river frontage, and the tract's bluffs are close to the river. Bluff elevation is 150 feet higher than floodplain elevation, providing views of the river and panoramic views overlooking Congaree National Park. During the 1800s, maps and newspaper articles referred to this area as Lovers Leap.

The north-facing bluffs host plants that are more typically found in South Carolina's foothills and mountains, including mountain laurel and sourwood.



View of the Congaree River from Lovers Leap.

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President's Corner

Dr. John Grego

David Stahle visit

After Friends of Congaree Swamp arranged a talk and visit to Congaree National Park by dendroclimatologist David Stahle of the University of Arkansas-Little Rock (see our Winter 2022 newsletter), David expressed his intention to obtain a research permit and return to the park to core the park's old-growth bald cypress.



David Stahle cores a bald cypress

Coring the park's bald cypress has been of long-term interest to Friends of Congaree Swamp, though the park's resource managers, protective of the old-growth trees, have been reluctant to encourage coring. David's international stature in climatology persuaded the park to issue a permit that allowed coring to study climate and stream-flow history in the Congaree River floodplain.

His original plan to visit in mid-winter had to be postponed due to flooding at the park, and he returned instead in late May. Photographer Mac Stone and a film crew accompanied

David on the trip to document his efforts, and David's works will be featured in the September 2023 issue of *National Geographic* magazine.

Friends members John Cely, Graham Norman, and Neal Polhemus, whose work surveying the park's old-growth bald cypress was shared in our Summer 2021 newsletter, helped David plan the trip. Prior to coring, Graham guided Mac Stone and the film crew to suitable sites in the park. David then cored trees over a long weekend, with help from Graham, Neal, John and David Scheutrum, while Mac Stone and the film crew recorded David's efforts.

Though the filming slowed progress, by the end of the visit over 30 standing trees and over 10 felled trunks had been cored.

David plans to visit the park later in the year for additional coring, and has added Friends members to his research permit, so that additional coring can be conducted in his absence. We look forward to sharing the results of David's research in future newsletters.

New directional signs

Earlier in the year, we noticed that the park's directional signs on Old Bluff Road at the intersection with Mt View Road had faded to a sickly greenish brown. We called the Richland maintenance office



of the S.C. Department of Transportation and asked them to replace the signs. They were suitably prompt and the new more-welcoming signs are now in place.

On a related matter, we applied for and received an encroachment permit so that the park could place directional signs for Fork Swamp Trail along U.S. 601, similar to the current signs in place for Bates Ferry Trail. SCDOT owns the easement, and requires a permit for any signage in its easement. Park staff will have six months to install the signs, which should draw additional visitor attention to the eastern end of the park.

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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

Research symposium planning underway

Planning is well underway for the 2024 Congaree Research Symposium, to be held Thursday evening, February 1 and Friday, February 2, 2024 (World Wetlands Day) at the University of South Carolina Alumni Center.

The symposium will feature the Congaree Biosphere Region, first recognized in 1983 and re-certified in 2017. Session topics are inspired by the goals of Congaree Biosphere Region in particular, and United States Biosphere Network and UNESCO World Network of Biospheres in general.

Accordingly, the symposium will feature sessions on biodiversity conservation



and research, integrating local communities in monitoring for ecosystem health, environmentally sustainable regional development, and research monitoring to inform visitor and resource management.

In addition, the opening session will feature Cliff McCreedy, Science and Stewardship coordinator with the National Park Service and federal liaison to the U.S. Biosphere Network,

and trace the history of Congaree Biosphere Region. The closing panel, including South East Rural Community Outreach, Richland County, and Central Midlands Council of Governments, will discuss the future of the Congaree Biosphere Region.

In addition to Friends of Congaree Swamp, sponsors will include Congaree Biosphere Region, whose advisory council includes Congaree National Park, South East Rural Community Outreach, and Central Midlands Council of Governments.

Registration will be available later this year through Friends of Congaree Swamp's website.

Friends assists with hog management

As part of our simplified partnership agreement with Congaree National Park, we develop an annual work plan in collaboration with the park, which is then shared with National Park Service's associate regional director for partnership, interpretation and education.

One of the featured projects this year proposed support for the park's feral hog management efforts. Park staff presented several options to the Friends board, including funding a two-month gap in a joint contract between the park and USDA-APHIS (U.S. Department of

Agriculture-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service) that supports the work of Scott Johnson.

Scott monitors, traps and shoots hogs both in the park and properties near the park. The funding gap occurs at a critical time—during the fall mast season, when hogs are particularly active in feeding during the day.

The park has closed portions of the backcountry during the fall specifically for feral hog hunts.

The board approved up to \$10,000 to support Scott's contract; we will negotiate our donation with USDA-



Feral hog

APHIS rather than National Park Service. In addition to Scott's work, the board supported funding for the park's own efforts at feral hog management, primarily for a range of equipment including

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Scout Motors mitigation plan has issues

After Project Connect was identified as Scout Motors' electric vehicle manufacturing facility in March 2023, the environmental community anxiously awaited mitigation plans to offset the inevitable impact on wetlands and streams on the 2,581-acre Blythewood site.

Project Connect's Conceptual Permittee-Responsible Mitigation Plan, submitted by S.C. Department of Commerce and Richland County, was released for public notice on June 1, 2023. Friends of Congaree Swamp joined other environmental organizations and private citizens in providing comments. Our public comments covered multiple aspects of the proposal, though we did not take a close look at planned mitigation and stormwater measures on site.

Crane Creek Watershed.

There is no sugar-coating the impact on Beasley Creek in the Crane Creek watershed—over 7 miles (38,152 linear feet) of its network of headwaters will be completely filled or piped, almost 74 acres of wetlands will be filled, and over 38 acres of open water (ponds) will be altered.

The destruction of these headwaters will have consequences for the Crane Creek watershed downstream, whose neighborhoods have been the focus of multiple efforts to promote and improve them. As part of the Richland County Penny Tax greenway program,

three greenway sections were proposed along Crane Creek, from the Broad River to Denny Terrace and Haskell Heights.

The Crane Creek watershed is also the only area protected in Richland County's Land Development Code under its Neighborhood Master Plans. Among the purposes of the Crane Creek Neighborhood District are several that promote conservation goals, which could be expedited by mitigation in the watershed.

The current mitigation plan requires that only 10 percent of mitigation take place in the Piedmont and we assumed that mitigation in the Crane Creek watershed would be a priority. Instead, the plan proposes protecting Shelton Island—an island in the Broad River in Fairfield County 40 miles upstream from the mouth of Crane Creek.

The proposal at Shelton Island struggles to find meaningful mitigation opportunities—it focuses almost entirely on preservation of the island's riverbanks, with little enhancement of wetlands and no restoration of wetlands. If mitigation is to take place in the Broad River watershed, we argued it should take place in Richland County in the Crane Creek watershed.

Congaree floodplain properties. The two Congaree floodplain properties proposed for mitigation are a 3,047-acre property, owned by Congaree River LLC, and

an 1,855.09-acre property owned by FBSC LLC.

Both properties are bordered on the south by the Congaree River. The first property is the site of Millaree Hunt Club, which shares a boundary with Westinghouse not far from existing groundwater contaminant plumes, and has extensive frontage on Mill Creek. The latter property includes Green Hill Lake and Green Hill "mound," and an African-American cemetery that Chicora Foundation was unable to confirm in their report on Richland County cemeteries, graves and burial grounds.

The most effective mitigation on both sites would either restore or enhance the function of the extensive set of floodplain channels or "guts" on the sites by removing roadbeds/culverts, constructing bridges and blocking drainage ditches.

Recent research by Prof. Ray Torres of the University of South Carolina (see our Winter 2021 newsletter) has shown that these floodplain channels are critical to floodplain function in the upper portion of Congaree National Park's floodplain, and would presumably be critical at the mitigation site as well.

Restoring upland streams is typically more intensive than restoring floodplain guts, and it's a matter of debate how credits should be computed in this context. Other mitigation includes preservation of existing

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Scout

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guts and streams (including Mill Creek's south bank) and preservation or enhancement of wetlands and upland buffers.

The sites are located in the COWASEE Basin, two to four miles upstream from Richland County's Mill Creek parcels and five to seven miles upstream from Congaree National Park. Preservation of these tracts would be an outstanding addition to conservation properties located in the Congaree floodplain.

Nonetheless, the accelerated schedule in preparing this mitigation bank leaves us uncertain whether the claimed stream and wetlands credits have been accurately calculated, and hence whether the proposed mitigation would be adequate to compensate for the loss of waters in the Crane Creek watershed.

Nearby sites in the Congaree floodplain required much closer scrutiny when proposed as mitigation banks, with one site adjacent to the proposed parcels never receiving U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approval, though there are strong similarities between that plan and the proposed plan.

While reviewing the plan, problems with claimed mitigation are readily apparent. In one case, the supposedly preserved portion of a gut is crossed by a road to be kept in place and maintained, with no apparent bridge or culvert treatment; a review of LiDAR imagery confirms that the gut is greatly impaired on the western

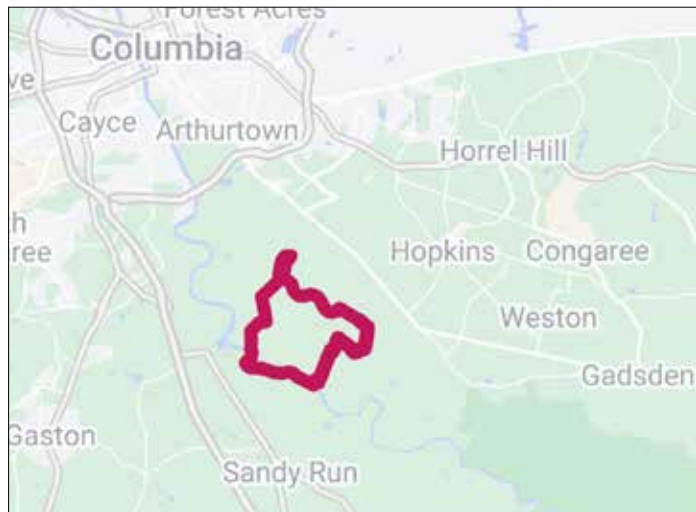
side of the road. The portion of the gut to the west of the road cannot be considered a healthy stream eligible for preservation, and hence should not have received credits. Though this is only a single instance, it does suggest that a more thorough credit-by-credit review is necessary.

Richland County Mitigation Bank. The mitigation package includes 42,510 stream credits from the Richland County Mitigation Bank. The stream credits are specifically from the former holdings of Mill Creek Mitigation Holdings LLC's portion of the bank, rather than the county's portion of the bank.

We were initially concerned that credits from existing mitigation banks were being largely overlooked and were pleased that some portion of the county's mitigation bank upstream of Congaree National Park will be included in the mitigation plan.

Wetlands credits from the county mitigation bank will not be used, presumably because sites included in the Permittee-Responsible Mitigation Plan for additional stream credits have substantial wetlands credits of their own.

Nonetheless, when permittee-responsible mitigation plans are favored



Map of Congaree floodplain mitigation area

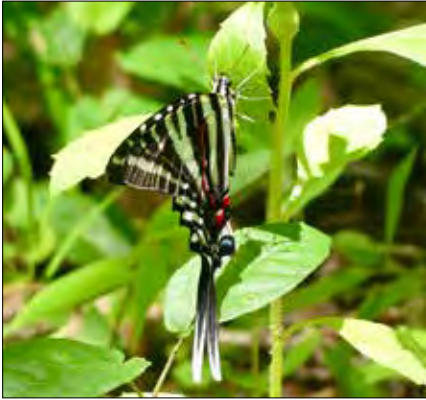
over existing banks, incentives for creating the banks may go away. Further, given the urgent nature of preparing permittee-responsible mitigation plans, the market for preserving other floodplain properties can be distorted.

Mitigation funds. Though not listed in the notice, mitigation funds will be set aside for watershed projects. Given the county's stormwater abatement measures, which are not designed to handle the most extreme rainfall/runoff events, the Crane Creek watershed is sure to be impacted by the project. We argued Crane Creek should be a high priority for any such funds.

Given the massive scale of the project and the uncertain mitigation analysis, and the lack of a thorough environmental analysis, Friends requested an Environmental Impact Statement. Additional mitigation lands and funding, and more properly targeted mitigation, are needed to meet the project's goals.

Save the date

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Zebra Swallowtail

ages and experience levels are welcome. Appropriate clothing is required, including long pants and closed-toed shoes.

Butterflies like the sun, so bring sun protection and plenty of water. Snacks or lunch are also recommended. Close-focus binoculars are recommended as well, but not required.

To RSVP, please contact Marty Kastner at kastners@aol.com.

Litter pickup

As part of National Public Lands Day, Friends of Congaree Swamp members will meet **Saturday, Sept. 23**, at our Adopt-a-Waterway site, Bates Bridge landing on U.S. 601, to collect trash at the

Hogs

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traps, net traps, cameras and memory cards, and bait.

With the departure of David Shelley and Claudia Santiago, a portion of whose duties included feral hog monitoring and coordination with USDA-

Congaree River boat ramp, parking lot and access road.

We will meet at 9:30 a.m. and work until 11 a.m.

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.

Keep the Midlands Beautiful, which sponsors Adopt-a-Waterway, will provide trash pickers, trash bags, gloves, etc. to assist with the clean-up 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. Please contact John Grego at friendsofcongaresswamp@gmail.com or 803-331-3366 if interested.

Migratory bird hike

Join us **Sunday, October 1**, for a fall hike to look for migratory birds moving through the park on their way to points

APHIS, the park's feral hog management lacked leadership in the short term. We agreed with Superintendent Gregory Hauburger to await new appointments in stewardship and resource management before providing additional resources for the park's feral hog management.

south. This is also a chance to see if we can still find some of our breeding migrant species that have not yet moved on.

During the hike, we will

have the opportunity to practice identification skills (mostly of resident and lingering summer species), and will be able to observe several species up close—American Redstart are always found in large numbers and thrush



Pileated Woodpecker

may be found foraging in undergrowth. We plan to cover other areas of the park both preceding and following the morning hike and welcome additional volunteers.

We will meet at the Harry Hampton Visitor Center at 8:30 a.m. and the hike should last until noon. Bring water, insect repellent and binoculars.

The hike will follow portions of the Sims Trail, Boardwalk Loop Trail and Firefly Trail. There should be an opportunity afterwards to visit the eastern end of the park.

If interested, contact John Grego at (803) 331-3366 or friendsofcongaresswamp@gmail.com.

Tract

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At its northeastern corner, the Arant tract includes part of an old river channel, now a backwater cove. Directly across the Congaree River is the oxbow lake known as Devil's Elbow.

The Arant family has owned this 400-acre tract since 1949, when Thomas D. Arant, Sr. purchased it. In recent years, a third generation of the family has owned the tract—Samuel Arant and his sister-in-law Kam Arant, widow of Thomas M. Arant. Sam had resided at the property since the 1990s.

The Arant family began efforts in 2012 to protect the tract with a conservation easement. The process encountered delays, including severe reductions in South Carolina Conservation Bank funding to pay landowners

for conservation easements.

In 2018, Sam Arant and Kam Arant transferred the tract into a Limited Liability Company (LLC), which they named The Fort Motte Cliffs, LLC.

As Sam's health declined in 2020, a proposal was formulated to conserve the property: Continue efforts to protect the Fort Motte Cliffs (Arant) tract with a conservation easement, after which Friends of Congaree Swamp would purchase the property. Friends of Congaree Swamp would then donate the property to become part of an Audubon South Carolina preserve at Fort Motte.

The Friends of Congaree Swamp Board of Directors of approved the proposal in December 2020.

Sam Arant died in June 2021, less than two weeks

before the National Audubon Society's Board of Directors voted to accept future donation of the Arant tract.

As the only surviving member of The Fort Motte Cliffs LLC, Kam Arant persevered to protect the Arant tract. She and her attorney turned to Ducks Unlimited (DU) as the potential grantee for the conservation easement. DU agreed to shepherd the conservation easement process, which included applying for South Carolina Conservation Bank funding. Such funding enables the landowner to be paid for part of the conservation easement's value.

In September 2022, the Conservation Bank's Board of Directors approved funding for the Arant tract conservation easement.

On July 5, 2023, the conservation easement was signed; Wetlands America Trust (Ducks Unlimited) is the grantee. Friends of Congaree Swamp purchased the Arant tract on July 6, then donated the Arant tract on July 7 to the National Audubon Society (Audubon South Carolina).

The Arant tract is the first tract to be acquired (owned) by Audubon for the new preserve along the south side of the river. Several adjacent tracts will be donated in the future, and conservation buyers are already working to purchase several other tracts.



Friends members gathered at Bates Bridge Landing on National Trails Day in June to pick up litter. In addition to the landing, we cleared Fork Swamp Trail and Bates Ferry trailhead. From left are Hank Stallworth, Julie Poppell, Scott Wietetcha, Todd Johnston, Mark Kinzer, Ed Ingram and David Scott.



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Individual \$15 Name(s) _____
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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!

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