



Concerns With SCDOT Bridge Project Stated at Public Hearing

Friends members attended the South Carolina Department of Transportation's (SCDOT's) May 3, 2005 public hearing on the design plan for the US 601 bridges over the Congaree floodplain. During the public comment period after the meeting, Friends submitted a lengthy letter detailing concerns with the project design as well as the Environmental Assessment. In particular, we noted that SC DOT should use this opportunity to bridge most of the floodplain and remove existing earthen embankments, thus restoring natural flow patterns to the floodplain in times of high water. This approach would be consistent with current SC DOT policy for new bridge construction on floodplains. SC DOT could also take a more thorough look at the sets of high voltage transmission lines that parallel US 601. We emphasized a more comprehensive planning approach to the entire project, realizing that an attractive US 601 corridor through Congaree National Park could enhance not only the Park, but lower Richland and Calhoun counties.

Concurrently, the SC Department of Natural Resources (SC DNR), the US Fish and Wildlife Service (US FWS), and the National Park Service (NPS) prepared a common set of minimal guidelines for the bridges. The guidelines specified that SC DOT should

- ❖ Bridge the section between the Congaree River and the southern bridge (Bridge 3) over Bates Old River

- ❖ Install large (8 feet high by 24 feet wide) culverts in the embankment between the two Bates Old River bridges (Bridge 2 and Bridge 3) to facilitate wildlife passage
- ❖ Extend Bridge 2 over Bates Old River an additional 500 feet north a natural terrace adjacent to the floodplain

Though these common recommendations do not include bridging the floodplain, the agencies expressed support for this concept.

SC DOT has listened attentively to Friends of Congaree Swamp and resource agencies, but has not adopted our ideas. The plans SC DOT included in the July 8, 2005 public notice for a US Army Corps of Engineers/SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC) wetlands permit included none of the input provided by Friends, SC DNR, the Park Service, and US FWS. There was a suggestion modest mitigation measures, but no a mitigation plan, which was promised by the end of July, has not been submitted.

In response to the public notice, Friends organized a letter-writing campaign to request a public hearing. Twenty letters are needed for SC DHEC to hold a public hearing (the Corps of Engineers' criteria are more discretionary), thank the following individuals who notified Friends that they had sent letters to SC

President's Corner



Dr. John Grego

I would like to highlight the Friends' recent grant activity. The two grants described here account for more than one year's membership contributions to the Friends of Congaree Swamp. Though we have ample reserve funds to support these and other projects, I would encourage you to make additional contributions to Friends to support projects particularly close to your heart.

Junior Rangers Partnership

Unilever Corporation, a Proud Partner of America's National Parks and a National Corporate Partner of the Junior Ranger Campaign, has partnered with the National Park Foundation in the Junior Ranger Challenge Grant Program. Unilever has agreed to match any funds up to \$7500 raised by a National Park in conjunction with a partner (that's where we come in) to support the Park's Junior Ranger program. Though the program encourages fund-raising, Friends Board members voted to provide \$7500 from existing funds to support the Junior Ranger program. Congaree National Park was notified on August 18 that the proposal was successful. As soon as the contract is signed and we provide our share of \$7500 to the National Park Foundation, Unilever's matching \$7500 will be released to Congaree National Park for its Junior Ranger program.

Most National Parks have some sort of Junior Ranger program; my family and I became intimately familiar with the program while traveling to Parks in the West and Southwest. Essentially, participants are given an educational/

activity booklet to complete while visiting the Park. The activities are non-trivial—the booklet cannot be completed on-site or by visiting only one of a Park's attractions—site specific information makes this impossible. Upon completing the booklet, the participant is briefly quizzed by a Park Ranger who then loudly calls attention to everyone within hearing distance. Imagine this taking place at a really busy Visitor's Center—say the Old Faithful lodge at Yellowstone National Park. The Ranger then announces the Junior Ranger's name and successful completion of the Junior Ranger activities, and awards a patch, pin, or medallion to the participant. The program is popular not just with families, but with youth groups such as Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts.

Why does Congaree in particular need additional funding? Part of the reason is obvious; with the change from National Monument to National Park status, all the Junior Ranger materials are out of date. Some of the funding will go toward stop-gap printing of materials that reflect the proper designation for the Park. In addition, new national standards for Junior Ranger programs have recently been developed, so the Park (along with every other Park in the system) will need to update its Junior Ranger educational materials. The funding from the National Park Foundation (through Unilever) and the Friends will help to develop and pay for new materials for up to 5000 Junior Ranger participants.

Cultural History projects

The Friends of Congaree Swamp was recently awarded a \$3212 grant from the South Carolina Arts Commission to conduct a folklife and oral history documentation survey of communities

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Friends 2005 Annual Meeting

Oysters, Chicken, Fun, and Friendship Again the Order of the Day!



The Friends will hold its Annual Meeting at Big Lake on Sunday, October 30 from 2 PM until dark. Big Lake is an 1100-acre property on the Congaree floodplain that includes a clubhouse, an enclosed picnic shelter, easy access to the Congaree River, a large oxbow lake, historic agricultural levees and evidence of old quarters dating before the turn of the century.

Plans are still being finalized, but will include nature and birding walks, tours of the property, a presentation on the Native Americans who lived along the Congaree by Chris Judge of the SC DNR Heritage Trust Program, and a campfire program led by Park Ranger Fran Rametta and Friends Board member Carolyn Hudson.

Dinner will feature something for everyone: an oyster roast, fried chicken, and vegetarian dishes. Registration information and directions will be soon be made available on our website, by mail and e-mail. We look forward to seeing you there.

Upcoming Field Trips

Virgin Cypress Field Trip Saturday, 24 September, 2005 9:00 – 2:00

Because of limited boat space we will have to limit this trip to Friends of Congaree members and the **first 15 people** that sign up; contact John Cely at jecely@sc.rr.com or call at 803-782-7450.

Few sites are more inspiring in the southern landscape than a old-growth bald cypress tree rising for more than a hundred feet through a swamp canopy. Many of these cypress giants had buttresses approaching 30 feet in circumference and were by far the oldest trees in eastern North America. Unfortunately nearly all were cut down for the lumber trade many years ago. A few still survive, however, in places like Audubon's Francis Beidler Forest in Dorchester County and those that escaped the early 20th century logging at Congaree National Park. According to the manager of the mill that cut most of the virgin cypress out of the Congaree-Wateree-Santee drainage, the average age of the cypress logs that came through the mill were between 500-700 years but one log had 1600 growth rings! More recently a dendrochronologist at the Francis Beidler Forest found a live cypress there that was 1500 years old.

For this trip we will ride by boat to our jumping off point on the eastern end of the Park. From there a short walk will take us to an area featuring old growth cypress varying from 16-26 feet in circumference. Another short ride upriver will take us to the state champion cypress, 26 feet in circumference and 132 feet tall. This tree could easily be a 1000 years old, if not older, and it is a humbling experience to stand in its shadow.

Meeting location: at DNR's Congaree Bluff Heritage Preserve on the south side of the river in Calhoun County. Count on about a 45-minute drive from Columbia – proceed down Bluff Road (Hwy 48) as if you are going to the Park, but continue on 48 south; 48 merges into US Hwy 601 – continue on US 601 south, crossing the Congaree River; once across the river you will be in Calhoun County. About 2 miles past the bridge, turn right at the first intersection you come to – this will be secondary road 80 (Adams Road); follow this road for a little over a mile, where it will intersect with South Carolina 419 (Fort Motte Road); turn right onto 419 – this will lead to a railroad crossing and what's left of the town of Fort Motte; once you cross the railroad track, proceed northward for about a mile and look for a dirt road on the right called Turkey Track – follow this single-lane dirt drive where it will end near the edge of the river at Congaree Bluffs Heritage Preserve.

Time: 9:00. We should be returning back to the Bluff and our vehicles no later than 2:00.

What to bring: the swamp should be dry this time of year but it may be muddy in places; tennis shoes or old hiking boots are recommended; snacks, sandwiches and a cold beverage will come in handy but please use the smallest cooler you have to save boat space or double up with someone else.

Owl Prowl for Members Saturday November 19, 2005 7:00 PM Limit 30, ages 12 and up.

RSVP to Carolyn Hudson
earth18@earthlink.net
or call 782-8007

A unique chance to enjoy Congaree after dark! Put on some rubber-soled shoes (for silent walking on the boardwalk) and bring a flashlight with good batteries (and red filter if you have one). Meet at the park Visitor Center. We will make red flashlight filters and have a chance to use the restrooms before hitting the trail at 7:30. Ranger Fran Rametta will lead us on an easy 2-mile walk, entertaining us with information about Congaree and demonstrating his famous owl call. Hearing the owls and the chorus of night sounds is a memorable experience you won't want to miss. If the sky is clear we should get good views of the Milky Way and stars before moonrise at 8:15 and we can then enjoy the illumination of an almost-full moon.

Events in Review



Friends of Congaree Swamp celebrated its first Dawn Chorus of Birdsong on June 4, followed by a gourmet breakfast.

About 20 members and guests of Friends gathered at the after hours parking lot at 5 a.m. under a sparkling array of stars punctuated by a new moon. Whip-poor-wills and a few Barred owls greeted the hardy hikers as they made their way to the Visitor Center on the main entrance road, but the birds were almost drowned out by a cacophony of frogs and Southern toads coming from the marsh next to the campground.

As night lightened into dawn, the hikers watched a few large bats chasing insects just over their heads and then the dawn chorus began. The first to call was an Eastern Wood-Pewee, followed by a Summer Tanager and then a Northern Cardinal, an Acadian Flycatcher and the Great Crested Flycatcher, according to walk leader Robin Carter.

By the time the hikers reached the high boardwalk and worked their way out to Weston Lake, the chorus was in full voice. Recent rains restricted the hikers to the high boardwalk, where the frogs and toads stole the show from the birds.

“It was probably the most impressive frog chorus that I’ve heard at the park in 20 years of frequent visits,”

Carter said. He noted that most of the calls were from Gray Treefrogs and Southern Toads, but the participants did hear some Southern Leopard Frogs and Squirrel Treefrogs.

By the time hikers straggled back to the campground around 7:30, John Grego, Sharon Kelly and Virginia Winn had a breakfast of shrimp and grits, strata, homemade biscuits and scones and fresh fruit ready. The coffee was hot and the hungry hikers were delighted to show their appreciation.

“John’s shrimp and grits made us forget about the bother of having to get up at 3:30 a.m.,” Carter said.



He said in addition to those named above, the bird list for the walk included:

Yellow-crowned Night Heron; Mourning Dove; Yellow-billed Cuckoo; Chimney Swift; Red-bellied Woodpecker; Hairy Woodpecker; Pileated Woodpecker; Carolina Chickadee; Tufted Titmouse; White-breasted Nuthatch; Brown-headed Nuthatch; Carolina Wren; Blue-gray Gnatcatcher; Eastern Bluebird; White-eyed Vireo; Yellow-throated Vireo; Red-eyed Vireo; Northern Parula; Yellow-throated Warbler; Pine Warbler; Prothonotary Warbler; Kentucky Warbler; Blue Grosbeak; Indigo Bunting; Brown-headed Cowbird and American Goldfinch.

Bridge

DHEC and the Corps of Engineers requesting a public hearing: Pat Macaruso, Nancy Thompson, Brian Habing, Roumen Vesselinov, James Lynch, Carol Jaworski, Carol Kososki, Sharon Kelly, Dick Watkins, Caroline Eastman, Sisi Sims, Nena Rice, Prof. Caroline Eastman, and Jane Lawther. The following conservation groups provided input as well: SC Wildlife Federation, SC Sierra Club, Columbia Audubon Society, Coastal Conservation League, American Rivers, Congaree Land Trust, SC Environmental Law Project, and Southern Environmental Law Center. No date has been scheduled for the hearing as of yet.

In addition to public comments, the resource agencies commented on the public notice as well. The following quotes are taken directly from the agency responses:

- ❖ “We acknowledge that the applicant has communicated regularly with park personnel. However, the project as proposed is certainly not consistent with National Park Service management policies or future park resource management plans. The EA does not evaluate any aesthetic impacts associated with bridge replacement and only briefly addresses the relocation of the adjacent 3 mile power line corridor. We support the idea of relocating the overhead electrical transmission lines either underground or attached to the undersides of the new bridges.” (NPS)
- ❖ “...the applicant must consider future NPS lands in the design of the bridges and causeways and evaluate methods to minimize impacts to the resource. Nothing in the EA indicates that the applicant has specifically done so.” (NPS)

❖ “Although spanning the entire floodplain is preferable, in consideration of increased costs and in the spirit of cooperation, the three agencies recommended a combination of wildlife passages/culverts and partial bridge lengthening to partially restore historic flows of the Congaree system. This public notice frustratingly reflects none of the recommendations.” (US FWS)

❖ “The Service feels that a net increase in impacts in habitat as unique as the Congaree floodplain is unacceptable. Further, if no effort is made to improve the floodplain’s condition at this time, it will be many years before the next opportunity arises.” (US FWS)

❖ “...the existing road is causing a major interruption in wetland and floodplain functions. Some of the impacted functions include (1) an alteration in the natural hydrological conditions, (2) ‘sheet flow’ across the floodplain has been blocked, (3) animal migration has been blocked, (4) the floodplain ecosystem has been fragmented, and (5) the nutrient exchange that normally fuels the base of a river’s ecology has been altered.” (SC DNR)

❖ “The Department believes that the proposed improvements to U.S. Route 601 will continue to negatively impact the Congaree River floodplain.” (SC DNR)

Friends has been encouraged by the very strong stance these agencies have taken to protect and restore the Congaree floodplain. For those of you who have an active interest in this project, we encourage your continued participation and will notify you as soon as possible when the date of the public hearing has been set.

President

that have traditionally lived in or near the site of Congaree National Park and have used Congaree and Santee swamps' natural resources. Friends will provide an additional \$1606 in direct support, while most of the research will be carried out by Prof. Stephen Criswell, formerly of Benedict College and now at USC-Lancaster, and Lesley Williams, a freelance folklorist now living in North Carolina, but with strong South Carolina ties. Additional support for the project has been provided by members of Friends, and Benedict College English, Mass Communication, and Service Learning faculty.

In the 1920's and 1930's, extensive efforts were made by Dr. E. C. L. (Ned) Adams, working with Thaddeus Goodson, to document the folklore traditions of Congaree, while novelist Julia Peterkin's fiction (particularly in the novel *Green Thursday*) reflected her knowledge of the lives of the residents of Fort Motte. Park personnel have often expressed concern that contemporary longtime neighbors (including Booker T. Sims) of the Park have passed away without any formal documentation of their insights and knowledge into the human/environmental interactions with the Swamp.

While pursuing support for the projects, Friends gathered contact information at Swampfest 2003 and Swampfest 2004, the 2005 Fort Motte Reunion, and the 90th Annual Good Hope Picnic in Lone Star. One of our first contacts was Marie Adams, the organizer of Swampfest 2004, whose father, Ulysses Barber, had been a long-time educator and resident of Hopkins for 90 years. Lesley Williams and Stephen Criswell interviewed and recorded Mr. Barber in November 2004, less than one month before he died. "Professor" Barber, who personally knew Thaddeus Goodson, was an alert and insightful resource, with a kaleidoscopic knowledge of the agricultural, hunting, fishing, entertainment, courtship, and religious traditions of Congaree Swamp.

The SC Arts Commission funding will allow Lesley Williams to interview additional subjects this Fall. Professor Criswell is seeking additional grant-

funding, and Congaree National Park has expressed interest in paying for Lesley Williams' travel and lodging as a Special Volunteer for the Park. In the short term, researchers hope to provide the Park with photos, audio and video documentation to assist in the creation of additional displays in the Harry Hampton Visitor Center, and to work with Clemson Public Radio to broadcast interviews with Congaree Swamp area residents. Long-term plans include developing K-12 and college-level curricula related to Congaree, as well as educational and research resources similar to regional folklife and cultural heritage projects in the Southeastern United States.

This may seem like an ambitious agenda from a modest start, but enthusiasm for the project has been infectious, and we are fortunate to have the participation of researchers like Prof. Criswell and Lesley Williams to shepherd the project along.

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**Friends of Congaree Swamp
PO Box 7746
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Summer 2005

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