

Congaree National Park (SC)

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Fiscal Year:

2009

Project Name:

Riverstone

Acreage:

1,840

Estimated Price to National Park Service:

\$5.88 million

Natural Resources:

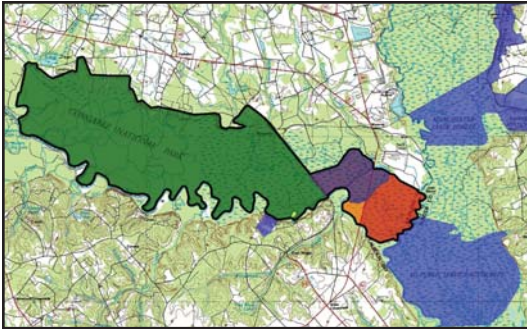
Swallow-tailed Kite, potential red-cockaded woodpecker habitat, bald cypress, planer tree, floodplain and bottomland hardwood forests, Congaree River and Wateree River watershed, 4-mile Oxbow Lake

Cultural Resources:

Part of the Lower Richland Heritage Corridor

Programmatic significance:

Connectivity to existing conservation lands, endangered and threatened species protection, scenic viewshed protection, recreation, public access, water quality protection, wildlife habitat protection, outdoor education and research, cultural and archaeological resources.



In recognition of the Congaree's extraordinary ecological and cultural significance, in 2003 Congress changed the designation from Congaree National Monument to Congaree National Park and expanded the park's eastern border to include an additional 4,576 acres. Resting on a floodplain of the Congaree River, the park is recognized as an International Biosphere Reserve, National Natural Landmark, Wilderness Area, and Globally Important Bird Area. Congaree encompasses the nation's largest tract of old-growth bottomland hardwood forest, is home to more than 75 tree species, including old-growth loblolly pine and bald cypress, and protects some of the tallest trees in the eastern United States, with some pines and sweetgums reaching higher than 160 feet.

With its dense overgrowth and high forest canopy, this area hosts more than 190 species of birds, making it a popular birding area. Most of the woodpecker species found in the Southeast find nesting and feeding sites in the standing dead trees within the forest. The park is recognized as a potential recovery habitat for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, and, following unverified sightings of the ivory-billed woodpecker in Arkansas, Congaree is considered prime habitat for the possible recovery of this species. Several sightings of the state-listed endangered swallow-tailed kite have been reported at Congaree, and deer, river otters, turtles, and raccoons, are just a few of the animals that also inhabit the forest.

Congaree offers the public excellent recreation opportunities. The park has a 2.5-mile boardwalk trail, more than 20 miles of hiking trails, and plentiful opportunities for backcountry camping. Outdoor enthusiasts can also enjoy canoeing, birding, kayaking, picnicking, camping, and fishing.

The Congaree and Wateree Rivers recently have been designated as the first Blue Trail in the nation by the organization American Rivers. Included in the Lower Richland Heritage Corridor, Congaree's landscape plays an important role in interpreting the rich cultural heritage of the area. Each year, Congaree National Park joins the community in recognizing the plantation and post-emancipation history of the area at the SwampFest! celebration.

A broad coalition of national and South Carolina-based conservation and civic organizations have joined together to assist the Park Service in acquiring the properties included in the 2003 park expansion legislation. The last remaining large inholding to be acquired, the 1,840-acre Riverstone tract, is available for federal purchase and protection this year. The Riverstone tract is the key connector between the central portion of the park to the west and the Bates Fork tract (acquired by the National Park Service in FY 2005), thereby linking Congaree National Park to the adjoining Upper Santee Swamp Natural Area, owned by the South Carolina Public Service Authority. Water resources on the Riverstone tract—including Bates Old River, Big Lake, Little Lake, Running Creek and Running Lake—have significant natural, recreational, and archaeological value. The property harbors extensive areas of early and mid-successional plant communities rarely found in the Congaree National Park as well as dwarf cypress and planer tree communities.

Park Service acquisition of the Riverstone property in Congaree National Park offers a critical opportunity to protect and enhance the ecological integrity of this extraordinary park. Acquisition of the property will nearly complete protection of the park expansion area and buffer Congaree National Park from encroaching timbering and other incompatible uses while providing new recreational opportunities to park visitors.

FOR SALE