

A Place of Nature and Culture: The Founding of Congaree National Park, South Carolina

By Elizabeth J. Almlie

On October 18, 1976, when Congress established Congaree Swamp National Monument for its significant ecological and geological resources, “the Swamp” was not and had never been a landscape empty of human history. That history has made it not only a place of nature but also a place of culture. Although, resource management continues to separate natural and cultural understandings of “place,” the story of establishing the Congaree Swamp as a designated wilderness area shows that ideas towards nature and culture were often interconnected within wilderness advocacy. During the founding of the park, proponents and opponents of making the Congaree Swamp a preserve debated the Swamp’s ecological *and* its historic value. While the park’s enabling legislation created a landscape of wilderness focused on natural values, this paper examines advocacy materials, congressional testimony, and management documents to reveal how participants discussed historical value. All of those different knowledges and valuations of the Swamp’s history have in turn affected the stewardship of cultural resources in this wilderness landscape. Over time, Congaree Swamp National Monument (later Congaree National Park) has increasingly devoted more time and resources to the historical subjects important to its past. Just such an interdisciplinary approach will best preserve and promote the complex identity of this park and all others within the National Park System.



Proponents of the park spent time researching the natural resources of the Congaree River floodplain as they built a case for national significance. Shown here counting tree rings, from left to right: John Cely, Jim Elder, and Dr. James Tanner, 1974.

The strength of the human history in the Congaree Swamp is not only the physical built remnants of past activity, but the whole, long, deep, rich, valued, and even unmarked history of the landscape of a place that is at once both natural and cultural. Human history is not an appendix, or worse an intrusion, on a wilderness story; it is part of how a place comes to presently have such valued natural characteristics.¹ Without undermining wilderness management, the National Park Service can pre-

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¹ Peter Landres, et al. *Keeping It Wild: An Interagency Strategy to Monitor Trends in Wilderness Character Across the National Wilderness Preservation System*. General Technical Report RMRS-GTR-212 (Fort Collins, Colorado: USDA-Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, July 2008), 24.

serve valued cultural resources and encourage a fuller understanding of natural environments by understanding the history of human relationships with them. As knowledge and understanding increases in the future, cultural resources and natural resources can and should be examined together to tell the story of the Congaree Swamp, its establishment as a national monument, and how it will continue to fulfill its role as national park and designated wilderness.

Since its passing, the Wilderness Act of 1964 has set a standard for how potential and designated wilderness areas on public lands should be treated by federal employees as well as by advocates, researchers, and visitors. The Wilderness Act was created around the ideas that wilderness should be “untrammelled,” “natural,” and “undeveloped,” and possess “outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.”² These qualities have been interpreted to imply that wilderness landscapes are empty of human presence, which led to a heated debate amongst natural and historical scholars and resource managers on the meanings of wilderness.³ The meanings and measurability of these four qualities are still being debated, as shown by the 2008 publication of *Keeping It Wild: An Interagency Strategy to Monitor Trends in Wilderness Character across the National Wilderness Preservation System*, which came out of a re-evaluation of those qualities.⁴ The text of the act does not deny the historical presence of humans on the land, but it does use phrases that speak to humans having had a light and temporary impact on these lands in the past, and to minimizing future impacts. To create places of wilderness that embody the various societal values of natural aesthetics, biological health and diversity, resistance to modern intensive and permanent development, solitude, physical challenge, and others, these wilderness landscapes were meant to be managed passively to allow natural processes the dominant role in shaping their appearance.

The examination of historical understanding in the designated wilderness of the Congaree Swamp requires a sense of *wilderness* values as well as *cultural resource* values and their place in the landscape. As wilderness advocacy has had various motivations of various intensities over time, historic preservation has similarly been inspired by architectural aesthetics, economic development and tourism, the representation of national heritage or cultural identity, the ability to contribute to historical scholarship, and the desire to live in sustainable and socially responsible communities.⁵ The close timing of the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966, the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) in 1969, and Executive Order 11593 in 1971 was not coincidental. Advocates of various specialties felt that valued places of natural and cultural origin were physically threatened by the intense pace of post–World War II development, and these pieces of legislation put together a front-line system to consider the values of place in reviewing the effects of federal actions.⁶

² Taken from Public Law 88-577 (16 U.S.C. 1131-1136), 88th Cong., 2nd Sess., “Wilderness Act” 1964, and interpreted by Peter Landres, “Developing Indicators to Monitor the ‘Outstanding Opportunities’ Quality of Wilderness Character,” *International Journal of Wilderness* 10 (December 2004), 9.

³ J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds., *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998); Michael P. Nelson and J. Baird Callicott, *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008); William Cronon, “The Riddle of the Apostle Islands” *Orion* (May/June 2003), 36–42; William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995).

⁴ Landres, “Developing Indicators,” 8; and Landres et al., *Keeping It Wild*.

⁵ Robert E. Stipe, *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Thomas F. King, *Cultural Resource Laws & Practice*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2002).

⁶ Donald L. Hardesty and Barbara J. Little, *Assessing Site Significance: A Guide for Archaeologists and Historians* (Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2000), 6; Stipe, *A Richer Heritage*; and King, *Cultural Resource Laws & Practice*.

Passed in 1966, sections 106 and 110 of the NHPA require federal agencies to identify and consider the effect of their actions on eligible historic properties—with the expectation that that consideration “ought to result in thoughtful, balanced management.”⁷ Eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places is the benchmark for evaluating the value of historic sites, and is created from the two aspects of *integrity* and *significance*. Integrity is the survival over time of the historic appearance and materials of the resource. Significance is then an informed judgment on its value, often coming down to whether it is worth spending the time and money to recognize the resource as historically important. There has been far less debate over the potential problems of National Register eligibility than there has been about wilderness designation, although many of same issues about subjective values and constructed authority could be raised.⁸ A major ethical and academic question of both is about who has the power to construct value, to make the decisions about the survival of historic or natural fabric. As the Wilderness Act has provided a framework for the wilderness system, so the NHPA has set forth a framework for the historic preservation and cultural resource management profession. Ethics should be as strong a focus for scholarship in historical preservation as it is for the wilderness movement. The NHPA-mandated review process should be only the beginning of recognizing the history of place; full understanding is inclusive and beyond the limitations of National Register eligibility. The existence of legislation does not guarantee that the worst in human apathy, ignorance, or malice will not affect that physical reality. They also do not place limits on the pursuit of full understanding that can support the best of human caring, wisdom, and beauty.

Establishment of Congaree Swamp National Monument

Examining the establishment of Congaree Swamp National Monument shows how those involved understood the historic and wilderness values of the Congaree Swamp and how those viewpoints affected its staff's early awareness about cultural resources. Doing so can bring contemporary understanding to the complex meanings that informed the perceptions held and actions taken in the past. The Congaree “Swamp” is, in fact, a hardwood forest thriving on the nutrient-rich alluvial soils of the Congaree River floodplain, located at the confluence of the Congaree and Wateree Rivers south of South Carolina's capitol of Columbia. While not inundated year-round, much of the forest is filled with water for a considerable portion of the year—giving rise to its local name of Congaree Swamp. The Congaree Swamp has a long history of limited and often abandoned attempts at resource-extraction through agriculture and logging, dating from pre-contact indigenous use through the establishment of the park, and permanent residency only occurred on the surrounding bluffs. Beginning in 1898, the Santee River Cypress Logging Company, owned by Francis Beidler out of Chicago, consolidated a large parcel in the floodplain (that later became the area of the national monument) and harvested cypress from the river. Dangerous and unprofitable, operations had come to a stop by 1914, but the Beidler family retained ownership of the parcel, and their foresters monitored the property. Folklore and newspaper articles reveal a more ephemeral cultural legacy of physical and emotional dangers, hauntings, and lawlessness. Following all that, the Congaree Swamp has made an unexamined

⁷ King, *Cultural Resource Laws & Practice*, 10.

⁸ One cultural resource professional who, from a long career in the system, *has* given it an important critical examination is Thomas F. King, whose book, *Thinking about Cultural Resource Management: Essays from the Edge* (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 2002), among his many other writing projects, most illuminates the limitations and possibilities of cultural resource bureaucracy.

contribution to the Southeastern wilderness movement that sought to enshrine, instead of exploit or fear, the relative lack of human presence or impact in the area.⁹

By the time the fight to “Save Congaree Swamp” reached Congress in 1976, nearly 20 years had passed since its being set aside had first been proposed. The earliest thoughts of making the Congaree Swamp a preserve came in the 1950s, when Harry R.E. Hampton, who had spent much time hunting and walking in the Congaree Swamp as a member of the Cedar Creek Hunt Club, used his position as editor at the *State* newspaper in Columbia, South Carolina, and his friendship with colleague Peter Manigault at the *Post and Courier* in Charleston, to publicize the natural value of the Swamp.¹⁰ In



The Congaree River floodplain.

addition, Hampton began writing to various government offices to discuss ways by which the Beidler Tract could be preserved as public land. In 1959, representatives from the Southeastern Office of the National Park Service answered their appeals and came out to conduct a suitability study of the Swamp. When it was published in 1963, the report recommended that the area should be “favorably considered” as a national monument for its ecological and geological significance.¹¹

Although Hampton and the Beidler Forest Preservation Association (which he formed in 1961) continued to write to federal and state officials and to make presentations to conservation and sportsmen organizations, wider public awareness was limited and many of Hampton’s audiences raised strong objections to the land being taken out of private ownership.¹² Little came from the Southeastern Office’s report—later said to be because “there was no urgency in 1963.”¹³ During this time, a few students and enthusiasts of ecology and natural sciences began coming into the Swamp with Hampton to find, measure, and nominate some of the trees as state and national champions. In the mid-1960s, naturalist John V. Dennis, the Charleston Museum, and others

⁹ The collection of folklore written by a descendent of a planter family and based on the African American community around the Congaree Swamp is Edward C.L. Adams, *Tales of the Congaree* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987). For more on the history of the Congaree Swamp area, see John Cely, “Is the Beidler Tract Virgin?” in *Congaree Swamp: Greatest Unprotected Forest on the Continent* (Columbia, South Carolina: South Carolina Environmental Coalition, 1975), 91–94; James L. Michie, *Archaeological Survey of Congaree Swamp: Cultural Resources Inventory and Assessment of a Bottomland Environment in Central South Carolina* (Columbia, South Carolina: SC Institute for Archaeology and Anthropology, 1980); Elizabeth J. Almlie, “Historical Background for Three Sites at Congaree National Park, Richland County, South Carolina,” Report submitted to Congaree National Park, November 2009.

¹⁰ John V. Dennis, “Woody Plants of the Congaree Forest Swamp, SC,” *The Nature Conservancy Ecological Studies Leaflet* No. 12, July 1967, reprinted in *Congaree Swamp: Greatest Unprotected Forest*.

¹¹ National Park Service, *Specific Area Report: Proposed Congaree Swamp National Monument* (National Park Service, Southeast Region, April 1963).

¹² From the testimony of his daughter Harriet Hampton-Faucette, Hearing before the Subcommittee on National Parks, of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, U.S. Senate, 108th Cong., 1st Sess., on S.1313 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003), 21–22.

¹³ Congaree Swamp National Preserve Association Brochure, “Congaree Swamp National Preserve: An Appeal for Fast Citizen Action to Save the South’s Best Forest,” Records of the South Carolina Environmental Coalition, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

also began studying the natural resources of the Congaree Swamp. In 1969, when the Beidlers began leasing harvesting rights and young naturalists found new sections of the forest being logged, they saw it as an attack upon the forest ecosystem they had visited, studied, and felt personally connected to.¹⁴ Through these experiences of research, the proponents' advocacy drew heavily on both ecological motivations and on finding ways of expressing and replicating their emotional attachment to the Swamp to a public who had not had the same experiences. Their vision for the Congaree Swamp stemmed both from their scientific training and the culture of grassroots activism that their youth allowed them to experience in the late 1960s.

In comparison to a campaign like that for the Redwoods that took some 50 years, the proponents' Congaree Swamp advocacy was a fast and largely successful process. In 1972, the Congaree Swamp National Preserve Association (CSNPA), an ad hoc group of preservation supporters with a close partnership to local Sierra Club groups, formed and launched a public awareness campaign that included additional news and magazine articles, brochures, a slide show, appeals to political representatives, holding a rally in the state capitol, and bringing small groups of potential supporters on tours to see the Beidler Tract in person. By the time the first proposed legislation got to subcommittee hearings in 1976, the CSNPA could call on the support of the leaders of major conservation and environmental organizations on local, regional, and national levels—the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, the National Audubon Society, the National Parks and Conservation Association, the National Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Earth, and the League of Women Voters—and on supporters from South Carolina and across the country.¹⁵ In two years, the preservation campaign had a following large enough to be a threat, and opposition mobilized from foresters and the forest industry. Organized professional groups of foresters and representatives of the forest industry in South Carolina, whose vision of the Congaree Swamp was informed by their professional training and belief in the socioeconomic value of the forest industry, led the public awareness efforts and political appeals. They reached out particularly to the Beidler family and those neighboring landowners who might be impacted if the park ever expanded beyond the boundary of the Beidler Tract.

On September 20, 1975, CSNPA held a “Congaree Action Now!” rally in Columbia, South Carolina, where about 700 people gathered to hear prominent environmentalists and researchers speak in favor of preservation. Also in 1975, the South Carolina Forestry Association (SCFA) printed a brochure for the public warning against the strict and elitist preservation that they argued would result from federal acquisition. A few months later, Senators Strom Thurmond and Ernest F. Hollings and Representative Floyd D. Spence authored the introduction of bills S. 3497, S. 3498, H.R. 11891, and H.R. 12111 (and the other House Representatives agreed to support H.R. 12111) to authorize Congaree Swamp as a national preserve. The respective subcommittee hearings were scheduled for April and August of 1976. The House Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation forwarded the bill to the floor, Congress passed the act establishing Congaree Swamp National Monument on September 21, 1976 (just a year after the CSNPA rally), and it was signed into law on October 18. A

¹⁴ As told in the oral interviews done at a reunion of park advocates, *The State* (Columbia, South Carolina), April 6, 2009.

¹⁵ Hearings before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation, 94th Cong., 2nd Sess., on H.R. 11891 and H.R. 12111, April 29, 1976 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977); Hearings before the Senate Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation, 94th Cong., 2nd Sess. on S. 3497 and S. 3498, August 6, 1976 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976); Letters, MSS 100, Strom Thurmond Collection, Strom Thurmond Institute, Clemson University Libraries, Clemson, South Carolina.

September news article by Jan Stucker reported that Senator Strom Thurmond had used his political connections to get the bill before the Senate subcommittee in time and then onto the legislative floor for a vote and, that Thurmond, “whose reputation for zeal concerning pet causes is well known, out-did himself on Congaree.”¹⁶ Environmentalists celebrated their victory as a successful grassroots effort to sway the opinions of politicians and defeat a powerful timber industry.

Although a comprehensive administrative history has yet to be written, for the first several years, the monument had only a couple of staff with offices in Columbia who spent most of their time creating a management plan for the park and coordinating more detailed inventories and studies. In September 1987, 11 years later, they completed the study of the proposed expansion and suitability for wilderness designation; the comments they received are still held in the archives of Congaree National Park. In February 1988, Senators Hollings and Thurmond and Representative Spence introduced both S. 2018 and H.R. 4027; S. 2018 had its subcommittee hearing in June 1988 and was signed into law on October 24, 1988. Congaree Swamp National Monument was then a designated wilderness area of 15,010 acres and 6,840 acres of potential wilderness, and the park’s authorized boundary was extended to 22,200 acres. In 2003, another bill was passed to expand the monument by another 4,600 acres and re-designate it as Congaree National Park—both increasing the prestige of the NPS unit and dropping the ecologically inaccurate “Swamp.”

Toward a Fuller Understanding of Place / The Role of History in the Debates on Significance

To a great extent, the arguments made by proponents and opponents of the preserve in advocacy materials during this founding period focused on the future of Congaree Swamp, but they also made arguments that showed how their sense of history and heritage had an important place in their ideas about that ideal future. Proponents’ views of the Swamp and its establishment had important historical components, but they regulated history to a level where it did not interfere with the value of the natural resources and the forest’s wilderness character. The arguments of opponents alternatively used history to negate any claims to the purity of the Swamp’s natural condition and insisted that forming a preserve would unalterably disrupt a continuum of history of economic enterprise, sport hunting, and private owners’ connection to the land.

In order to make a successful argument to the public and then to Congress, proponents’ advocacy primarily stressed its national ecological and geological significance as “the last large remnant of original bottomland hardwood forest in the southeastern United States,” but some of the assertions about this ecological and geological significance were also, in a sense, about a broader idea of valued heritage.¹⁷ During the 1976 House hearings, the old-growth trees, especially those champions that had been measured and registered as the tallest and biggest in the country of their species, became physical symbols of that heritage. Senator J. Bennett Johnston, chairman of the Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation, specifically questioned Senator Thurmond on his use of the term “the historic part” of the Swamp and his answer that the term was “from an environmental standpoint” and meant the “oldest timber.”¹⁸ Their age became a powerful symbol

¹⁶ *The Columbia Record* (Columbia, South Carolina), September 30, 1976.

¹⁷ The quote is one variant of a commonly repeated phrase used by those in favor of Congaree Swamp’s preservation; Hearings on S. 3497 and S. 3498, 10.

¹⁸ Hearings on S. 3497 and S. 3498, 28.

of ecological survival that supported the argument of the Swamp's national significance and uniqueness.

The summer of 1976 was the Bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence, and preserve proponents used those associations where they could in their presentations to Congress, as shown best in the testimony of Sierra Club regional leader, Ed Easton:

What is our purpose in preservation, what can be served by hanging onto these pitifully small remnants of virgin forest land? Gentlemen, why are we celebrating a Bicentennial? I hope not to just remind ourselves of past glory. . . . So, also, should we celebrate and preserve the Congaree. For it could be, in its pristine wholeness, not only a reminder of the great forests which once existed, but also an inspiration for all of the American people.¹⁹

The connections proponents also made to other valued places attempted to connect the congressmen to the heritage of the Swamp landscape in an emotional way that implicitly reflected the Bicentennial atmosphere. Biology professor John Terbough testified that “we should afford it the same degree of protection we would give a priceless historical document, and should cherish it with the same solicitous concern that we lavish on the most revered piece of art that hangs in our museums.”²⁰ After the 1975 rally in Columbia, the *New York Times* quoted both Brock Evans, director of the Sierra Club, that “cutting down the trees in the Congaree would be like cutting down the Liberty Bell, melting it down and selling the metal for spoons and forks,” and Bill Painter, executive director of the American Rivers Conservation Council, that it would be “like paving over Gettysburg and turning it into a shopping center.”²¹ These and similar arguments did not challenge the natural character of the Swamp the way that its history of logging might, and they even served to augment the historical significance and integrity of that naturalness.

Proponents also made the connection more specifically by describing the Swamp as a representative setting—and possibly even the actual setting—of the Revolutionary War history that was the focus of Bicentennial festivities. The old-growth Swamp's association with the time period, because of the age of the trees, would convey a feeling of the floodplain environments that Revolutionary War soldiers like the “Swamp Fox,” Gen. Francis Marion, had experienced and used strategically in their Southern campaigns. Naturalist and *Audubon* magazine editor, Gary Soucie, testified in 1976 that “while the Congaree was not a major battleground, at least it can remind us of the Swamp Fox and the southern Sons of Liberty. So far the Bicentennial has been mostly empty rhetoric.”²² The landscape's integrity when other floodplain forests had been drained for agriculture or clear-cut made the Congaree Swamp particularly important for carrying those associations, in the words of Ed Easton, “of the world of our fathers and their fathers, and the world of Marion and Moultrie, only the Congaree is left.”²³ The frequent recalling of historical associations shows that a strong motive for Congaree's preservation was the preservation of a historical frontier appearance. In their testimony, proponents, like Sierra Club leader Ann Snyder,

¹⁹ Hearings on H.R. 11891 and H.R. 12111, 48.

²⁰ Hearings on H.R. 11891 and H.R. 12111, 90.

²¹ *New York Times* (New York City), September 22, 1975.

²² Hearings on H.R. 11891 and H.R. 12111, 216.

²³ Refers to Revolutionary War Generals Francis Marion and William Moultrie from South Carolina, Hearings on H.R. 11891 and H.R. 12111, 48.

invoked other historical associations of Euro-American history, saying “this is the forest the Spaniards met in their conquests West, the forest our pioneer forefathers cleared and settled, the forest in which the Swamp Fox eluded the British . . . the kind of forest that in most every other place was drained for rich bottomland crops or was built upon or was flooded beneath vast reservoirs.”²⁴ Again, these historical associations made the Congaree Swamp a remnant of the frontier wilderness and did not interfere with the Swamp’s natural value. There was no question for proponents that a fortunate accident of history had left the Congaree Swamp intact when elsewhere the settlement of the frontier had resulted in agricultural or industrial development.

However, there was physical evidence of attempts at environmental manipulation in the Congaree Swamp. Proponents acknowledged the existence of those attempts and the resulting cultural sites, but stressed the small impact they had had and their ultimate failure. In articles originally printed in 1967 and 1972, John V. Dennis incorporated into his discussion of the forest ecology of the Swamp the history of hunting and fishing; of rumored Indian mounds; of slaves building field dikes for rice or indigo production; of the construction of dirt hills, or “mounts,” to help grazing cattle avoid high water; and of bootleggers later building whiskey stills on the mounts.²⁵ John Cely’s article “Is the Beidler Tract in Congaree Swamp Virgin?” directly addressed a controversy “over whether this area is a true virgin forest or not,” and described the agricultural process of clearing land and building dikes as a limited and temporary process in which “planters were reluctant to reclaim the swamps because it involved investing a considerable number of expensive slaves working in a disease-ridden environment to construct the elaborate system of dikes required to protect the crops from periodic floods.”²⁶ Cely concluded that history had not impacted the Congaree Swamp’s overall wilderness character.²⁷ His research formed the basis by which proponents could argue for the relative virginity of the Beidler Tract compared to other tracts of land, emphasizing the small scale of alterations made until the logging in 1969 became “the most serious inroad by man upon an otherwise virgin forest.”²⁸ Professor of geography Robert Janiskee reminded the congressmen that it was hard to find anywhere on the East coast where no one had ever been before.²⁹ Professor of biology Ross T. Clark testified that the Swamp “shows only extremely localized evidence of disturbance.”³⁰ Their statements consistently reflected their continued concern with prohibiting future forest industry activity while minimizing the character of historical impacts.

Opponents made a combination of arguments about the productivity of the Swamp, private property rights, the viability of the forest industry on a local and regional scale, the unappealing qualities of the Swamp’s aesthetics, and the cost to taxpayers of acquiring and establishing the property as a preserve. Other arguments they made directly expressed their perspective on the history and wilderness condition of the Congaree Swamp. Rejecting an idealistic characterization of a pure wilderness, they argued that past land use had had an extensive impact on the character of the forest, that private owners had responsibly and sustainably managed the resources on their land, and both logging and hunting had value both economically and socially as continuing practices.

²⁴ Hearings on S. 3497 and S. 3498, 169

²⁵ *Congaree Swamp: Greatest Unprotected Forest*, 35, 43, and 60.

²⁶ Cely, “Is the Beidler Tract Virgin?” 91–92.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁸ Dennis, “Woody Plants,” 35.

²⁹ Hearings on S. 3497 and S. 3498, 91.

³⁰ Hearings on S. 3497 and S. 3498, 91, 174.

In response to the public awareness campaign of the park advocates, the South Carolina Forestry Association (SCFA) put out a brochure in 1975 in which they told a history of continuing timbering in parts of the Swamp, where “parts of the 70,000 acre tract have been harvested, replanted, or regenerated naturally, and harvested again for at least 50 years.”³¹ The brochure also shared with the public the information that historic maps and plats of the property showed dikes, wagon trails, agricultural fields, and fences that owners had constructed in the past. Opponents emphasized a continuity of history, asserting that a Congaree Swamp National Preserve would not be formed out of vacated land. Robert Taylor, of the SCFA, in a statement sent to all the members of the congressional delegation from South Carolina, conceded that while some few hundred acres of the land was virgin and a small amount could be valuable for scientific research, much of it was not virgin.³² He implied that preservationists made claims to virginity because they had been fooled by the environmentally sound nature of historic practices. He and the other opponents argued that managing the land for multiple-uses of logging, hunting, fishing, and recreation would be the best for the future of the Swamp as it had been for its past. South Carolina State Representative John G. Felder, who told Congress he would speak for the many landowners in the Swamp area who were concerned about potential boundary expansions, appealed to the representatives with historical allusions that, if a preserve was established, these owners who loved their land would be punished, asking the congressmen:

Now, what about these people’s lands? Why is that important? It may be that it is not important up here but it is important because it goes from the original land grants in this country and this land has been passed down from generation to generation. These people have cared for this land. They have preserved it.³³

Opponent Jack Brady testified that his family had, in fact, owned their land on the north and south sides of the river continuously for over 200 years and had conscientiously managed it for all those years.³⁴ Philip C. Chappell, Jr., wrote in a letter that, after working the land for years, “obtaining this parcel of land has been a life-long dream which was just recently fulfilled.”³⁵ Those who had stewarded the land argued that their historic and continued connection to the Congaree Swamp would be forcibly broken by an outside force if the federal preserve were established.

Opponents also insisted on the importance of that continuing history in terms of societal, economic, and environmental value. These arguments centered on the issue of access and questioning what benefits would actually result from preserving the land. Opponents, and even some of the proponents, acknowledged that the Beidler family and their company had stewarded the Congaree Swamp and their other lands with sustainable conservation forestry practices.³⁶ By extension, public ownership would break that healthy relationship, and although the National Park

³¹ Note that of the 70,000-acre floodplain, the eventual legislation only included the 15,000-some acres of the Beidler tract that had been logged from 1898 to 1914 and after 1969. SCFA, Brochure.

³² Robert Taylor, South Carolina Forestry Association, Letter to the SC Delegation, undated, MSS 100 Strom Thurmond Collection, Clemson University, South Carolina.

³³ Hearings on H.R. 11891 and H.R. 12111, 155.

³⁴ Hearings on H.R. 11891 and H.R. 12111, 132.

³⁵ Philip C. Chappell Jr., Letter to Robert C. Edwards, University President (February 27, 1975), Folder 13, Box 5, Dept. of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management, University Archives, Special Collections, Clemson University, South Carolina.

³⁶ Hearings on S. 3497 and S. 3498, 22, 170; Hearings on H.R. 11891 and H.R. 12111, 26

Service might mean well, landowner Peter Buyck, Jr., argued to Congress that “anytime the public gets their hands on something, it is defaced or destroyed.”³⁷ He implied that without private management, both the trees and the wildlife would suffer from overpopulation and disease, and the introduction of visitors, who did not have a relationship to the land and would strain the Swamp’s environmental balance. When the land became a part of the National Park System in October 1976, logging operations ceased and hunting was criminalized, which not only affected the men who ran the lumber companies and who belonged to hunt clubs, but those who labored in harvesting or milling the lumber and locals who hunted for subsistence.³⁸ Opponents recognized early on that prohibiting certain uses of resource extraction and prescribing new ones based on wilderness values would fundamentally change the landscape and the types of relationships people had to the Congaree Swamp.

In the late 1970s, perspectives from the predominately African American community in the areas to the north and east of the Swamp were absent from the documented debate over preserving the Swamp. Not until the 2003 hearings on expanding the park did the Lower Richland NAACP have a representative, Hattie Fruster, testify against how the park had negatively impacted the African American history of land ownership, charging that the National Park Service had not made the proposal process transparent and accessible to local residents.³⁹ As Congaree National Park begins oral histories with not only environmental advocates and proponents, but also with the local African American community, memories will be documented and a historical record will hopefully soon be available to fill in this glaring gap in the cadre of perspectives of the park’s founding. Without the benefit of direct perspectives from the local African American community during the founding period being available in the historical record historical relationships with the Swamp would certainly and immensely have affected their perspectives on the creation of a preserve. To a limited extent, insights into those connections can come through the folklore collected by planter-descendent Edward C.L. Adams in Lower Richland County, some existing local history, and broader historical scholarship about African American relationships to the environment.

Originally printed in the 1920s, Adams’s stories, as compiled in the 1987 *Tales of the Congaree*, carried all the racial undertones of the post–Civil War, Jim Crow era, but included stories about subsistence activities where locals went fishing, hunting, and berry-picking in the Swamp. The short tales also included ghost stories about planters, having sold apart families or brought slaves into the Swamp to beat them, being condemned to haunt the Swamp. These legends and the probable underlying historical reality would have made the Swamp not only a place of danger from snakes, alligators, or getting lost, but a place of violence as well.⁴⁰ Additionally, a small amount of research has recently been done on some of the African American families who lived on the northern bluff of the floodplain during the 20th century. One man at least, Joe Garrick,

³⁷ Hearings on H.R. 11891 and H.R. 12111, 134.

³⁸ For more on the criminalization of traditional practices like hunting and the underestimation of their cultural and historical value within newly acquired public lands, see Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Benjamin Johnson, “Wilderness Parks and Their Discontents,” in Michael Lewis, ed., *American Wilderness: A New History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature’s Role in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³⁹ Hearing on S. 1313.

⁴⁰ Adams, *Tales of the Congaree*.

had a small farm in the early 20th century and used fish gathered from the Swamp's Cedar Creek to sell to townspeople and to trade for medicine.⁴¹ This folklore and limited historical research tells us that Congaree Swamp provided resources for nearby residents, but its remote location also meant it had been a space of danger and violence. Historian Mart Stewart has written that slaves experienced environments outside the plantation landscape through supplemental subsistence hunting and fishing, traveling to see family from other plantations, and escaping even temporarily the constraints of their bondage.⁴² Cassandra Y.



Remains of Joe Garrick's home on the northern bluff of the Congaree River.

Johnson and J. M. Bowker drew from several other analyses to similarly highlight black environmental knowledge coming from independent subsistence activity as well as forced labor and violence.⁴³ They argued that this knowledge of the land began through the experiences of slavery but had subsequently continued in post-emancipation experiences and had been passed down through collective memory. Their scholarship concludes that most African American communities generally did not develop an indigenous concept of wilderness landscapes, but saw unsettled land as an extension of their utilized landscape.⁴⁴ The Congaree Swamp was a significant part of the African American communities' culture and landscape. For all local residents, white and black, strong ties to the extended landscape of the Swamp were permanently changed by the creation of Congaree Swamp National Monument.

Evolution of Congaree Swamp Management Plans

Within the scope of documents generated by the National Park Service during the founding period, discussions of history and historic resources were most likely informed by the available information from park proponents. Additionally, and more so as the years passed, their own research and resource management policy handed down from the national level guided their attention to historic sites. In the general description of the area in the National Park Service's first feasibility study, begun in 1959 and printed in 1963, the authors stated that compared with the biological, geological, and even aesthetic values, "historical and archaeological values seem to be negligible."⁴⁵ The report then described the small-scale impact of old agricultural fields, grazing animals, and unimproved hunt club roads within the park, and only "submarginal" and "widely scattered" rural development of farmhouses, outbuildings, churches, and schools in the surrounding area. This report evaluated acquisition feasibility in largely economic terms and indi-

⁴¹ Descendants of his relatives were among those who owned the land that became part of the authorized 1988 park boundary, much of which the National Park Service purchased through eminent domain. Richland County Judgment Rolls, Roll #34861, South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Columbia, quoted in Almlie, "Historical Background," 42.

⁴² Mart Stewart, "If John Muir Had Been an Agrarian: American Environmental History West and South," in Paul S. Sutter and Christopher J. Manganiello, eds., *Environmental History and the American South: A Reader* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 204, 211.

⁴³ Cassandra Y. Johnson and J. M. Bowker, "African-American Wildland Memories," in Nelson and Callicott, *The Wilderness Debate Rages On*.

⁴⁴ See also Stewart in Sutter and Manganiello, *Environmental History*, 206.

⁴⁵ National Park Service, *Specific Area Report*, 6.

cated that “achieving public ownership of adequate amounts of this type of land for boundary protection purposes should not be difficult.”⁴⁶ They saw the farms, schools, and churches in the surrounding area, but overlooked that these African American communities had evolved out of post–Civil War expressions of independence and had historical ties to the Swamp landscape as an extension of those communities. An awareness of the connection has only recently become an intentional part of Congaree National Park’s management and programming efforts.



After the monument was established, the next major National Park Service documents to come out were the 1978 management statement and the 1979 general management plan/wilderness suitability study of the monument. In the interim, the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966 and the issuance of Executive Order 11593 in 1971 framed a system of regulations that required the new superintendent to inventory and evaluate the eligibility of cultural resources within the boundary of the park to a greater extent than the 1963 report had. In the 1978 management statement, the authors acknowledged that “cultural resources within the park are not completely known at this time, and because of this, a contract has been let for a complete study of the cultural resources that may exist.”⁴⁷ They acknowledged the history of cypress logging, but, like the characterizations of the proponents, emphasized the high concentration of old-growth trees that had survived because of “the lack of disturbance by man,” and asserted that there were no traditional uses that would affect management.⁴⁸ In the 1979 general management plan, staff acknowledged that “cultural resources will be researched and interpreted where feasible. Any cultural resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places will be treated according to provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act and Executive Order 11593.”⁴⁹ The authors made no claims to the historical importance of the Swamp, but they also did not disregard cultural resources as “negligible” as the 1963 study had.

The Congaree Swamp superintendent contracted with James L. Michie of the South Carolina Institute for Archaeology and Anthropology to survey for cultural resources within the boundary of the new monument. They examined whiskey stills used in the 1960s and bridge abutments of then-unknown origin, determining that both were ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places because they had been damaged and only partially survived.⁵⁰ They also determined other resources potentially eligible, particularly the field dikes and cattle mounts of earthen construc-

⁴⁶ Ibid., 18–19.

⁴⁷ Congaree Swamp National Monument, *Management Statement* (1978), 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁹ Congaree Swamp National Monument. *General Management Plan and Wilderness Suitability Study for Congaree Swamp National Monument, South Carolina* (August 1979), 13.

⁵⁰ Michie, *Archaeological Survey of Congaree Swamp*, 144.

tion and two of the newly identified archaeological sites. Michie described the significance of the cattle mounts as uniquely built in central South Carolina and representing a previously unrecognized form of environmental adaptation for agriculture. The archaeological sites represented excursions by Native Americans into the Swamp for hunting or fishing from camps up on the northern or the even higher southern bluffs of the floodplain. Michie learned from Jack Brady, the owner of a private in-holding and an opponent of the preserve, that Brady's grandfather had built their cattle mount around 1900 and still continued to use it for their cattle, and in this way Michie included some history of continuity in the report. The survey concluded that since the pre-contact period, the Swamp had served as an unsettled but utilized extended landscape. Continuing archaeological and historical studies of additional areas of the Swamp are still needed in our present day to expand on historical knowledge of the thousands of years of Native Americans using the land, of colonial settlers attempting to control the landscape, and of the daily lives of small farmers on the bluffs.

In 1987 the staff of Congaree Swamp National Monument prepared another general management plan (GMP) that also served as a study for the proposed boundary expansion before it came before Congress in 1988.⁵¹ This study also evaluated the suitability of making the Congaree Swamp a designated wilderness—much of it focused on describing landscape features and recreational opportunities—so considerations of cultural resources and the history of the Swamp were supplementary, but nevertheless present. The GMP made recommendations on studying the archaeological sites and nominating the eligible historic resources to the National Register.⁵² In addition, a multiple property submission (completed in 1995) integrated the nine sites owned by the park and one privately owned site within the authorized boundary into a more complete record of what was then known about the agricultural history of the Congaree Swamp.⁵³ The 1987 GMP also reported that “cultural influences, i.e., Indian activities, farming, logging, and hunting, [were] treated as a minor theme in monument interpretation.”⁵⁴ It discussed land uses that continued in bordering areas of the monument but still did not see them as culturally or historically significant.⁵⁵ This GMP also shows the reader how they were creating a new managed wilderness landscape by monitoring the condition of resources, prohibiting the “cultural influence” of hunting, and encouraging the restoration of previously impacted lands to natural appearances. Recently, the park has been able to dedicate more resources to understanding natural and cultural values of the Swamp together, including seeking out the stories of those who logged in the Swamp and the locals whose cultural lives were and still are connected to the Swamp, even if they had opposed the establishment of the preserve. This recent work has continued to build on the proponents and the opponents' knowledge of the history of the Swamp, as well as their understanding of the role of that history in the landscape as wilderness.

The preservation of the eligible historic resources in Congaree Swamp has benefitted from their being perceived as non-threatening to the valued natural ecosystem. In national practice and

⁵¹ Congaree Swamp National Monument, *General Management Plan/Wilderness Suitability Study/Environmental Assessment* (1987).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 15, 28.

⁵³ Jill Hanson, “Historic Resources of Congaree Swamp National Monument,” Multiple Property Submission to the National Register of Historic Places (November 1, 1995).

⁵⁴ Congaree Swamp National Monument, *General Management Plan* (1987), 19.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8, 10.

theory, the acknowledgment of human history and remnants of man-made structures or landforms in natural parks has been seen as a threat to wilderness not only because resources might be reallocated to them, but, as Frances M. Hayashida has noted, because “many fear that acknowledging the human past of wild areas will be used to justify their intensive use today.”⁵⁶ Fortunately, there are interpretations developing in both the academic and professional worlds that not only can cultural resources be non-threatening to wilderness, but they can actively inform a fuller understanding of place.⁵⁷ These interpretations recognize neither white nor black, but seek to respect the values of those who came before while informing the values developed by those managing the land at present.

Conclusion

Although some of the rhetoric of the wilderness movement and the interpretation of the Wilderness Act has encouraged a preconception that wilderness areas are eternally untouched by humanity, the legislation itself does not limit management to those preconceptions but is more about the limiting the future impacts of human activities. The founding period of Congaree Swamp National Monument showed that those closest to the place itself had a richer understanding of its past, but proponents still desired future management of the property to fulfill Wilderness Act standards by limiting human impact. In discussing cultural resources in the 2008 interagency guidance on monitoring wilderness character, Peter Landres and his co-authors referred to past human-land uses not as automatically exploitative but as indicative of relationships with the land. If these uses resulted in a place significant for its lack of development, the preservation of the physical remains of those good relationships does not have to be a threat to wilderness character or future management decisions.⁵⁸ It is a full understanding of that past that is needed to make decisions on how to manage the legacy of those relationships and integrate them with the wilderness qualities valued in the contemporary landscape “because they primarily represent human relationships with the land prior to modern wilderness designation” and their fate should be negotiated by resource managers in consultation with cultural resource professionals and with those invested in that history.⁵⁹ If the prejudices highlighted by historian Rebecca Conard are allowed to persist—that historic preservationists carry the baggage of high architecture and significance, environmentalists carry the baggage of pristine wilderness, public land managers see both as zealots, and both see managers as bureaucrats—good understanding will not be able to inform good management.⁶⁰

In his article on the Apostle Islands of Lake Superior, William Cronon challenged the practice of removing man-made structures or landscapes in order to reconstruct wilderness conditions, charging that it deceives visitors, giving them a false sense of place.⁶¹ From his perspective, natural restorations and the language used in their justification imply that all human presence has

⁵⁶ Frances M. Hayashida, “Archaeology, Ecological History, and Conservation,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005), 52; similar sentiment expressed in Nelson and Callicott, *The Wilderness Debate Rages On*, 3.

⁵⁷ Landres et al., *Keeping It Wild*; Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*.

⁵⁸ Landres, *Keeping It Wild*, 24.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁰ Rebecca Conard, “Spading Common Ground,” in Martin V. Melosi, and Philip V. Scarpino, eds., *Public History and the Environment* (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 2004), 6.

⁶¹ Cronon, “The Riddle of the Apostle Islands”; Directed by Cronon, James Feldman’s dissertation work on the Apostle Islands sought a way to reconcile the disconnect between history and wilderness management.

wounded the environment, tragically dishonoring the memory of those whose lives were connected to the land. A feeling of tragedy should come not when decisions are made, because decisions have to be made, but if managers make uninformed decisions without the benefit of research and engaging the input of interested parties, or if they ignore the fact that management practices themselves are conscious choices between differing values—because that is when memory is dishonored. Not only does a mistakenly simple and eternal sense of place, especially in areas prioritizing natural resources, dishonor the memory of the environment and the people of the past, but it disables the people of the present and future from learning about consequences of decisions they make about their environment. The natural characteristics that visitors to a designated wilderness area love and value are the result of conscious decisions made by those who dwelt there and those who put that place within a federal system of protections. The recording and understanding of decisions made in the past and their consequences is essential for being able to judge what decisions to make in the future, both for the stewardship of the park and for visitors to carry with them back to the web of environments impacted by their own lives. The National Park System has the opportunity to be “not a place of boundaries—political, social, or legal—but a place of relationships,” to be a place for people to learn about historic and current relationships to the land, and then to carry that knowledge beyond the boundary of the park.⁶² No place, especially a highly valued one, is simple or eternal. The opportunity of managing Congaree National Park and other wilderness areas is to foster understanding of the complexities of history and the environment.

Photo credits: Scientists studying tree, courtesy of the National Park Service; Congaree River floodplain, photograph by author, April 2009; Remains of Joe Garrick’s home, photograph by author, March 2009; Map, Congaree National Park.

⁶² Lucy Lawliss and Tim Davis, “America’s Best Idea,” *Common Ground* (Fall 2009), 21.