



Friends of Congaree Swamp News

www.friendsofcongarree.org

Summer 2025

Save the date

Butterfly Count

The September North American Butterfly Association Count at Congaree National Park will be held **Saturday, September 20**.

The event occurs at the peak of butterfly diversity in the park and wildflowers and other pollinators will also be found in abundance.

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 9 a.m. at the Harry Hampton Visitor

*See **Save the date**, page 6*

Park Service budget status

In our Spring 2025 newsletter, we covered several aspects of the administration's impacts upon the National Park Service in general and Congaree National Park in particular. Since then, the major action of interest has been the National Park Service budget for Fiscal Year 2026.

The Secretary of Interior proposed a 32 percent cut in the park service's operating budget, which funds visitor services, resource management, park protection, facilities operations and maintenance, and park support (see table on page 7).

A proposed 50.5 percent cut in resource stewardship was particularly severe. At Congaree National Park, resource stewardship would encompass feral hog management, forest management including controlled burns, invasive plant species management, wilderness management, and research to support resource stewardship.

It was difficult to discern, though, how these cuts would affect individual park units such as Congaree National Park, since the administration had expressed a desire to turn park units over to state control and the cuts may have anticipated this process.

The U.S. House Committee on Appropriations passed a budget proposal in mid-July for the Department of Interior, Environment and Other Related Agencies that restored much of the National Park Service budget, though it still represented a 6 percent cut in park management.

We contacted Senator Lindsay Graham's office afterwards, since he serves on the Senate Committee on Appropriations and chairs the Senate Committee on Finance. Along with other advocacy groups, we noted the substantial improvements in the House proposal, while requesting full funding for the park service. In late July, the Senate Committee on Appropriations released its budget on a 26-2 vote, and restored full funding for National Park Service operations.

Both the House and Senate budgets restore Interior cuts that zeroed out Centennial Challenge grants, which are matching grants between park units and park partners. (Friends of Congaree Swamp received a Centennial Challenge grant to help the park purchase a power boat that they use to this day for resource management

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President's Corner

Dr. John Grego

2026 Congaree Research Symposium

The 2026 Congaree Research Symposium will focus on 50 years of research at Congaree Swamp, honoring the fiftieth year since the establishment of the Congaree Swamp National Monument.

The biennial event will be held Friday, January 30, 2026, at the University of South Carolina's Pastides Alumni Center.

Scientific testimony played a prominent role in the 1970's advocacy leading to the protection of Congaree Swamp, and research at the park since then has played an integral part in understanding its natural and cultural resources. Though Congaree is a small park, its Old-Growth Bottomland Forest Research and Education Center is one of only 17 learning centers in the national park system.

Park staff participated in the initial planning for the event, but withdrew based on administration directives that National Park Service staff outreach should focus on visitor-centered services. Research outreach, such as presentations and attendance at research events has been greatly curtailed, and it was uncertain if staff could participate in the event in an official capacity.

Needless to say, the program was greatly impacted, since staff could not assist with planning or serve as presenters. The organizing committee chose to press forward with the event, which will include an overview of research at the park. Sessions will focus on the three significant

statements in the park's October 2014 Foundation Document:

1. Congaree National Park protects the nation's largest remaining tract of Southern old-growth bottomland forest and a significant expanse of associated floodplain.

2. Congaree National Park preserves unique regional cultural history, archeological sites, and landscape features that document evolving agricultural, commercial, and social practices in the bottomlands and forests of the South Carolina Midlands.

3. Congaree National Park wilderness preserves the wilderness character of the largest expanse of old-growth bottomland forest in the National Wilderness Preservation System and provides opportunities to experience solitude, challenge, and adventure that are unique to this landscape..

Our closing panel's theme, originally intended to focus on the next 50 years of research at the park, has been modified to focus on foreseeable impacts of administration actions upon natural and cultural resources.

We will share a program and provide registration information for this free event in coming months.

Maintenance support

Park staffing has been relatively unaffected by administration actions that have reduced staffing elsewhere in the National Park Service. Even with a full complement of staff, the park could use assistance in all areas of operation, especially since the increases in visitation places pressures upon park resources. Prior to our recent board retreat, we approached Superintendent Greg Hauburger for potential projects for our Annual Work Plan, and he suggested that Friends support a seasonal (6-month) employee.

The board strongly supported hiring a seasonal maintenance employee, who could also provide support for our volunteer maintenance activities (e.g., trail-clearing).

Our Annual Work Plan for the upcoming year will include funding to fully support a seasonal maintenance employee. We plan to make this an annual commitment. It is well within our resources for the short term, and we are confident Friends members will support the position in the future through their donations.

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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

County working on comprehensive plan

Richland County has been drafting its Comprehensive Plan and recently completed Phase II, which sought public input on Draft Guiding Principles, Draft Goals, Draft Place Types and three different scenarios for land-use planning.

The Draft Guiding Principles appear so brief as to resist critique, though they encompass admirable ideas such as Protected Natural Environment, Sustainable and Equitable Development, Celebrated Cultural History, Economic Vitality, and Equitable Access and Connectivity. These principles are further elaborated under Draft Goals. Nonetheless, the principles and goals fall short on a couple important themes: watershed and landscape-level protections, and climate change.

The goals listed for Protected Natural Environment do address climate resilience, including threats of flooding and extreme heat, though no reference is made to the increasing likelihood of such events under climate change.

Prof. Kirstin Dow's recent Urban Heat Island Mapping Initiative in partnership with NOAA, mapped temperature disparities in the City of Columbia and parts of unincorporated Richland County and discussed the effect of extreme heat upon livability, public health and emergency preparedness. In light of such research, the county needs

to place greater emphasis on preparedness for climate change.

Conserving natural areas and critical wildlife habitat are highlighted, but should reference the importance of corridors in meeting these goals, as confirmed by various green infrastructure analyses that have been prepared for the county and the Midlands.

During the development of the county's Land Development Code, environmental groups consistently argued for better protection of the county's watersheds. A Water Resources Overlay (WR-O) zoning district is part of the code, but provides weak protection for the county's water resources and has only been narrowly applied to date.

With so many of the county's watersheds listed as impaired or compromised by development, additional terminology on protecting water resources is needed under this principle, emphasizing watershed-level protection.

There were several points of agreement when reading the elaborations on the Draft Guiding Principles contained in Draft Goals. As an example, one of the goals under Economic Vitality—Leverage Richland County's cultural and natural assets to enhance heritage tourism, recreation, and place-based economic development—neatly summarized the goals of the Lower Richland Tourism Plan,

initiated by the Conservation Commission and strongly supported by the Congaree Biosphere Region.

Scenarios

Three different scenarios are presented to guide development in Richland County: Scenario A (Stay the Course), Scenario B (Leveraging the Centers) and Scenario C (Rich Land). Though Scenario A sounds like a recipe for inertia, it does include recent land development code improvements, particularly the requirement for generous open space in new developments. Nonetheless, some of the weaknesses of Scenario A, particularly related to protection of the county's watersheds, conservation lands and agricultural lands, place it in a less favorable light than Scenarios B and C.

The Phase II materials provide many different metrics to compare the three scenarios. All three scenarios anticipate the same number of residential and non-residential units, though the scenarios use a different mix of residential options among single family detached, single family attached and multifamily. Potential areas for growth include vacant land, agricultural land and under-developed land, though the three scenarios use varying definitions of eligible (or ineligible) agricultural land and under-developed land.

See Plan, page 7

Uranium still an issue at Westinghouse

In the Fall 2024 and Winter 2025 newsletters, we discussed recent high uranium readings at a single well, W-56, at the Westinghouse Commercial Fuels Fabrication Facility and rezoning for the new production facility.

A review of recent reports suggests that the uranium reading has not subsided. In addition, Westinghouse moves toward a feasibility study to propose mitigation strategies mandated under its Consent Agreement with S.C. Department of Environmental Services to remediate groundwater pollution onsite.

Westinghouse has requested and received permission to test various mitigation strategies for effectiveness under a Pilot Study Work Plan, particularly for chlorinated volatile organic compounds and radionuclides.

Uranium at W-56

Uranium at groundwater monitoring well W-56 surged beginning in October 2022, peaked at 552 micrograms/liter a year later, then subsided slightly as reported in our newsletter. The level fluctuates, though remains high, with the highest concentration to date recorded in January 2025—576 micrograms/liter.

A possible source for the leak was not uncovered until September 2024—water from a break in a cooling tower return line leaked into the soil in an area with a history of uranium contamination. Repairs were

made and quarterly monitoring remains in place. There continues to be no evidence of readings above 0.1 micrograms/liter at W-73, which is only 35-40 feet away and downgradient of well W-56.

Remediation

Westinghouse prepared a Pilot Work Study plan to evaluate the effectiveness of onsite remediation technologies prior to potential inclusion in the set of remediation alternatives in the feasibility study for existing groundwater contaminants. The graph on page 5 overlays the plumes for the major contaminants at the facility.

Note that tetrachloroethylene (PCE) has the most extensive plume (outlined in magenta in the graph), though PCE has not been used since 2020 in Westinghouse's production processes. Westinghouse has argued that the presence of CVOC by-products (e.g., vinyl chloride, a formidable contaminant in its own right) in the floodplain south of Upper and Lower Sunset Lakes suggests that the CVOC's are breaking down over time due to the action of anaerobic microbes in the groundwater.

One of their strategies would be accelerate that natural process by injecting chemicals in the groundwater that promote bioremediation (enhanced reductive dechlorination or ERD). In theory, the dangerous by-

products would further break down into ethylene.

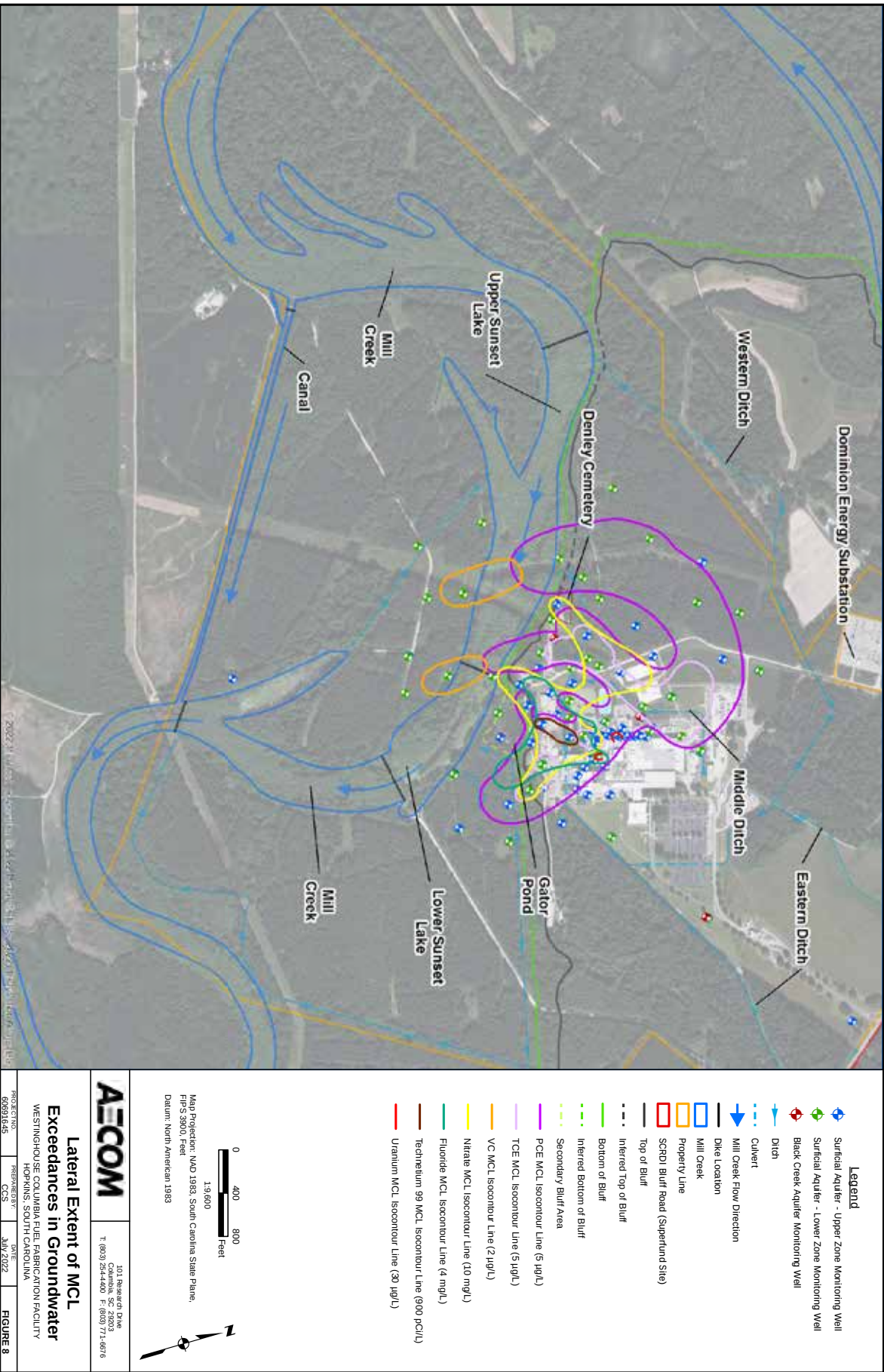
This method would be supplemented by an approach that chemically reduces the CVOC's. One chemical is zero-valent iron (ZVI), and Westinghouse used the acronym ERD+ZVI to refer to this coupled strategy.

ZVI can be injected in groundwater contaminated by technetium-99; the chemical reaction in this case converts technetium-99 from a soluble to an insoluble form, so that the radionuclide is immobilized in effect.

There is concern that immobilized radionuclides in the soil would still need to be addressed when the plant is eventually retired. The same technology is proven to work for uranium, so a pilot study would not be strictly necessary though Westinghouse has nonetheless requested a pilot demonstration for uranium.

DES has approved the Pilot Study Work Plan and Westinghouse applied for permits to drill the injection wells and conduct the study. We are generally pleased to see Westinghouse pursue onsite treatment of groundwater contamination, an approach they abandoned in 2011 with SCDES's consent.

The next critical decision will be the selection of a set of remedial alternatives; most of them are fairly aggressive, though a No Action alternative, as always, appears on the list.



Path: M:\EnvData\Westinghouse\mxd\2021 RI Report\32 Lateral Extent of MCL Exceedances GW.mxd

Save the date

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Center then split into teams. All ages and experience levels are welcome. Appropriate clothing is required of all participants, including long pants and closed-toed shoes.

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

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

National Public Lands Day

As part of National Public Lands Day on **Saturday, September 27**, Friends of Congaree Swamp members will meet at 9:30 a.m. at our Adopt-a-Waterway site, Bates Bridge landing on 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 and perhaps one of the paddling landings 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. We should finish about 11 a.m.

Light hiking boots, plenty of

water, sun protection and a snack are recommended.

Migratory bird hike

Join us **Sunday, October 5**, for a fall hike to look for migratory birds moving through the park on their way to points 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 or whether overwintering species have arrived.

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 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.



Walking Tupelo

Big tree hike

Earlier this year, we hiked to the banks of Cedar Creek near the Hurricane Islands to visit a hidden but accessible stand of old-growth Baldcypress.

On **Saturday, October 18**, we will be visiting another such site along a slough in the middle of a 1974-1975 clearcut.

Evidently, the Baldcypress along the slough were not harvested.

Expect to see several large Baldcypress, some with interesting features, and large resprouted Water Tupelo.

Meet at the South Cedar Creek Road parking lot at 9 a.m. We will travel on Kingsnake Trail and briefly continue south on a jeep road, then wander off-trail for a half mile to the site. We will take a slightly different route home, swinging by a remarkable walking tupelo.

Regular hiking boots should be sufficient; there should be no wet spots or gut crossings to negotiate. 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 any or all of the last three events, contact John Grego at friendsofcongaresswamp@gmail.com or 803-331-3366.



American Redstart

Plan

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For instance, Scenario A seeks to preserve only those agricultural parcels greater than 500 acres; Scenario B, agricultural parcels greater than 300 acres; Scenario C, agricultural parcels greater than 100 acres. Scenario C further restricts potential areas for

growth by protecting historic properties, wetlands, one hundred-year floodplains, and land adjacent to military bases.

In general, Scenario A results in more developable space and more single-family detached housing. Scenario B promotes denser growth near growth clusters, with the highest percentage of multifamily

residential units. Though Scenario C protects more land for agriculture and Open Space-Conservation, Scenario B requires less infrastructure and impervious surfaces.

The county is currently seeking public input on Phase III of the Comprehensive Plan, which will draft policy directions and an action plan.

Budget

continued from page 1

and law enforcement). The House and Senate also restored draconian cuts to the Historic Preservation Program. Historical interpretation at the parks has been a particular administration target.

The funding for construction under all three FY 2026 proposed budgets does not restore previous funding levels, though the amount allocated for construction has always been wholly inadequate. Construct projects rely instead upon philanthropy from park partners, and government programs, such as the Legacy Restoration Fund described next.

The Interior budget also called for transferring Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars from land acquisition to deferred maintenance (note that Land and Water Conservation Fund requests were used to acquire the Riverstone Tract from The Trust for Public Land).

Deferred maintenance is a real need, but the explanation is disingenuous since the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act’s Legacy Restoration Fund already provides up to \$1.3 billion annually for deferred National Park Service maintenance from 2021 through 2025 and a renewal would extend another 8 years through 2033. The Legacy

Restoration Fund allocated \$4 million for road improvements to South Carolina national park units, including Congaree National Park.

The Senate version of the bill remains the favored proposal. In addition to more generous funding, it strongly supports staffing levels sufficient to meet the park service’s mission to protect cultural and natural resources, maintain access for visitors, protect natural infrastructure and administer historic programs and other preservation programs.

It will be important to remain in contact with Senator Graham’s office as differences between the House and Senate budgets are resolved.

Category	2024	2025 (Notional)*	Interior 2026	House 2026	Senate 2026
Park Management	\$2.9B	\$2.9B	\$1.8B	\$2.7B	\$2.9B
Historic Preservation Fund	\$189M	\$168M	\$11M	\$169M	\$168M
National Recreation and Preservation	\$91M	\$90M	\$12M	\$90M	\$92M
Construction	\$172M	\$172M	\$100M	\$136M	\$141M
Centennial Challenge	\$12M	\$12M	\$0	\$12M	\$12M

*Secretary of Interior’s report suggested further possible transfers from NPS budget



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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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_____ Family \$40*	Mailing address _____
_____ Advocate \$50	City _____ State _____ Zip _____
_____ Nonprofit \$50	Phone _____ Email _____
_____ Partner \$100**	
_____ Benefactor \$500	
_____ Patron \$1000	<i>Please keep your information current to receive special notices about field trips, events, scheduling changes and acknowledgements in addition to a quarterly newsletter.</i>
_____ Corporate \$1000	

*For a contribution of \$40 - \$99, you may choose one of the following gift options:

Baseball cap maroon _____ tan _____ tan visor _____

Bandana imprinted with map of Congaree National Park teal _____ red _____ forest green _____

**For a contribution of \$100 or more you may choose either a copy of *The Natural History of Congaree Swamp* _____
or one of the six 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!

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