

COWASEE

BASIN

Congaree • Wateree • Santee Rivers

A Focus Area Along The
CONGAREE, WATEREE,
SANTEE RIVERS

**A Commitment to Conserve
Fragile Landscapes in the
Heart of South Carolina**



The COWASEE Basin

What was once one of the largest delta-forming rivers on the east coast begins in the mountains of North Carolina. Throughout its course many rivers merge and flow into the Congaree and Wateree Rivers, which join to form the Santee River, continuing to the Atlantic Ocean. This huge river system has carved the landscape over thousands of years to create vast floodplain forests, high bluffs, fertile soils, forests and rare or endangered species and beauty beyond description.



The 24,000-acre Congaree National Park is the heart of the basin and is home to the largest old-growth bottomland hardwood forest remaining in the United States.



Seasonally flooded bottomland hardwoods, numerous oxbow lakes and beaver ponds once supported huge wintering waterfowl populations.

A Unique & Historically Significant Area in the Heart of the State

The COWASEE Basin covers over 215,000 acres in the midlands of South Carolina and includes the Congaree, Wateree and upper Santee Rivers.

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Many diverse habitats border the vast bottomland forests, including the bluffs along the Congaree River in Calhoun County, the High Hills of the Santee in Sumter County and the monadnocks along the Wateree River in Richland County. The entire area is rich with wildlife and cultural resources.

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The Congaree National Park and upper Santee Swamp have been recognized by National Audubon Society as a "Globally Important Bird Areas". Some of the highest winter songbird densities ever recorded in the United States have been observed in this basin, having more than 5,100 birds per square mile.

A Voluntary Collaboration

In 2005, a partnership of private landowners, conservation organizations, land trusts and government agencies created the COWASEE Basin focus area to promote conservation. This partnership works with willing private landowners to promote stewardship using a variety of tools ranging from technical and financial assistance to conservation easements.

Our Goal is to Conserve this Unique Area

Conservationists realize the need to preserve entire ecological systems. Since public ownership of this vast area is impractical, the success of this project rests on the willingness of current landowners to protect these river basins. Sixty-eight percent of the land within this focus area is privately owned by landowners who have a long history of being good stewards of their resources.

The key for this initiative is to encourage the continuation of private ownership while ensuring long-term protection and enhancement of resource stewardship.

A Paradise for Outdoor Recreation

The COWASEE Basin is rich in wildlife habitat and cultural resources, and its timber and agriculture have contributed to employment and a way of life unique to this area. Outdoor recreation opportunities for hunters, fishermen, hikers, birdwatchers and boaters provide critical revenue for local businesses. To ensure these recreational and financial opportunities for the future, we must act now by working together to promote habitat protection.

Tools to Succeed

Use the Services and Programs Available

Technical assistance to develop resource management plans is available from the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and the U.S.D.A Natural Resource Conservation Service. In addition to technical assistance, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offer programs that provide financial assistance to many landowners who desire to implement conservation practices.



The focus area is a priority waterfowl restoration area where many partners are implementing research and management to improve waterfowl habitat and populations. Staff from the S.C. Dept. of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service band mallards as part of a waterfowl monitoring project.



A private landowner has replanted oaks in an abandoned agricultural field in the river bottom to improve habitat. Many examples of landowner stewardship can be found throughout this focus area.

Voluntary Conservation Easements

A conservation easement is a written legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified conservation organization or public agency that contains restrictions relating to various uses of the land.

Conservation easements are tailored to characteristics of a particular property as well as the owner's financial needs and conservation goals. They may be put on entire parcels, or only portions of a parcel and can restrict as much or as little development as desired.

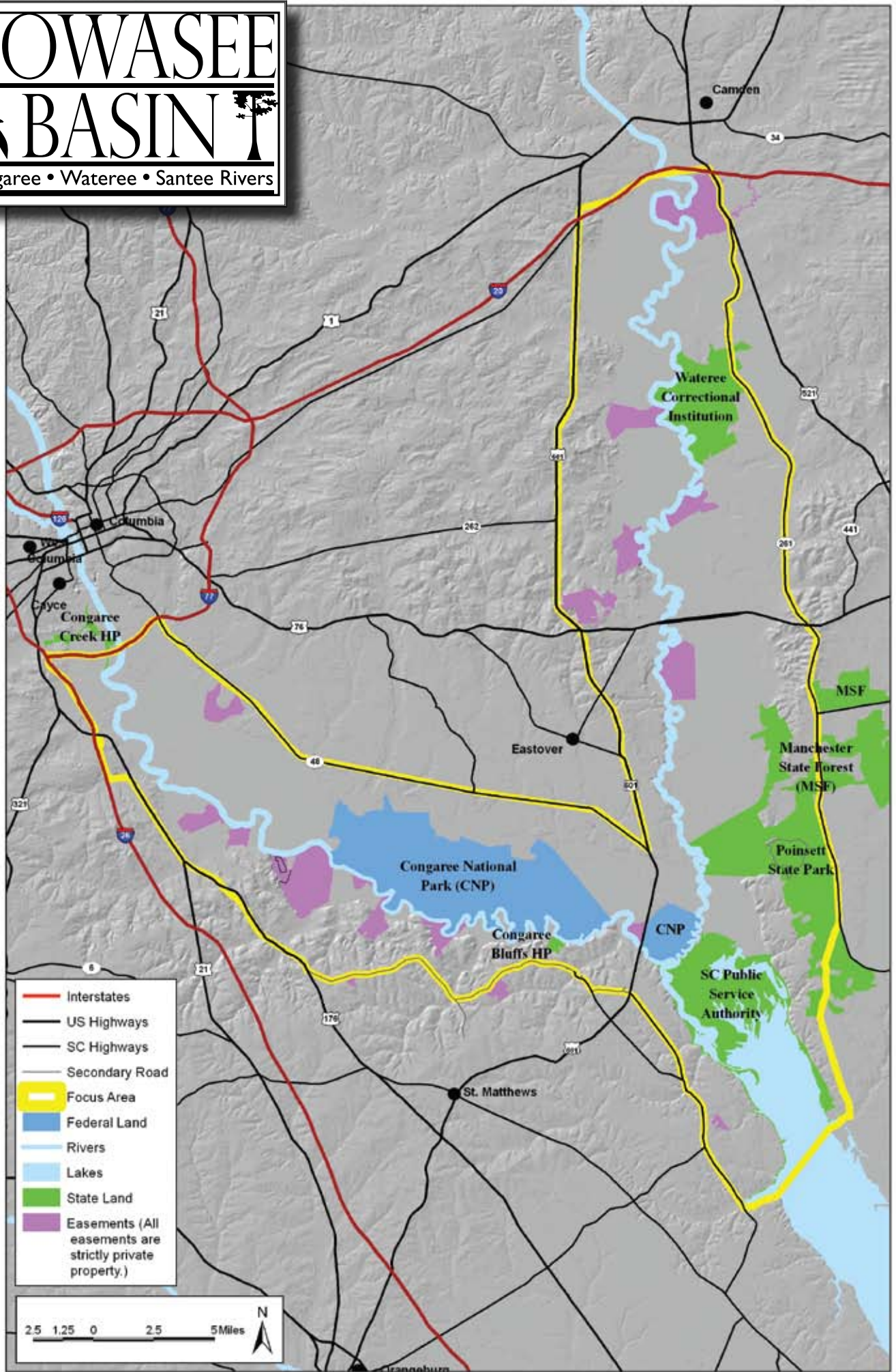
Because properties having conservation easements remain privately owned, they offer an excellent opportunity for those with a passion for their land to leave a perpetual legacy of their conservation values while honoring traditional land uses such as agriculture, forestry and wildlife management. Conservation easements may offer significant federal and state income tax and estate tax advantages.

“Protecting and enhancing the quality of life in South Carolina is incredibly important to ensuring South Carolina’s competitive edge in this global economy. I support the COWASEE Basin efforts to encourage private landowners to voluntarily practice resource conservation to enhance the quality of life in the Midlands area and create a legacy of stewardship for future South Carolinians.”

Governor Mark Sanford, 2006

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For more information on the COWASEE Basin focus area,
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