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# **Barriers to a Backyard National Park**

## *Case Study of African American Communities in Columbia, SC*

Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/EQD/NRR—2012/604

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## **Executive Summary**

This report presents the results of a qualitative study about recreational behaviors, preferences and opinions of African Americans in the Columbia, SC area and the potential barriers to visiting Congaree National Park. Following a single case study methodological approach, the focus group method was applied as an appropriate data collection method. Ten focus groups of six to twelve participants each at five different locations in the Columbia, SC area were scheduled between November 11 and November 16, 2011. Focus group discussions were audiotaped and transcribed. Thematic coding using a grounded theory approach was applied to analyze the qualitative data. The emerging themes indicating potential barriers to park visitation included lack of information, concerns for safety, detachment from nature, and perceived discrimination. The recreational behaviors, interests and preferences discussed by focus group participants can serve as opportunities to help guide park managers as they seek to increase the number of African American visitors to Congaree National Park. Facilities such as group picnic areas, structures for special events (such as meetings, weddings, and reunions), and outdoor play and sports facilities may help enhance the visitor experience. Focus group participants suggested that more community outreach, education, and marketing could help the park make meaningful connections with its local communities.

For more information about the Visitor Services Project, please contact the Park Studies Unit at the University of Idaho at (208) 885-7863 or the following website <http://www.psu.uidaho.edu>.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **About the Authors**

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## Background

The National Park Service (NPS), entrusted by the public to preserve and protect the nation's significant natural, cultural, and historic resources, is also mandated to provide for the public's enjoyment of these (National Park Service Organic Act, 16 U.S.C.1.). Since the first electronic report of visitation statistics in 1979, the number of recreation visits to national park units has increased from approximately 205 million to 279 million in 2011. Some parks, such as Zion National Park, experienced such high visitation during peak season that in 1997 a shuttle bus system was implemented as a solution to overcrowding.

However, as park visitation figures increase, there is a segment of the population for which low attendance has been and continues to be a concern of park managers, raising the question of social equity as reflected in the diversity of the park visitor profile. In the post civil rights era of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century an important question arose and remains: "Who is *not* visiting national parks, and why?" Diversity in national parks is lacking, as important segments of the American public are consistently under-represented among visitor populations. According to the National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public 2008-2009, African Americans were the most "under-represented" visitor group of those surveyed ( Taylor, Grandjean, & Anatchkova, 2011). This state of under-representation is evident at Congaree National Park.

Located in Richland County, within about 20 miles of Columbia, SC, Congaree Swamp National Monument was established in 1976 then designated as Congaree National Park (NP) in 2003. As stated in the park's website "the primary significance of Congaree NP is demonstrated through its unique bottomland hardwood forest communities, the overall height of the forest canopy and associated number of national and state champion trees, as well as the presence of a well-preserved, biologically diverse, and dynamic river floodplain ecosystem" ([nps.gov/cong](http://nps.gov/cong) retrieved February 2012). In 1983 Congaree NP was designated as an International Biosphere Reserve and in 2001 it was designated as a Globally Important Bird Area. In addition to its national significance for preserving a unique North American ecosystem, Congaree NP is also an important international biodiversity reserve.

According to the 2010 U.S. census 42.2% of the city of Columbia, 45.9% of Richland County, and 27.9% of the South Carolina population identifies itself as African American. A visitor survey conducted by the National Park Service Visitor Services Project (VSP) at the University

of Idaho revealed that African Americans composed only 1.3% of the visitor population during spring 2005 (Le & Littlejohn, 2005). A more recent VSP study at Congaree NP showed that proportion to be 4.4% in spring 2011, 1.9% in summer 2011, and 2.3% in fall 2011 (Kulesza & Le, 2012). These statistics show that there may be a seasonal effect as African Americans were more likely to visit during the spring and fall than in summer. In comparing the 2005 and 2011 VSP studies, there was a slight increase in African American visitation to Congaree NP. However, comparing the visitation statistics with the percentage of African Americans in the U.S. population and Richland County population, it is apparent that the African American community, especially from the local area, is an underserved population among visitors to Congaree NP.

To address this issue and obtain information for potential solutions to increase the number of African American visitors to the park, the Park Studies Unit (PSU) at the University of Idaho conducted a study among African Americans residents in the Columbia, SC region in the fall of 2011. Previous research has attempted to provide an insight to potential problems/barriers that prevent African Americans from utilizing public parks and recreation areas. However the majority of this research focused on users of recreation areas and public lands and very few focused on non-users. In order to address the potential problems or issues that prevent the African American population in the local area from visiting Congaree NP, it is more appropriate to study the non-users. This study was conducted concurrently with a visitor survey at the park that collected information about park users.

## **Study Objectives**

The objective of this project was to study African American residents of the area surrounding Congaree NP who don't visit the park, in order to address the issue of low attendance and provide information for potential solutions. Specifically, the study aimed to:

- Understand recreational behaviors, preferred recreational activities, and the significance of outdoor settings through discussions with African American community members;
- Learn about potential barriers/problems that prevent the African American community from visiting the park;
- Investigate how services and facilities at Congaree NP can help meet the recreation needs of the community;
- Explore ways that Congaree NP can connect with its local community.



# Methods

## Study Design

Our research objectives were to understand and explore attitudes and preferences of African Americans in the communities surrounding Congaree NP rather than to generalize to a larger population, thus a qualitative approach is more appropriate than a quantitative approach. Furthermore, a qualitative case study was deemed the most appropriate research approach in order to address our study objectives. Case study research involves an in-depth exploration and description of a unit, or case (Stake, 2008). In this study the case was defined as attitudes and recreation preferences of African Americans. The case had a clearly defined boundary that only included African Americans who live in the area of Congaree NP but do not visit the park. The goal was to learn about the case and not about specific individuals within the case. Yin (2003) and Creswell (2007) suggested that given these parameters, single case study is the most suitable approach as it gathers a variety of data to provide a rich description of what is occurring.

The focus group method of data generation was selected for this case study as the most applicable to obtain data in a relatively short period of time and at a low cost. Focus groups are facilitated discussions about a specific topic. Unlike individual interviews, the focus group method relies on interactions and discussions between focus group members. Its success depends on how well the researcher facilitates the focus groups (Krueger, 1998). Group discussions about a specific topic can generate data more quickly than one-on-one interviews because each participant hears others' perceptions and experiences and can reflect and respond with their own thoughts on the subject. While interviews provide more information about the interviewee, focus groups generate more information about the subject of interest. In addition, inquiring about behaviors of members of an ethnic group can be sensitive, and focus groups are well suited for researching sensitive subjects.

The focus group approach has been widely adapted and proven beneficial in market, consumer, and social science research. This method is used to learn about how people feel about a certain topic and to find a range of opinions across several groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Typically, six to twelve participants are invited to each focus group. The participants in each group can be diverse in demographic characteristics, but should be compatible enough to create a comfortable environment for open dialogue. In this environment the participants can freely express their

opinions, ideas, and evaluations of a product, program, or service. We followed guidelines for focus group procedures from Krueger & Casey (2000).

### **Focus Group Script Development**

Discussions and meetings held with Congaree NP staff defined this study's objectives, and the theoretical framework (see below) guided the development of the focus group discussion route. The discussion was designed to move from the general to the specific, beginning with broad questions about recreational behaviors and progressing to specific questions regarding Congaree NP. A prototype was conducted with a group of students at the University of South Carolina, and was video-recorded and analyzed by the researchers. Based on the results, the focus group questions were slightly modified to increase their clarity and facilitate more conversation between group members.

### **Participant Recruitment**

The sampling frame included African Americans residents, at least 16 years old, of the Columbia area. While metropolitan Columbia remained the primary focus, the sampling area included all of Richland County and nearby towns. Focus group participants were purposely sampled to ensure a range of opinions, rather than the representativeness of the sample. Participants with the widest possible range of age, income, occupation, and place of residence were actively recruited. Since the researchers were not from the area, gaining entry was critical. In order to reach potential focus group participants, a snowball sampling method was used, starting with accessible gatekeepers: 1) pastors of African American churches in the Columbia area, and/or their administrative personnel, were contacted via phone, mail, and email to solicit their support for the project and invite members of their congregations to participate in a focus group; 2) presidents of neighborhood associations in the Columbia Council of Neighborhoods, and its officers, were invited to participate via phone calls and emails; 3) Columbia City Council officials were invited to participate via email and were asked to spread the word to their constituents; 4) employees of Congaree National Park and members of Friends of Congaree Swamp provided contacts in the community; 5) personnel at Benedict College and the University of S. Carolina were contacted via phone and email and asked to provide names of potential participants, including students, faculty, and staff; 6) board members of the South East Rural Community Outreach were contacted to obtain their support and to provide contact information

of potential participants; 7) fliers announcing the focus groups and inviting participation were posted in area businesses, on Craigslist, and on various public websites. A combination of these invitations and snowball sampling technique proved to be an effective recruiting strategy.

## **Focus Group Procedures**

Nine focus groups of six to twelve participants each at five different locations were scheduled between November 11 and November 16, 2011. Participants received a reminder phone call or email several days prior to their scheduled focus group, as well as the day before. The focus groups lasted from 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the number of participants.

Meetings were held in churches, community centers, a hotel conference room, and a student resource center, each selected for their central locations and amenities such as parking, restrooms, and comfortable seating in a circular layout. Upon arrival at the focus group meeting place, participants were greeted and asked to fill out a place card with their first name only. The procedures were explained, the Office of Management and Budget regulations and approval were presented, and permission to audio-record the sessions was obtained. Two moderators were present to guide the discussions and take notes. Participants were served sandwiches and/or cookies and soft drinks. To thank them for attending each participant received a cash gift card, a souvenir decal from the Congaree NP bookstore, park brochures, and the opportunity to sign up for a free ranger-guided canoe trip in the park, at a later date.

Two researchers - one as moderator and one as note taker - were present during each focus group. Each focus group was recorded using a digital audio recorder. Within 24 hours of conducting the focus groups, recordings and written notes were reviewed for accuracy. Within three weeks of the study's conclusion the recordings were transcribed for analysis. Code names were used to protect participants' privacy.

In qualitative studies, participants are often selected purposely rather than randomly. The number of participants needed cannot be determined by a statistical formula to calculate a representative sample size but rather to achieve a point of theoretical saturation (where new ideas or issues emerge). Krueger and Casey (2000) suggested that in a focus group scenario, three to five focus groups would generally provide enough samples to reach theoretical saturation. The more complicated the case to be investigated, the larger sample size will be needed. Since the level of saturation could not be determined in advance we decided to over sample by including eight

focus groups. After receiving confirmation of participation from focus group participants, we decided to increase to ten sessions in order to include more men in our sample. Upon completion of each session the two moderators compared notes to identify the themes emerging from the discussions. The observed themes were also triangulated with the theoretical framework as presented in the following section. After five focus groups both moderators concurred that theoretical saturation was reached, as no new ideas or themes emerged, however we agreed to continue with the remaining five focus groups to ensure we had captured the whole range of opinions as well as their level of intensity.

## **Data Analysis**

Coding is a technique of assigning meaning, or themes, to various pieces of text. In this study, data were analyzed using an open-coding process. Using the focus group questions as a framework, the dominant themes were identified. Other themes arose organically from each discussion. This approach provided a structure to gather and group similar participant responses and create a cohesive picture of the focus group discussion results.

In this process a researcher who was also present at the focus group discussions read the transcripts through several times while comparing them with the audio recordings, to become very familiar with the content of each. Participants' comments were then evaluated for their specificity (level of detail), and extensiveness (repetition by different individuals). Since this is a pragmatic rather than a theory-based study, the operationalized themes include topic areas that relate to recreational preferences and awareness of parks as well as issues and suggestions regarding park visitation. The section on Qualitative Findings, below, summarizes participants' responses to the focus group questions, organized by six major topic areas.

# Quality Control

## Researcher as Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher is also the research instrument (Morse & Richards, 2002), serving as a conduit for the data, and by whom it is analyzed and interpreted. While software such as NVivo® can help organize data, the researchers themselves determine meaning. This requires extensive preparation and self-reflection on the researcher's part, so to remain objective. The researcher, serving as moderator, controls the focus group discussion and must be careful to guide the discussion without introducing bias that might influence its outcome, while ensuring that participants are able to communicate openly.

In this study, the primary researcher was not a member of the ethnic group being studied therefore great care was taken to ensure proper use of language and social behavior during the focus groups. By first approaching pastors of African American churches and other leaders in the African American community to obtain support in recruiting focus group participants, researchers helped establish a level of trust with the participants.

Data analysis requires reflection to ensure that results are true to the participants and not a reflection of the researcher's own thought process. The data from this study was coded by a single researcher therefore we rely on her skills and objectivity as a researcher. An outside researcher, knowledgeable about focus groups, though not familiar with this study, conducted an audit of the research process and data analysis. There were no areas in which the auditor disagreed with the methodology or interpretations of this study's primary researcher.

## Theoretical Framework

Many researchers have attempted to explain the underrepresentation of minority groups (particularly Hispanics/Latinos and African Americans) in recreation areas and public lands. Out of five major journals in recreation and leisure sciences, more than 3,000 studies on this topic had been published as of 2008 (Floyd, Bocarro, & Thompson, 2008). Various theoretical frameworks have been applied to explain the lack of participation among African American communities. Regardless of their theoretical background, the main hypothesis arising from these studies is that minority groups often have different recreation behaviors than mainstream

behaviors (mainly White) and thus have different needs regarding recreational facilities and services.

In an attempt to explain the underlying reasons for differences in recreation behavior among different racial groups, four dominant theories have emerged from the literature. Floyd (1999) and later Byrne and Wolch (2009) summarized these four theories: marginality, subculture, assimilation, and discrimination. Each theory provides a unique angle to explain why different racial groups may exhibit different recreation behaviors.

The marginality theory explains the lack of diversity in public land visitation as a socio-economic factor (Lee, Scott, & Floyd, 2001; Edwards, 1981) whereby minority groups experience barriers related to lower economic and educational status. Some, such as Byrne, Wolch and Zhang (2009), and Tarrant and Cordell (1999) see discrepancies in outdoor recreation as an environmental justice issue in which minority groups may not have equal access to public outdoor space due to socio-economic barriers.

Others such as Ho et al. (2005) found that culture and sub-culture play an important role in differentiating recreation behaviors. Johnson, Bowker & Cordell (2004) and Carr and Williams (1993) saw that “under-participation [by minority groups] is the result of subcultural differences in values and expectations related to outdoor recreation experiences” (pp. 23). West (1989) suggested that subcultural identity might overlap with perceived discrimination and observed that a strong awareness of subcultural identity might lead to a stronger perception of discrimination. This perceived discrimination may act as a deterrent for minority groups to participate in outdoor recreation.

While the effects of assimilation in some racial groups (e.g., Hispanics) are more obvious, assimilation in African American communities is often intertwined with economic conditions and racial discrimination. Assimilation into mainstream recreation behavior has been found to affect differences in recreation behavior among U.S.-born versus foreign-born Hispanics Johnson et al. (2004) Recreation behaviors of U.S.-born Hispanics were found to have greater similarities with non-Hispanic White behaviors, while foreign-born Hispanics had more differences when compared to non-Hispanic Whites. Assimilation in African American communities sometimes is viewed as an urban/rural lifestyle difference (Craig, 1972). Others view assimilation as more likely an issue of class and economics rather than racial difference as no differences between

Black and White recreation behaviors were found among a mixed race neighborhood (Edwards, 1981) or between people with the same economic status (Hutchinson, 1987).

Stodolska (2005) and Blahna and Black (1993) theorized that racial and ethnic minorities might hesitate to visit public land areas because of past experiences with discrimination and the expectation of such occurrences. Duncan and Duncan (2003) and Schelhas (2002) observed that historical discrimination, such as segregation, resulted in biases in park and public area designs that catered more to Whites' recreational needs. Such designs may make minority group visitors feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in recreational settings (Floyd & Gramann, 1995). In certain areas, researchers found that minority groups have fewer opportunities to access public parks and recreation areas compared to Whites as a result of segregation-era bioregional design (Abercrombie et al., 2008; Johnson-Gaither, 2011).

Regardless of the theoretical framework, the main tenets with which to examine differences in recreation behaviors are often centered on how people choose a recreational setting (place), what they do there (activity), and with whom (group structure). Literature shows that activity and recreation setting preferences are often intertwined. Recreational settings provide context for the types of activities in which people engage. The preferred type of activity in turn may affect the decision to select a particular destination. Many researchers have found that people with different cultural backgrounds have different preferences regarding recreation settings and activities. In this study, our goal was not to falsify nor verify any particular theoretical framework. However, the focus group script development was guided by these theoretical premises. In addition, theoretical premises were used as one of the criteria to determine theoretical saturation.

## **Trustworthiness**

Conducting qualitative research, much like quantitative research, requires demonstration of the trustworthiness of the data and findings. It is important to know that data were collected and analyzed in a manner that will accurately answer the research questions and/or address the research objectives. There are four primary categories by which qualitative research can be judged as trustworthy: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Schwandt, 2001).

## **Credibility**

The researchers were charged with reconstructing, paraphrasing and interpreting focus group participants' responses. The beliefs and thoughts of each participant were to be communicated, though not modified, by the researcher. To ensure this occurred, focus group moderators repeatedly reminded participants that their honest opinions were highly appreciated and their answers were neither right nor wrong, but rather reflected their personal opinions. The focus group script was designed to encourage discussion without evaluation or judgment of participants' comments. Peer debriefing was conducted throughout the data generation and analysis processes. At the end of each day during the study period, the two moderators compared notes and decided if additional probing questions should be added to obtain more in-depth information on any particular topic. After the study was completed, a third researcher reviewed the focus group transcripts and the analysis to confirm that the coding presented a fair representation of participant comments.

Additionally, member-checking was addressed by sending report drafts to two of the focus participants to review. They were asked if the researchers' interpretation of the data was a reasonable reflection of the focus group discussions. Both reviewers agreed that the interpretation was a reasonable reflection of participants' comments.

*I have read your findings and find them reasonable and on target. I really find the use of the quotations to be most helpful because they provide direct insight into the minds of focus group members.*

Andrew; 30's, middle income, urban

Triangulation of data sources ensured trustworthiness of the data and analysis. To identify any instances of inconsistency, previous studies conducted at the Congaree NP (VSP surveys) in addition to other park documents, observations from park personnel, and researcher journals were reviewed. Previous studies about African American recreation behavior in literature were extensively searched to compare to this study's results. Finally, probing questions were added during the focus group discussions to verify meanings of participants' comments.

## **Transferability**

While quantitative research is often generalized to broader populations via statistical results, the qualitative results from focus groups are reflective of the participants only and can be transferred only to others in this particular demographic. Our target population was the African American residents of the Columbia area that do not visit Congaree NP. These results do not necessarily reflect the reality of African Americans in other parts of the country who do not visit nearby national parks. However, the results will be useful to the managers of Congaree NP, and in guiding the design of similar research in other locations.

## **Dependability**

Our data and analyses are dependable because we can trace the data throughout the process from generation to interpretation. We did not rely on researcher recall but rather on audio files and transcriptions. Each focus group audio recording was kept on file and transcribed exactly as heard. These documents were imported into NVivo software for coding. Within this software, each code and category was described and the path of logic can be seen. Researcher field notes and coding notes were kept.

## **Confirmability**

Another researcher, having access to our files, would be able to see the process due to our transparency and thoroughness. Every element of the research process has been preserved so the evolution of focus group questions, coding rules, background research and interpretation of the data can be clearly discerned. An outside researcher, not involved in the data collection or interpretation, audited this report and confirmed that the findings arose from the participants' responses and not the researcher's own ideas.

## **Ethics**

When conducting qualitative research, care must be taken to protect participants' identities. During focus groups, participants share personal thoughts and opinions, so in order to obtain trustworthy data it is imperative that each participant feel safe and comfortable and able share honestly. Setting this tone is the moderator's responsibility.

In this study, during the initial communication with focus group participants, the moderator explained the purpose of the study, how the data would be used and how their identities would be

protected. Participants were told their names would be changed to aliases to protect their identity. The moderator mentioned that the focus group script, recruiting script and recruiting strategy were submitted to and approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) - as required for all federally funded studies. The moderator then presented the OMB approval number. To encourage sincere responses to questions, the focus groups moderators reminded participants throughout the discussions that there were no right answers. These components helped establish a safe environment for all participants.

# Findings

## Descriptive Statistics

Eighty individuals participated in ten focus groups representing a range of socio-economic backgrounds and age groups. A majority of participants (55%) were lifelong residents of the Columbia area, including many whose families had been in the area for three or four generations. They came from six different communities within the Columbia area, including inner-city Columbia, its suburbs, and smaller towns located near the park. Participants included youth in their late teens and early 20’s, young and middle-aged professionals, parents, and senior citizens. Participants were not asked their income levels due to the sensitive nature of such a question. However, based on their zip codes, comments made during the focus groups, and conversations before and after the focus groups, we estimated each participant’s economic level, ranging from low-income to upper–middle income. We also estimated participant age based on physical characteristics, and conversation before, after, and during the focus groups. Table 1 shows demographic data for each participant.

Tables 1 - 4 describe the distribution of participants by age, income level, community, and gender. Table 5 shows complete demographic data for each focus group participant (see Appendix 1). Figure 1 displays the geographical distribution of the participants.

Table 1. Participant age group (estimated)

Age group	Percent
Teens-20 years	14%
20-30 years	9%
30-40 years	15%
40-50 years	13%
50-60 years	18%
60-70 years	20%
70-75 years	13%

Table 2. Participant economic status (estimated)

Status	Percent
Low income	11%
Lower-middle income	15%
Middle income	54%
Upper-middle income	20%

Table 3. Participant gender

Gender	Percent
Female	57%
Male	46%

Table 4. Participant residence

City/town	Percent
Columbia	59%
Hopkins	18%
Gadsden	10%
Irmo	6%
Blythwood	4%
Eastover	4%

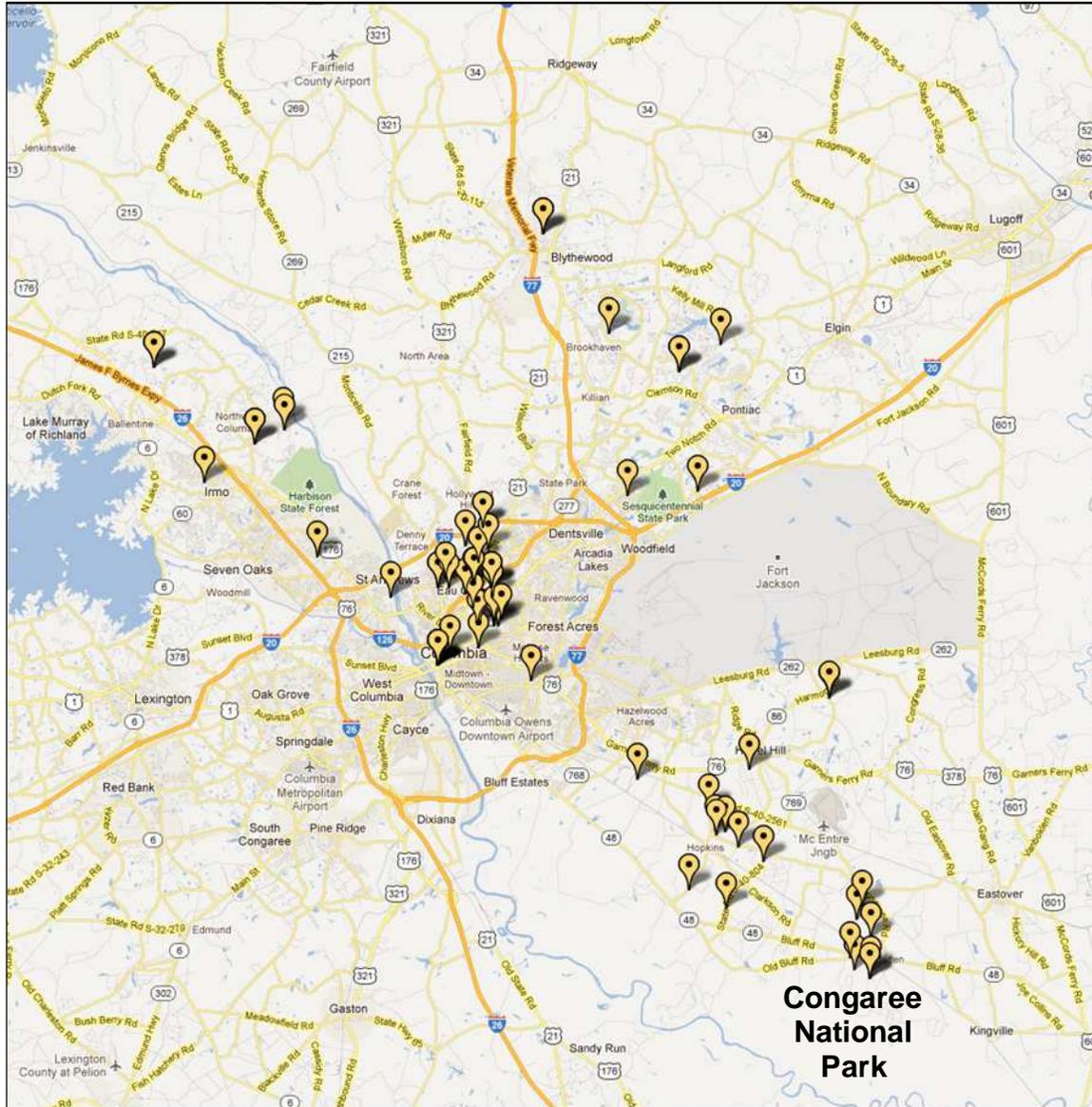


Figure 1. Distribution of focus group participants

## **Qualitative Findings**

This section describes findings from the focus group discussions, organized by topic area and illustrated with verbatim quotes from participants. The focus group question route progressed from general questions about recreational activities and behaviors to more specific questions regarding park awareness and Congaree NP in particular.

### **TOPIC AREA 1: Recreational activities and preferences**

Participants were asked about what they liked to do for fun and specifically about their preferred outdoor recreational activities, as well as where they chose to recreate, and how far they would be willing to travel for recreation.

Participants engaged in a wide variety of indoor and outdoor activities, a common thread being activities that involved spending time with family and friends. Senior citizens as well as teenagers tended to engage in more sedentary activities such as relaxing, watching television, sleeping, doing nothing, and talking with friends. For some participants, yard or garden work was considered recreational. For some participants, shopping was a recreational activity.

Asked specifically about outdoor activities, many participants said that walking was an activity in which they engaged on a regular basis. Other outdoor activities included going to parks, working in the yard or garden, participating in or watching outdoor sports, attending festivals and events, outdoor grilling/cookouts/barbeques, exercising, fishing, and backyard bird watching. Activities such as hiking, camping, and experiencing nature were less prominent or nonexistent.

Regarding activities they would *not* do, some participants said they would not engage in extreme sports that they considered dangerous, involving obvious physical risks, while others said they would “try anything.” Some, particularly younger participants, expressed a dislike for strenuous activities or activities that involve getting dirty or muddy.

Camping, fishing, being outside, and water-based recreation such as canoeing, rafting and swimming were also activities that some participants chose not to do. Fear of wild animals, especially snakes, was consistently cited as a reason for not camping. Boredom and lack of patience were reasons given by those who chose not to go fishing. While some participants were

avid swimmers, others did not like being on or in deep water where the bottom was not visible. Getting dirty or muddy was also cited as a reason for avoiding camping and outdoor activities.

*I would not go outdoor camping. I don't like being in the woods. Camping is not safe, because of wildlife and animals.*

Thomas; early-20's, low income, urban

*I am pretty open to trying just about anything but in a family setting if I perceive it to be unsafe I wouldn't do it. I would be close-minded if I felt it was unsafe or potentially dangerous to my family. I'm thinking about Congaree Swamp. Why wouldn't I go there? I would go there but the first time I went I didn't think I was going to enjoy it because of my perception of what a swamp was.*

George; 30s, upper-middle income, suburban

*I don't think camping would be one of my big things. One of the main reasons would be because of those snakes. I don't like snakes at all. I don't even like to look at a snakes even though it's on TV. I'll change the channel. Camping would be a big issue for me.*

Peter; 40's, lower income, urban

Participants listed dozens of different public places they visited, generally in the Columbia area. Regardless of the place, attributes such as cleanliness, maintenance, safety, quiet, and green space, were very important. Participants were attracted to certain places because of the availability of amenities and activities, such as concerts, festivals, playgrounds, waterfalls, walking trails, lakes, picnic/grilling/cookout facilities, cabins, fishing, and beach activities.

In general, participants were willing to travel at least an hour or more to a recreational destination and for many, travel time and distance were of little consequence.

Asked to name a place they would like to go, given sufficient time and resources, participants listed places as far as Africa, Egypt, Paris, China, Alaska, as well as relatively nearby places such as Charleston, Florida, Georgia, and the mountains of North Carolina.

## **TOPIC AREA 2: Group characteristics and sources of information**

We asked participants 1) to describe the type and size of group that they typically recreate with; 2) which person member of the group usually plans and organizes the activity; 3) and how they go about getting information to plan a recreational activity.

Recreational groups were predominantly families or groups of family and friends ranging in size from two to over fifty people, a common size being four to eight people.

Participants often identified themselves as the primary organizer/trip planner in their respective groups. Organizers were generally women.

To find out about an activity or place, participants described using the Internet, or starting with an announcement received via the media (television, newspaper, radio), then using the Internet to supplement the information, followed by verification through word of mouth. Overall, word of mouth was considered the most reliable and useful source of information. Other sources included: phone books, brochures, magazines, tourist bureaus, social media, and chambers of commerce. Senior citizens used word of mouth almost exclusively, but were aware of the Internet as a source of information and tended to rely on younger family members to do online research for them.

*Internet and word of mouth go hand-in-hand because when you go on the Internet you can get reviews from other people, so that's the word of mouth also. But its good if you have a family member or a friend that's gone somewhere, you know you're going to get the truth.*

Andrea; 40s, upper-middle income, rural

*First, I would look on Google, that would be my best. I would ask around too, to see if what Google is saying is correct. If they've [friend/family] been there, they can probably tell me more about it.*

Timothy; early 20s, lower income, inner city

### **TOPIC AREA 3. Awareness of national parks and Congaree National Park**

When participants were asked what came to mind when they heard the words “national park,” individuals’ images varied widely but as a whole described many aspects of national parks. They were also asked to tell what they knew about Congaree NP. Participants responded that national parks are recognized as special places, and although they may differ little from other parks in the activities and amenities offered, they are larger and grander. Parks preserve and protect nature and historic events, are open to all and attract people from around the world.

*Wildlife, that's the first thing, and animals. And like [participant] said, the preservation of nature and untouched territory, not affected by buildings and other developments.*

Sara; 30s, upper-middle income, suburban

*I think about boating and nature. Nature trails and boating. I think of theme parks as well like Sea World.*

Harold; 50s, upper-middle income, suburban

*Trees, bugs, waterways, picnic grounds, about the same thing you'd see in state parks and any other parks.*

Terese; 70s, lower income, urban

*I think about something that's grand, something out of the ordinary. Like Grand Canyon, or Yellowstone, something like that. Because most national parks are taken care of by the government, and they have more money to put into something than the locals. So I think of something out of the ordinary, more than a regular city park.*

Eric; 50s, middle income, urban

Participants first learned about national parks through a variety of sources, including school; family members; television programs (e.g., Jacques Cousteau, National Geographic, Yogi Bear cartoons, nature shows); living nearby Congaree NP; visiting parks of all kinds; 4-H, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts; and Smokey Bear. One participant remembered as a child seeing View Master slides of Yosemite National Park.

Including those who had previously been to Congaree NP or other national parks, few participants could name any national parks, or they believed that certain regional parks and amusement/theme parks were national parks.

Over half the participants were life-long residents of the Columbia area, yet many had never heard of Congaree NP. Some, even those who were park neighbors, knew of the park but had never visited, while others were occasional park visitors. Those who had not visited but had heard of Congaree NP know little about it but presumed it has trails, mosquitoes, snakes, swamps and marshes, trees, and that it offers quietude and serenity, as well as hunting and fishing.

*I'd heard the only thing down there is swamps and snakes and mosquitoes. So I was never interested in going. I'd heard about it and been by it several times but never wanted to go.*

Alan; 70s, middle income, suburban

*I've heard of it. I saw it on TV. It looks like there's a lot of nature, a lot of trails. They had a guide taking people around. A lot of old trees, different types of trees I remember seeing it on the TV show. A lot of nature. Animals, alligators, different types of bird species. But I've never been there. I'd like to go there.*

Peter; 40s, lower income, urban

*I haven't been there but I have heard of it. I don't know too much about it but like she said, it is a swamp. That is all I see: a swamp.*

Madeline; 70's, lower income, urban

Those few who had visited Congaree NP were aware of its visitor facilities and its natural features such as trees, moss, scenery, and wildlife. Some had enjoyed its trails and boardwalks, and remembered it as quiet, dark, large, frightening, or as a learning environment. Participants who reported a positive experience may naturally share these impressions with others, thus helping to spread the word about what the park has to offer.

*I think of Congaree National Park, I don't think of it as a park, I think of it as a swamp. I go the edge and say "oh that's pretty" and go back in the building. For people who are a little bit nature shy. If the perception is that I'm going to get out a mile on the trail and snakes and alligators are going to greet me – uh-uh! With the swamp, by the fact that it is nature, to me it comes across as being very uncontrolled. It's a little too much nature.*

Meredith; 40s, middle income, urban

*We were there a week ago, and walked the trail and looked at the different trees. Just had a lot of fun, when a homebody came from out of town. It is a getaway right in the neighborhood. I wrote somebody on Facebook about going and enjoying Congaree Swamp, because it is like a resort in your back yard.*

Henry; 40s, middle income, rural

#### **TOPIC AREA 4. Services, facilities, activities, amenities**

Participants were asked about the types of services and facilities that a park like Congaree should have. In general, participants felt it should be clean, well maintained, safe, and well equipped with facilities and activities for all.

*I'd like to see family picnic shelters, where a family could come and they could rent a shelter and have a picnic, and you can grill. I don't know if you can do that in a national park, but that's what I'd like to see. And a souvenir gift type thing where you can buy gifts. And recreational activities, like outdoor basketball, badminton. And of course the nature-type thing – be able to go see nature when you're down there. Walk in the park and see the different animals, trees, flowers.*

*Really scenic type things so you can feel for nature when you go there, and get away from the city.*

William; 60s, middle income, urban

*I typically like places with a clean area that is easily accessible for cooking out. I also enjoy areas where you can go fishing. As long as it's clean and easily accessible.*

Brenda; 30's, upper-middle income, suburban

## **TOPIC AREA 5. Barriers to visiting**

Participants were asked about issues that would keep them from visiting a national park such as Congaree NP. While some barriers to visiting the park are real and others are perceived, lack of knowledge about the park - and consequent misperceptions – as well as safety concerns posed significant barriers. Other issues included fear of animals, lack of racial diversity at the park, economic issues, and the need for transportation to the park.

### ***Lack of information***

*I think what would keep a lot of people away is not knowing. So I'm thinking maybe more advertising, as in, letting people know what's going on and when it's going on. That would [explain] a lot of the reasons people just don't go.... I think that not knowing is our biggest fear. We just don't know.*

Anabelle; 70s, middle income, rural

*I was just thinking about the lack of knowledge, so, fully informing of the available experiences. Just being here tonight, all of the different ideas, that would be great. The thing that attracts me to a place is knowing what's there to do.*

Sara; 30s, upper-middle income, suburban

### ***Perceptions/misperceptions***

*There's the perception is that it is Wild Kingdom out there and there is a perception that nothing has been done ahead of us, that there's no trails and that we are going to a big swamp and there will be mosquitoes and frogs. That is the perception and that is what would prevent a lot of people from going there.*

George; 30s, upper-middle income, suburban

*I've been there several times, and I don't know if there is, if they had grilling spots and park-like things. Because again, I know it's a national park, but in my mind it's a national swamp so I don't think of it as park activities.*

Meredith; 40's, middle income, urban

***Safety concern: other people***

*Emergency, police presence. When I go somewhere I want to know that it is a place I am not expecting to be knocked over the head.*

Catherine; 50s, middle income, urban

***Safety concern: animals***

*What would make me not want to go to a national park is they probably have animals that aren't supposed to be there. Like foxes, snakes, alligators.*

David; lower 20s, low income, urban

***Safety concern: injuries, medical emergencies***

*It's nothing but towering trees. If you had an emergency there you'd probably never get out of there, no one could even find you. Are there any shelters at all?*

Leila; 60s, upper-middle income, suburban

***Transportation***

*A lot of people would go but they don't have a way to get there. If they had a ride, something to take them, there would be more people visiting. A shuttle bus.*

Marissa; senior citizen, middle income, rural

***Racial issues***

*I think that, as an African American, and it goes back to the advertising thing, being invited to come. I know that the parks are open to everyone, but when you go and you're the only family, or the only couple of people that you see there – I don't know about Congaree because I haven't been there, but I've been to other parks - it's not uncommon not to see other diverse groups of people. I think that sometimes that can be a little bit of a turn-off.*

Karyn; 20s, middle income, urban

***Lack of development***

*When you think about a nice park area - when you first step up there you want to feel safe and you want to see some clearance. You don't want to see a whole lot of wooded area. You want to see some clearance, you want to see roads, you want to see buildings you want to feel safe when you are walking on the ground. That area doesn't give that vibe at all.*

Cameron; 60s, middle income, suburban

***Importance of maintenance***

*If they get a good reputation - like they keep it up, clean, maintained, the grass is kept.*

Thomas; early 20s, low income, urban

### ***Economic constraints***

*Make it affordable. A lot of people down here, their incomes aren't high, and they might have a lot of kids so make it affordable and make it good. A lot of the tourist place you go to, the stuff is just outrageous and the kids will beg for it. It might be a little ink pen that says Congaree National Park and it's \$5. You want them to carry something away, but you want to be able to afford it.*

Andrea; 40's, middle-income, rural

### ***Accessibility to seniors***

*There is nothing for the older people (60 and above) to do except go there and sit. There are no resources and 60-70 year olds aren't going to go on a nature trail or go canoeing. What do you have to offer our senior people? There are a lot of seniors in that area. I don't think this park has much to offer them.*

Bella; 60s, middle income, rural

## **TOPIC AREA 6. Park management actions**

Participants were asked what could be done to encourage African American visitation at Congaree NP, and how the park could make connections with the African American community in the Columbia area. To summarize, participants said that park managers should consider: additional facilities and physical improvements; transportation options; activities to draw in the community; advertisement – particularly via media used by the African American community; education on what the park is and what it offers; and outreach to the community's churches, senior and youth organizations, and schools. Items are organized and listed by the type of management action.

### ***Activities and events***

*Maybe have an annual Getting to Know Your Swamp day, or, Getting to Know Your Park day. Have a grand opening. Invite all of the churches from the surrounding area. Maybe a barbecue cook-off, or something that will bring them in there. And food will bring them there.*

Verda; 60s, middle income, rural

*If they put it on their flier that they have one day a month they have a cookout with free food, free door prizes, a lot of people will come. Once you get them in the door they'll say "I like this park" and then they'll come back. A lot of people like free things.*

Serena; late teens, low income, urban

### **Advertisement and marketing**

*I'm speaking for the Black community.... We have a Black newspaper, and they do a lot of advertisement in there and that would be a way to reach the Black community. Even the cost of the paper is not high. People can afford it and a lot of people use that newspaper. So that would be a good way to advertise. That paper reaches the Black community.*

Peter; 40s, low income, urban

*...it is mainly a marketing issue. If more money is put into marketing and there is focus on some of these fundamental understandings of the safety or the perceived gaps we may have. If we address those I think there could be attraction. It's a marketing issue.*

Oscar; 40's upper-middle income, suburban

### **Education and information**

*We need to promote that - that is good information. When I watched those other parks (on the ETV) it didn't seem that I was going to be eaten by a bear. It focused on how beautiful it was and how serene. They focus on how comfortable you are when you are there. If they could express and communicate that through our channels or however we do it, you could get more attraction from our community*

George; 40's upper-middle income, suburban

*One of the great things about National Parks is that we pay for them through tax money. Letting people know that everything here is free will bring a lot of traffic into the park.*

Oscar; 30s, upper-middle income, suburban

*We still just see it as a swamp area and we don't feel it is as exciting to go there. Others go on the Internet and think it looks interesting and want to visit.*

Elizabeth; 50s, middle income, rural

*Congaree has a lot of Black history because they used that land in there back in those days. They should highlight that history.*

Christopher; 40s, middle income, rural

### **Facilities – directional signs to the park**

*First of all you need better signage. They're historic signs – they're brown and small and far apart, and you get very frustrated if you've never been there. The first couple of times I got lost and I'd already been there.... So that's a little bit frustrating.*

Meredith; 40s, middle income, urban

### **Facilities – transportation**

*They could do a shuttle at the different parks, or churches. If they had a schedule of when they were going to do it people would know I need to be at this place at this time. Then you wouldn't have so many cars going in. And if you go together you have sort of a closeness. They would have several stops. They could pick up at each church, or park.*

Anabelle; 50s, middle income, urban

### **Facilities – community facility/venue**

*If there was an arena in the park they could do little things there. A concert, a little gospel concert. Where the picnic things are set up, it's not set up for a lot.*

Christopher; 50's, middle income, rural

### **Outreach – churches**

*In the African American community the church is a real strong presence, and of course the schools. But the church is a major way to advertise or market a concept to the community or make use of what seems to be a phenomenal part of the state. Invite churches to plan activities there. Just about every church has a church picnic every year. Offering something like that to get members there and once they go as a group it will be incentive to go back as individuals or with their families.*

Eleanor; 50s, upper income, urban

### **Outreach – schools**

*We have to start with the school kids, to at least having had an experience there, having been, there so they can tell their kids.*

William; 60s, middle income, urban

### **Outreach – elders, seniors**

*I'm thinking about my grandmother. They are active in their communities. My grandparents, and that group, they pull us into these things, they may be a great vehicle for communicating this, then saying this is what we're going to do. They championed us going to the Gullah Festivals for many years. They organized it...*

George; 30s, upper income, suburban

### **Outreach – relatives of former park residents/ancestors' families**

*Contact the family members of people who used to be caretakers of the swamp, if they could contact them. I know a lot of guys now who spend a lot of time with their grandfathers. I think that would be a personal touch if they had meetings and stuff and have those people say what they experienced before it became a national park.*

Hanna; 50s, middle income, rural

### ***Safety measures***

*To ensure the safety of everybody. That's number one.... the first thing is, when you think about nature, you want to be safe. You don't want to be by yourself. I'm afraid of gators!*

Sasha; 70s, middle income, urban



## Discussion

As summarized above, the focus group results exhibit an array of preferences, behavioral patterns, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions regarding recreation in general and Congaree NP visitation specifically. While there were some unique opinions, commonalities were found. In order to build a better connection with the community and encourage visitation, it is important to understand African American community's potential barriers to visitation as well as the park's opportunities to increase visitation. It is equally important to understand the context in which problems or issues occurred. After the preliminary coding of focus group participant comments, we conducted selected coding focusing on barriers, problems, and issues that face the African American community, as well as potential factors that would encourage this population to visit the park. What emerged from this approach were four areas of challenges that park managers might consider when making policy and planning decisions: 1) lack of information/misconceptions; 2) detachment from nature/fear of the unknown; 3) economic barriers; 4) perceived discrimination/racism; and 5) lack of interpretive messages that connect with the African American community. During the last stage of analysis, we used selective coding to identify the central theme acting as the main deterrent. In this case, lack of information, which leads to misconceptions about the park, was the central phenomenon that posed a barrier to African Americans in the Columbia area from visiting Congaree NP.

### Barriers to Visitation

#### 1. Lack of information and misconceptions

Insufficient or inaccurate knowledge about a topic can lead to misconceptions. In the case of Columbia area African Americans' knowledge of Congaree NP, this emerged as the strongest theme across all focus groups. In every group lack of information emerged as a barrier to visitation, which we divided into the sub-categories below.

#### *General information about national parks and Congaree NP*

The understanding of the national park concept was extremely low among focus group participants. Some, especially those of lower economic levels, were surprised to learn that Congaree NP is so close to their home. Although participants recognized the term "national

park” and some remembered becoming aware of national parks in school, through the media, and from having visited Congaree NP, it was clear that for many, their concept of a national park was something similar to a city or state park though on a grander, larger scale, and few participants had ever visited a national park.

*It's like a big park that has some main attractions that other parks might not have.*

Dominic; 20's, lower-middle, urban

*A place with more variety of activities than a state park, where there are lots of things to do.*

Virginia; 50's, middle income, urban

For African Americans in Columbia, low awareness of Congaree NP was cited as a significant obstacle to visiting. While newcomers to the community were more likely to have “never heard of it” than longtime residents, even those whose families had lived in the area for generations exhibited a lack of general information about the park. Some participants had heard of the park, but did not know where it was.

*Never heard of it, but when I hear the name I think about someplace far off. Congaree. I don't know why, it sounds like someplace that doesn't belong in, or near Columbia, South Carolina.*

Dennis; 30's, middle income, urban

*Lack of knowledge, not knowing what is there and why I should go there – what is there to do? When I looked at the website I thought it looked like a place you might go for a field trip.*

Patricia; 30's, lower-middle income, urban

*The perception that there is nothing to do at the park keeps people away, in addition to the wildlife. I always thought that maybe the park didn't want a lot of people to come because of the notion to keep the environment safe and the more people, the more it would get disturbed. I don't know if that is accurate or not but I just thought they wanted to limit the number of folks that came so it wouldn't be a whole lot of disturbance of the natural environment.*

Taneesha; 30's, middle income, urban

### ***Lack of information on activities and facilities***

Focus group participants were not sure what types of activities were available or allowed at the park, nor of the facilities that might await them. Participants also voiced their preferences for

urban-type, more well developed parks with amenities such as picnic facilities, playground equipment, sports equipment, walking paths, ponds, lakes, and gardens. Recreational settings that provide social activities such as concerts, festivals, and shows were also preferred. This is consistent with literature that showed African Americans used city and neighborhood parks while Whites were more likely to travel to surrounding regional parks (Shinew, Floyd, McGuire & Noe, 1994). African Americans were also found to prefer the recreational rather than the conservation functions of parks (Payne, Mowen & Orsega-Smith, 2002) and preferred higher levels of facility maintenance with more order and more formal design (Gobster, 2002). Again, not knowing if such facilities existed at the park, and in what condition, was a deterrent to visitation.

*We don't know about it. Could we have meetings in there? Could we bring things in there? Stuff like that we just don't know*

Verda; 70s, middle-income, rural

*I've been there, and I don't know if there is, if they had grilling spots and park-like things. Because again, I know it's a national park, but in my mind it's a national swamp so I don't think of it as park activities.*

Meredith; 40's, middle income, urban

*I have an uncle with a new RV and likes to travel. There are a lot of RV travelers that probably would go there for overnight or weekend trips if there's is space - and are there water or electricity resources for them to plug into?*

Christopher; 50's, middle income, rural

Gobster (2002) and Ho et al. (2005) found that Whites were more likely to engage in individual recreation activities while Blacks preferred team sports and social activities. Dwyer (1994) found that Blacks were more likely to participate in sport activities but less likely to participate in activities in remote or undeveloped areas. Participants cited activities at the park that would not appeal to them or which they considered somewhat strenuous. This is consistent with an observational study in Michigan parks in which Whites were most often observed engaging in vigorous activity, followed by sedentary activities, compared to those of different ethnicities who were most frequently observed walking, followed by sedentary and vigorous activities (Reed Price, Grost & Martinan (2012).

Lack of knowledge about the park may lead to the perception that the park does not provide a range of activities suitable to the needs of the African American community. The challenges lie

in communicating and effectively informing this community of the diversity of activities the park has to offer, and creating opportunities for activities that meet the needs of this population.

*I don't hike, I don't go fishing, I don't go canoeing. I don't do anything where I will possibly encounter wildlife.*

Taneesha; 30's, middle income, urban

*I try to do outdoor activities, not rough outdoor activities like camping and canoeing. I've been camping, but not roughing it.*

Valarie; 60's middle income, urban

*If there is at least the thought that there is something else out there, like, if we're going out that far, you may want to go to Congaree National Park, but I'll go down the street to whatever. But I think the feeling is that that's the only thing that you're going out there for, the feeling is that there's nothing else near it. So if it's got varied things for different people, that's got to be widely advertised. Otherwise people think "I'm just going out to walk a nature trail and if I don't want to do that there's no point in going".*

Meredith; 40's, middle income, urban

Floyd, Shinew, McGuire and Noe (1994) reported higher levels of involvement among Blacks in team sports, fitness activities and socializing. This preference for sports and social activities emerged in the focus group interviews.

*They should have water sports. Every park has playgrounds and volleyball nets and basketball courts. They should have playgrounds because the parks are mainly for little kids.*

Serena; teens-low 20's, lower income, urban

### ***Safety concerns due to lack of information***

Personal safety was a top priority across all focus groups, and an important concern for many participants. This characteristic is reflected in research conducted by Johnson, Bowker & Cordell (2004) in which African Americans had the highest concerns about safety, compared to other racial groups.

Participants voiced concerns that the park might not have adequate ranger presence and emergency services throughout to protect visitors from possible harm – from both natural and human elements – and to provide first aid. Others mentioned risks of injuries, the fear of isolation, and the importance of emergency services.

*Emergency response teams. People who can help in case of medical emergencies. If someone's out and it's a hot day, they might get an asthma attack, and they'd want to contact 911. Those trails they don't have anything. There's no way to call anybody.*

Leandra; 50s, middle income, rural

*You just have to make sure your market and your clientele is going to be safe. You need to promote both. Because when they think about nature, it's wild animals and everything.*

Sasha; 70's, lower income, urban

### ***Lack of information resulting in negative image***

There was a perception that the park may not communicate its intentions regarding future projects and plans, which could create a negative image.

*I'm fairly new down there but I'm hearing where they're buying up all the land and they're waiting for people to lose their land so they can take it. About how they don't want to build stores. [Sic] in Gadsden, they own certain areas and they don't want stores coming in. They got this whole big project coming in, where they're taking over. I don't know if it is true or not, like on this side where you all live they want all that land and everybody out. But I think they need to be upfront about what they're doing with the people and let them know what projections are for the future.*

Christopher; 40s, middle income, rural

*Where we're living, I think our land, that area, is under some type of protection thing. We can't build anything or do anything to the trees.*

Gabrielle; 40's, middle income, urban

## **2. Detachment from nature and fear of the unknown**

Some participants did not recreate outdoors, and others were emphatic that recreational settings be safe, clean, developed and managed. Fears of unknown factors in natural settings such as Congaree NP surfaced in some form in every focus group.

The fear of unknown natural elements may stem from the transition from a rural to an urban culture and a subsequent detachment from nature and nature-based leisure activities. As Columbia becomes increasingly urban, its residents are further distanced from their agricultural roots and nature-based lifestyles. Focus group participants with generational connections to the area cited their families' historical reliance on natural resources for daily living, such as fishing,

hunting, and farming, and mentioned that these activities were what their families “used to do,” but in which they no longer engaged with their own children. References to gardening were primarily about growing flowers and mowing lawns, not raising food.

*No one goes down there [Congaree Swamp] except for country boys who want to fish and hunt. I’ve never seen it, I just hear about it. It is not for me.*

Alan; 60s upper income, suburban

Focus group participants across all demographic characteristics expressed a fear of unknown factors in what was perceived as wilderness. The most commonly feared animals were alligators and snakes. Participants were also quite bothered by mosquitoes. Natural darkness, getting lost or not having contact with others via phone, as well as other elements associated with what was considered an “untamed” environment were causes for concern.

*The area is under-developed and I also think the animals and creatures and predators are running around free. I would be scared of getting attacked; say I get bit by a snake, is there a venom kit out here?*

Lane; 30s upper income

Evidence found in literature indicated that this perception is not unique to African American communities in Columbia. According to Gobster (2002), Blacks preferred a higher level of maintenance and order and more formal design. Blacks perceived forest and wilderness areas as unsafe and threatening (Viriden & Walker, 1999). Floyd, Outley, Bixler and Hammitt (1995) found that Blacks were less likely to prefer wildland recreation activities. They also found that this preference was related to the fear of nature and desire for developed environments.

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early into the 20<sup>th</sup>, in what has been called the “Great Migration,” many African Americans left a rural, agrarian lifestyle for an urban existence, which at the time was dominated by White culture. Acculturation with an urban society may have led African Americans to purposively “lose touch” with nature. One participant, in her comments on the results of this study, felt that African Americans’ lack of interest in activities within an undeveloped natural setting was less due to detachment and more due to a lack of interest in “activities reminiscent of hard times,” i.e., post-slavery.

### 3. Economic barriers

Economic conditions can impact potential visitors' abilities to access the park, as well as visitors' park experiences. Some participants raised concerns about entrance fees, gas prices, and purchases within the park itself. Comments on potential economic barriers did not emerge from participants in higher income groups. Visiting a national park may be seen as a luxury that comes with a price. For some participants, particularly the elderly and youth who live in Columbia's inner city, lack of transportation, which is often an indication of lower economic status, posed a barrier to visiting the park.

*One of the biggest things for the inner city kids that I'm more concerned with is the transportation. Have excursions, like "Congaree Month" - they would have busses[from] downtown. Do you have to pay for Congaree, to get in?*

William; 60s, middle income, urban

Overall, there were few comments on entrance fees as a direct factor restricting access to the park. However, this is a hidden factor due to the lack of awareness about national parks and federal land areas. The places that participants frequented for outdoor activities were often neighborhood parks that didn't charge fees or charged very minimal fees. Sesquicentennial State Park, one of the popular local outdoor areas, at the time of the study charged \$2/adult, \$1.25/senior and no fee for children. Participants also mentioned that they liked visiting Finlay Park especially in the summer because they have free concerts.

*Finlay Park in the summer has a lot of concerts. We do that a lot. It's free - that's the best part.*

Eric; 50s, middle income, rural

Many participants assumed that all national parks charge entrance fees and were surprised to learn that Congaree NP does not. A church activity organizer said that he had not considered Congaree NP as a destination for his group due to concerns that the church may not be able to afford entrance fees for a large group. Upon being informed that no entrance fee was charged, he expressed interest in organizing a church event at the park. Bowker, Cordell and Johnson (1999) found that African Americans were more sensitive than Whites to fee issues at federal land areas. We found that this is both a challenge and an opportunity for Congaree NP – an opportunity to attract African American communities without the inhibiting factor of entrance fees, and a challenge in how to raise public awareness of this fact.

The current economic downturn was a unique factor at the time of the research. Several participants indicated they were no longer able to afford to do some of the things they would like to do. A group of educators expressed concerns that due to the lack of funding, local schools have had to reduce their number of fieldtrips. While this problem is neither unique to African American communities nor to Congaree NP, it might be a long-term problem that the park managers may need to plan for.

*I think about the cost, especially right now, with the economy. If the cost is affordable. Even if they have to adjust it from time to time because of the economy, unemployment. Because a lot of times I want to do stuff, anything, and I think about gas. I think maybe they should have a tour bus to take people there. It would help out in these times. There's a lot of things I want to do that I just can't do right now.*

Peter; 30s, lower income, urban

*Our school districts are stretched with travel fund limits. If the park had some type of grants or scholarship to offer for driver and fuel costs I am sure a lot of schools would be willing to come here.*

Bob; 40s, middle income, rural

Lack of leisure time can be indicative of economic challenges, posing an yet another barrier to visitation. For example, a participant acknowledged that his family's middle class status allowed him to engage in leisure activities more often than his cousins, who lived in the area but had to work several low-income jobs to make ends meet. A group of young single mothers also identified lack of free time as a deterrent to recreational activities, while some older participants stayed busy provided childcare for their grandchildren.

*Oh, um, gosh, I don't have a lot of leisure time. Whatever time I do have I love to work in the church. And most of the time I'm taking care of grans.*

Verda; 60's, middle income, rural

*Sleep. I've got four kids, so, sleep!*

Eric; 40's middle income, urban

Although some participants were proud of the fact that a national park was close to home, this sentiment was not found among participants at higher income levels, perhaps because higher income groups can afford to travel and may live in neighborhoods where they have easier access to parks and recreation areas.

#### **4. Perceived discrimination and racism**

Interpersonal discrimination refers to unequal treatment on the basis of race or ethnicity that individuals may experience from other individuals in personal encounters (Farley 1988).

Institutional discrimination occurs when “an institution’s policies, practices and procedures favor some ethnic groups over others” (Haas, 1992, pp. 2). Institutional discrimination is not necessarily deliberate, and can occur without any racist intent. Both interpersonal and institutional discrimination were reported as barriers that prevented Hispanics and African Americans from using recreation areas in Chicago (Blahna & Black, 1993). Other researchers such as West (1989) observed that Blacks did not go to regional parks because they perceived negative reactions from other park users.

While institutional racism was not reported within the national park context, it was observed in various urban park settings. Gobster (2002) reported that adult Black males were often stopped and searched by park police (Lincoln Park in Chicago) because they were carrying a duffle bag. In this case, African Americans were racially profiled as drug dealers and not as recreationists. When compared to all other races, African Americans rated the importance of ethnic sensitivity and representation in parks highest (Ho et al., 2005). Literature indicates that both institutional and interpersonal perceived discrimination could be a factor preventing African Americans from visiting Congaree NP.

During the focus group discussions, participants did not cite racial discrimination as a direct factor preventing them from visiting Congaree NP. A possible limiting factor is that because the focus group moderators were not African American, commentary on racial discrimination as a barrier to park visitation may have been limited. However, a trace of perceived discrimination during the focus group discussions was shown in a participant’s comment that the lack of diversity among national park visitors was a “turn-off.” If lack of diversity among park visitors is one of the reasons African Americans do not visit national parks the cycle will need to be interrupted.

It was not surprising to find race as an issue linked to the park’s image of inclusivity and diversity. One participant asked if Blacks were allowed in the Congaree National Park during the segregation era.

*I think if they want to reach multi-cultural audiences, they need to have multicultural rangers. Because even if there's more visibility, they get out on television, if you're trying to reach African-Americans and you're constantly showing me Caucasians and their perception of the park, I still don't feel connected. If I see a Black ranger, then I'm thinking 'ok, if they're having fun out there, maybe there is something out there for me.' Putting a different face on it for different groups, different ages. If you're trying to reach younger people then you need younger rangers. Just so people can see themselves in the rangers out there.*

Meredith; 40's middle income, urban

Hiring African American rangers then effectively communicating that there are African American rangers in the park can help create a more welcoming image.

In his essay "In the Face of 'Jim Crow': Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945" (The Journal of Negro History, Vol. 84, No.2. Spring, 1999) Mark S. Foster writes:

Numerous scholars have analyzed the evolution of black 'society.' Nearly all have observed that blacks could almost never achieve total relaxation, but that they came closest to doing so when there were no whites around. It is hardly surprising that successful blacks did all they could to insulate themselves, particularly their children, from unpleasant confrontations with whites." (p. 131)

It is possible that these patterns of insulation persist, although one participant observed that African Americans are becoming more involved in recreational activities that have been traditionally considered as White activities.

*We as the Black community, we're already involved. There are a lot of Black people interested. Not trying to make this a racial issue, but most things that Caucasian people used to do: whitewater rafting, ski boarding, mountain climbing, the Black community is interested, especially the younger generation. We don't try to do that though.*

Eric; 40's middle income, urban

American African preferences for well-maintained and developed facilities could be a result of institutional discrimination. Research showed that when compared to Whites, minority groups did not have equal access to outdoor recreation and open space in urban settings (Lindsey, Maraj & Kuan, 2001; Abercrombie et al., 2008). Parks and recreation areas in neighborhoods with high percentages of Blacks or Hispanics were not as well kept as parks in White-dominated neighborhoods (Blahna & Black, 1993; Duncan & Duncan, 2003). This historical discrimination

may result in a lack of knowledge about the park, or in perceptions that the park lacks facilities and amenities considered as important to recreation. In our research, we found that this was also a perception among African American concerning national parks. For example, a middle-aged rural resident was under the assumption that the park was not designed to provide activities preferred by minority groups.

*I would like to see them build a recreation center; you may want to have wedding receptions in the park. I would like to see a fun park for the children, fenced in. And I would love to see boat rides down the swamp for kids, and adults. I would like to see them put up a concession, souvenir shop. If I could I would just build it up and a lot of people would go in there, having lovely weddings in the woods. We as Black folks don't like woods, because we're scared of a lot of stuff – bears and stuff like that. If you build a nice recreation facility, because we don't have a lot around here, a lot of people would go out there to have wedding receptions, and weddings.*

Verda; 60's, middle income, rural

## **5. Interpretive messages lack connections with African Americans**

When interpretive messages about a particular story or resource cause individuals to reflect on their personal experiences they are more likely to connect with the story (Ham, 1992). Focus group participants suggested that Congaree NP exhibits should focus on the African American story at the park and in the area, and highlight the connections between today's families and their ancestors who lived in the area.

*We regularly visit a neighborhood park that is important to our history, that my ancestors helped to establish, save. My mother fought for the right to use parks. It's a privilege, not to take it for granted. My children need to experience the history. We visit it once a month. Sing hymns, have a barbecue.*

LeeAnne; 30's, middle income, suburban

*It covers such a large area of land; inside it gives the history of the Native Americans and African Americans. I think there should be more. Maybe a little museum, or a log cabin, expanding on the history of the African Americans who lived inside the grounds. I think that would attract more African Americans to that site. Give them patronage to the ancestors that were in that area.*

Christopher; 40's, middle, rural

## **Opportunities**

Although the park is faced with challenges to bringing more of the African American community to Congaree NP, the focus group discussions revealed advantageous circumstances and conditions that present opportunities for the park to make meaningful connections with this community.

### **1. Strong family and community connections**

Focus group discussions underscored the significant role held by the family and the church, in the daily life and activities of the African American community in the Columbia area. The immediate and extended family is an important foundation, while the church provides structure for social activities within and outside the family. Efforts to include families and church groups as factors in park planning and programming can only enhance the park's attractiveness to the community. For example, participants who preferred not to engage in outdoor recreation did enjoy and attend events and festivals that involved their families.

*Fun for me is a lot of family events. Being from Hopkins and having a majority of family in Columbia it tends to be lots of family events in the spring or summer, lots barbeques, I have a family that likes to cook.*

Bob; 40s, middle income, rural

### **2. Positive park image**

Some participants were aware that Congaree NP is well known outside Columbia and receives visitors from throughout the U.S. and the world. Emphasizing this phenomenon could help draw more positive attention to the park. Along the same lines, some participants from lower income families expressed that national parks are attractive because they are places where one can interact with people from other countries, which is not very often the case in their daily lives.

*I think about different people, different cultures. It could be where the sports came from. It's going to be different, in the park. And it's national, so it's free to everyone.*

Thomas; late teens, lower income

*The program I was watching on E-TV was saying that we here don't visit the park as much as folks from out of the United States. One day my husband and I were down there with the grandchildren and there were people from England and all over world.*

Natalie; 70's, middle income, rural

While connections to a natural, non-urban environment were mostly absent from younger focus group participants, some older participants voiced enthusiasm for bringing young people to the park.

*If people knew the history behind it they would go out and see it for themselves, what it is about. I know a lot of young kids would probably like to go. They've been in the city for so long. They would like to go down. When I first went down there in the country I was so amazed. I was stuck in the city all the time; I didn't know anything about it. My granddaughters would love it.*

Gabrielle; 40's, middle income, urban

### **3. The park is close to home**

Congaree NP's proximity to a large urban population, and its lack of entrance fees are attractive features that the park can promote to enhance its image and its accessibility. Some participants took pride in the fact that South Carolina has a national park so close to home. Interestingly, this sentiment was not found among participants at higher income levels, perhaps because higher income groups can afford to travel, and may live in neighborhoods where they have easier access to parks and recreation areas.

*The city bus could have days you could come and have a one-hour or a two-hour tour of the park. To appreciate the outdoors. Even if they don't have time to go out and enjoy it, just to say they've been. I think it's an indictment, on our part – Columbia and Richland County and South Carolina to have a room with this many kids in it that have never been there. That's an indictment. And it's a good thing that we have our new-found friends from Idaho to come down and expose us to this. It's a good thing. Don't you want to go to the Congaree Forest? We're going to go!*

William; 60's, middle income, urban

#### 4. Interest in learning about the park

Participants were interested in the educational possibilities at the Congaree NP. Knowing that the park does offer such opportunities to learn would help encourage participation. In addition, parents, such as Patricia with her young daughter, were looking for new places to bring their children with new activities to engage in.

*Trails, and on the trails - nature walk trails - something so you can guide yourself so you don't have to have a tour. You go to a certain spot and there's something educational to stop and read or do, like teaching kids about a sundial. Something dealing with science or math. I used to do a lot of field trips and the children will have different courses, like they'll have social studies and then a lesson dealing with nature and science along the trail. They're walking but they're learning as they walk.*

Andrea; 30s, middle-income, rural

*Make the website more appealing and informative, and attractive. Show what there is to do at the park. If I look at a website and see that there are things to do there, new things to learn, we'll want to come.*

Patricia; 20's, lower income, urban

In addition, it was not uncommon to hear focus group participants say that one of their motivations for coming to a discussion about Congaree NP was to find out more about it, and that they expected to receive some information. Many were eager to learn, and looked forward to an eventual park visit.

## Recommendations

While Congaree NP is bound by the National Park Service mission to conserve and protect park resources while providing for public enjoyment of the same, there is much that can be done to encourage visitation in a manner in keeping with the park mandate. It is possible that, as it reaches out to its local community, Congaree NP may adopt certain management practices to create the look and feel of a friendly local park.

In summary, while some participants had a fairly accurate picture of what Congaree NP has to offer, the park will need to correct misperceptions of the park stemming from lack of information and/or misinformation. These perceptions, voiced by focus group participants, include:

1. The park is unsafe due to snakes, alligators, spiders, etc.
2. The park is unsafe due to crime, gangs.
3. It is easy to get lost in the park.
4. The park is dark, swampy.
5. There is nothing to do in the park for me/my family.
6. The information about the park does not relate to me.
7. The park charges entrance fees.

These are the messages to be communicated:

1. The park is a safe, healthy place to recreate.
2. The park is more than “just a swamp.”
3. There are things to do here for all ages.
4. There are clean, adequate facilities here.
5. The park invites and welcomes all visitors.
6. The park has picnic and grilling facilities for families.
7. The park is free.

There are many different avenues and approaches for overcoming obstacles to visitation and for taking advantage of opportunities. The following nine areas of emphasis provide guidance to achieving the goal of a more diverse visitor population at Congaree NP.

### **1. Communication channels**

Lack of information about the park is a formidable deterrent to visitation, and word of mouth was the most important source of communication among participants. A case in point is what occurred during Focus Group 9. Only one participant had recently been to Congaree NP, and most had never heard of it. This participant had a negative impression of her experience at the park, and her remarks strongly affected other participants, of whom several expressed that they had no desire to visit such a place. After the focus group, when moderators talked about the park in a positive manner and handed out the park brochure, the participants' attitudes became more positive, and some showed interest in wanting to see the park for themselves. As more people hear accurate information about Congaree NP and/or have positive experiences in the park, the word will spread, which may follow with increased visitation.

As suggested by focus group participants, more formal approaches to getting initially the word out include:

- Local DJs of African American radio stations – invite them to the park for special events, schedule interviews, prepare public service announcements.
- Hire an African American “community ambassador” to offer presentations about the park to local schools, senior centers, youth groups, church groups.
- Publish articles in *Black News*, a local newspaper that serves the African American community. Seek other African American venues.
- Enhance the park website with dynamic, people-oriented images and up front descriptions of park activities and resources. Ensure the park website is well publicized.
- Create a Facebook page for Congaree NP with frequent updates.
- Publicize the fact that there are no fees to visit Congaree NP.

### **2. Information and outreach**

Using the communication channels described above, Congaree NP needs to inform and educate the community about the park's historic and natural resources and its educational opportunities, as well as address perceptions regarding park safety and the beneficial outcomes of visiting the

park. In addition, outreach should directly target young audiences through the public schools, as well as local universities and their programs and organizations that serve African American students.

- Encourage park field trips in local schools, especially those with higher proportions of African American students.
- Create virtual park field trips and virtual ranger-in-classroom programs that teachers can access from the classroom (see [www.nps.gov/badl](http://www.nps.gov/badl) and [nps.gov/sagu](http://www.nps.gov/sagu)).
- Organize a letter/brochure campaign to local organizations ( see <http://www.richland.lib.sc.us/organizations/home>). The park may market itself as a great place for group meetings, or just get the word out to the community members about the park.

### **3. Park image**

First, an institution seeking to serve a particular population needs to represent that population as part of its public interface. Recognizing oneself in a new setting may lead to feeling welcomed there and more comfortable in that setting. Second, it is important to counter the negative perceptions that visiting the park is dangerous, and that facilities may not be adequately maintained.

- Hire African American rangers to serve in positions that interact with the public. These could be students from local African American colleges and universities.
- In park media include images of African Americans at the park.
- Include/promote images of the park that portray open canopy, safe boardwalks, clean facilities, etc.
- Avoid using the term “swamp” in all literature and signage.

### **4. Transportation**

Some would-be park visitors, elderly and lower-income residents in particular, may lack access to transportation. Next to lack of information, this is perhaps the most imposing barrier to visitation. Park managers may be able to work with local transportation systems to accommodate this particular need.

- Cooperate with City of Columbia transportation (CMRTA) to establish a regularly scheduled route from the city to the park, perhaps on a seasonal, monthly basis.

- Encourage senior centers, community groups, and churches to provide occasional outings to the park, using vans or shuttles.
- Within the park, provide transportation, such as golf carts and wheelchairs, for the mobility-impaired.

## **5. Facilities**

Providing facilities that meet recreationists' needs and preferences enhance their visit and may help encourage repeat visitation. Focus group participants voiced many activities that can be accommodated by certain facilities, and some that cannot be, due to the nature of the park and its mission.

- Covered picnic areas to accommodate large groups
- Outdoor grilling and barbeque facilities
- Access to fishing areas
- Fish-cleaning stations
- Water fountains
- Restrooms along the trail
- Indoor meeting/event venue
- Children's area/playground
- Orientation signage
- Directional signage
- Recreational facilities (basketball, volleyball)
- Safety services
- Ranger presence on trails
- Emergency phones
- Trail safety information signs

## **6. Interpretive and educational services**

For many focus group participants, especially families with children, opportunities to learn about the park's natural and cultural history were important. Some participants suggested augmenting information about the African American history in the park and surrounding area.

- Ranger-guided walks

- Self-guided tours
- Interpretive signage throughout the park
- Exhibits about park history
- Use interpretive media at the park to tell the story of Congaree's historical connections to the African American community and promote these interpretive efforts.

## **7. Events and activities**

Well-advertised events that offer activities for different age groups draw people from the community. Focus group participants suggested many such events.

- Family days
- Special park anniversaries
- Art contest
- Artist-in-residence with local, African American artists
- Music concerts

## **8. Concession services**

The availability of food and lodging often emerged during the discussions as an important component of the visitor experience. While the park does not have control over lodging outside the park, and it may not be feasible to add eating establishments inside the park, there are still some options possible.

- Add a self-service snack bar. An example is the snack vending room at Wind Cave National Park. Located within the visitor center, the room contains vending machines for snacks and drinks, a microwave to heat items from the vending machines, and a seating area.
- Cooperate with local caterers/vendors to set up food services during certain seasons, special events, weekends, etc.
- Upgrade the park campground to accommodate RV's and provide electric and water hook-ups.

## **9. Directional signage to the park**

Participants often mentioned that the park is difficult to find, and that signage needs to be augmented and improved.

- Place large, “welcoming” directional signs at strategic points on roads connecting local communities to the park access routes.
- Remove the term “swamp” from directional signage.

## Conclusion

Lack of information and resulting misperceptions about the park are the most challenging issues facing Congaree NP managers as they seek to increase the diversity of park visitation. Making connections with the local African American community is critical to this endeavor. Focus group participants cited interpersonal contact and direct marketing as the most effective communication channels for reaching the African American community. In order to provide the park with a broad range of solutions, additional research may need to be conducted on how to best communicate with the community. Participatory action research may be a more appropriate approach for future studies, as it will help to create long-term connections with the communities. This approach would also provide researchers with an insider's view, which may be difficult to obtain through other approaches. Moreover, such a process could also help to empower local community residents to become involved in the park management process.

What was not lacking among many participants was an interest in and desire to visit Congaree NP. William, a senior citizen actively involved with urban and youth organization, was motivated to bring young people to Congaree NP:

*Everybody here [at the focus group], by the time they're the age they are now should be able to say 'oh yeah, I went there in fourth grade. I know about it....' We shouldn't be in Columbia talking about national parks [like] Yellowstone and Grand Canyon - we've got one at our backdoor we haven't been to ourselves.*

This interest in visiting their backyard park, if nurtured, encouraged, and informed, may lead to a greater diversity of visitors to Congaree NP and serve as a model for other national parks seeking to do the same.



## Appendix 1: Focus Group Demographics

Table 5. Focus group participant demographics

Code name	City/town	Zip code	Age group	Length of residency in Columbia area	Income group	Gender
<b>Focus Group 1</b>						
LeeAnne	Irmo	29063	30-40	Lifetime	middle	F
Durran	Columbia	29203	teen-early20s	3rd generation	middle	M
Virginia	Columbia	29204	50-60	2nd generation	middle	F
Stephen	Columbia	29210	20-30	2 years	middle	M
Patricia	Columbia	29210	20-30	18 years	lower-middle	F
<b>Focus Group 2</b>						
Hanna	Hopkins	29061	50-60	Lifetime	middle	F
Annabelle	Hopkins	29061	70-75	Lifetime	middle	F
Lily	Hopkins	29061	70-75	Lifetime	middle	F
Verda	Hopkins	29061	70-75	Lifetime	middle	F
Natalie	Hopkins	29061	70-75	35 years	middle	F
Marissa	Hopkins	29061	70-75	8 years	middle	F
Olivia	Hopkins	29061	70-75	1.5 years	middle	F
Sandra	Hopkins	29061	70-75	Lifetime	middle	F
Heloise	Gadsden	29052	60-70	Long time	middle	F
<b>Focus Group 3</b>						
Eric	Columbia	29204	40-50	10 years	middle	M
Richard	Columbia	29201	40-50	7 months	middle	M
Andrea	Hopkins	29061	40-50	3rd generation	upper-middle	F
Lamar	Hopkins	29062	50-60	lifetime	upper-middle	M
Meredith	Columbia	29203	40-50	3rd generation	middle	F
Malia	Columbia	29204	teen-early20s	4th generation	middle	F
Sasha	Columbia	29203	70-75	Generations	middle	F
<b>Focus Group 4</b>						
Serena	Columbia		teen-early20s	lifetime	low	F
Timothy	Columbia	29203	teen-early20s	lifetime	low	F
Nikki	Columbia		teen-early20s	lifetime	low	F
William	Columbia	29204	50-60	lifetime	middle	M
Marc	Columbia		teen-early20s	lifetime	low	M
David	Columbia	29204	teen-early20s	lifetime	low	M
Peter	Columbia	29203	30-40	lifetime	low	M
Jacques	Columbia	29223	teen-early20s	lifetime	low	M
Thomas	Columbia	29204	teen-early20s	lifetime	low	M
Pierre	Columbia	29023	teen-early20s	lifetime	low	M
<b>Focus Group 5</b>						
Christopher	Gadsden	29052	40-50	Generations	middle	M
Henry	Gadsden	29052	40-50	Generations	middle	M
Josie	Columbia	29204	60-70	Generations	middle	F
Darla	Eastover	29044	50-60	Generations	middle	F
Paula	Hopkins	29061	60-70	Generations	middle	F
Gabrielle	Columbia	29203	40-50	Generations	middle	F
Debra	Columbia	29203	60-70	Generations	middle	F
Rachel	Columbia	29210	40-50	Generations	middle	F

Table 5. Focus group participant demographics, continued

Code name	City/town	Zip code	Age group	Length of residency in Columbia area	Income group	Gender
<b>Focus Group 6</b>						
Terese	Columbia	29204	60-70	4th generation	lower-middle	F
Whitney	Columbia	29204	60-70	5 years	lower-middle	F
Madeline	Columbia	29203	60-70	40 years	lower-middle	F
Dorothy	Columbia	29204	60-70	3rd generation	lower-middle	F
Meryl	Columbia	29203	60-70	Long time	lower-middle	F
Tanya	Columbia	29203	60-70	Long time	lower-middle	F
Florence	Columbia	29203	60-70	Long time	lower-middle	F
<b>Focus Group 7</b>						
Sara	Irmo	29063	30-40	Lifetime	upper-middle	F
Jada	Irmo	29063	30-40	Lifetime	upper-middle	M
Robin	Eastover	29044	70-75	Long time	lower-middle	F
Leandra	Eastover	29044	50-60	Lifetime	lower-middle	F
Richelle	Gadsden	29052	40-50	Generation	middle	F
Erica	Columbia	29209	20-30	Generation	middle	F
Sherri	Columbia	29212	30-40	9 years	upper-middle	M
Raylene	Hopkins	29061	50-60	Lifetime	middle	F
Oscar	Gadsden	29052	50-60	Generation	middle	F
Elizabeth	Gadsden	29052	60-70	Lifetime	middle	F
Maddie	Gadsden	29052	50-60	Lifetime	middle	F
George	Gadsden	29052	50-60	Long time	middle	F
<b>Focus Group 8</b>						
Valarie	Columbia	29203	60-70	9 years	middle	F
Eleanor	Columbia	29204	50-60	Recently return	middle	F
Adrienne	Columbia	29229	30-40	8 years	middle	F
Taneesha	Columbia	29203	20-30	Lifetime	middle	F
Bob	Columbia	29209	40-50	Generations	middle	M
Bella	Hopkins	29061	60-70	Generation	middle	F
<b>Focus Group 9</b>						
Harold	Columbia	29223	70-75	20 years	upper-middle	M
Cameron	Irmo	29063	50-60	13 years	upper-middle	M
Darryl	Hopkins	29061	teen-early20s	Lifetime	middle	M
Leila	Columbia	29223	60-70	23 years	upper-middle	F
Alan	Columbia	29209	60-70	29 years	upper-middle	M
Kaylene	Columbia	29212	30-40		upper-middle	F
Alice	Blythewood	29016	30-40	3 years	upper-middle	F
Micah	Blythewood	29016	30-40	3 years	upper-middle	M
Dennis	Columbia	29229	30-40	4 years	upper-middle	M
Breeanne	Columbia	29229	30-40	4 years	upper-middle	F
Catherine	Blythewood	29016	50-60	3 years	upper-middle	F
Lane	Columbia	29212	30-40	10 years	middle	M
Cheryl	Irmo	29063	50-60	14 years	upper-middle	F
<b>Focus Group 10</b>						
Karyn	Columbia		20-30	1 year	middle	F
Dominic	Columbia		20-30	18 years	lower-middle	M
Langford	Columbia		20-30	4 years	lower-middle	M

## Appendix 2: Focus Group Discussion Guide

### Introduction

Good (Morning/Afternoon), my name is [MODERATOR]. I work for the Park Studies Unit at the University of Idaho. We're conducting research sponsored by the National Park Service. The purpose of the research is to better understand the needs and perceived barriers of local community members regarding access to resources at Congaree National Park

This discussion group has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget in compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act. The Office of Management and Budget control number and expiration date are available at your request.

Before we begin I want to tell you that the information that we obtain here is confidential and will not be used for any commercial purposes. I also want to inform you that we are audio recording this session, but the recording will not be shared with anyone and will be used only to create a summary of our discussion. Code names will be used in transcripts and quotations to protect your privacy.

This focus group will take a maximum of one and a half hours to complete. During this time we invite you to get something to eat or drink and if you need to use the restroom, they are located at \_\_\_\_\_.

I am going to ask you to please take turns when speaking, that you do not speak at the same time, and that you do not interrupt when others are talking during the session. If you have something to share while someone else is speaking, raise your hand and I will make time for you to share when that person finishes. I want you to know that there are no right or wrong answers. What we want to know are your opinions and feelings.

You do not have to use your full names during this discussion. We can refer to one another by using our first names only. Let's begin the session by going around the table and introducing ourselves. As we go around the table, please:

- Introduce yourselves by stating your first name
- Share with us how long you have lived in Columbia area
- Tell us which neighborhood/city/street do you live on?

Let's go around the table one by one, starting to my right....

### 1. Recreational behavior/culture

- a. What things do you like to do for fun, when you have free time such as a weekend or vacation?
- b. What outdoor activities do you engage in? -OR- What do you do for fun outside? (*prompt: such as picnicking, daily exercise, walking, playing Frisbee, etc?*)
- c. Is this an activity you do on a regular basis (daily, weekly, etc.), or only once in a while?
- d. What kinds of outdoor activities would you NOT do? And why? (*Prompt for reasons: due to limitations, preferences, etc.*)

### 2. Public Land Use Patterns

*Public land areas are places such as national parks, city parks, bike trails, museums, recreation centers, etc., that are operated by a city, county, state or federal entity.*

- a. Describe a place that you visit often (now or in the past). How often did/do you visit this place and what did/do you normally do there? (*If there is more than one site please provide answer for each site*)?
- b. In addition to the site that you just described, is there any other place that you would go to when you have more time - like a vacation/holiday or a special occasion? If Yes, please describe the place and what do you normally do there.
- c. About how far (or how much time) would you be willing to travel for recreation? (*prompt for different scenarios 1. weekend trip, 2. long vacation, etc.*)
- d. Is there any "popular" site in your communities that people often go to for outdoor recreation? If yes, what can you tell me about the place?

### 3. Information sources

- a. Who do you usually visit the public land/area with, and about how many people are usually in the group (range - minimum to maximum)?
- b. Is there a person in the group who plans/decides when/where to go somewhere and do something (logistics, etc.)? If not, who does the planning?
- c. What do you usually decide on first - the activity, or the place?
- d. If you want to find out more about a public land/area, how do you get information about it? What sources do you use?
- e. Which one is the most important source of information? ("Important" means the source you rely on the most and provides you with most information to prepare for your travel.)

[5-10 minute break]

### 4. National park perception/awareness

*Reinforce: Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers for the following questions - I am only interested in your perceptions.*

- a. When you hear the term "national park" what does that mean to you? Remember, there is no such thing as a right or wrong answer. I'm interested in your impressions and perceptions.
- b. How did you first learn about national parks?
- c. Name some of the national parks, if any, that you have visited.
- d. If you have never visited a national park, have you ever heard of any? Which ones?

5. Congaree-specific questions

- a. Prior to this conversation, were you aware that Congaree National Park existed? If yes, describe to me what you know about it.

*For users only: When you have visited Congaree National Park what did you do there (recreational activities)? When was the last time you visited the park?*

- b. When people visit an area such as Congaree National Park, what facilities and services would they like to see available?

*For users only: What facilities or services do you want to see available or added? May need to read list of activities stated in Question 1a.*

- c. What do you think might be a potential issue that would prevent you or others in your community from visiting Congaree National Park?

*For users only: What has prevented you from visiting the park again?*

*(Examples: financial, transportation, lack of interest, "close to home syndrome," Federal land issue, perceptions of park rules/regulations...)*

- d. In your opinion, what can park managers do to encourage you and people from your community to visit the park? What would help Congaree National Park make a connection with the residents of the Columbia area?

*Probing: How would we best get the word out to your communities? Are you aware of any other issues regarding access to the park, or to park information, that people in your community may have?*

6. Is there anything else anyone would like to add to the discussion?

Close

I want to thank each of you for your time and for helping us with this focus group. All your comments have been very useful. Thank you very much.



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