



Foundation Document Overview

Congaree National Park

South Carolina



Contact Information

For more information about the *Congaree National Park Foundation Document*, contact: tracy_stakely@nps.gov or (803) 776-4396 or write to: Superintendent, Congaree National Park, 100 National Park Road, Hopkins, SC 29061

Purpose

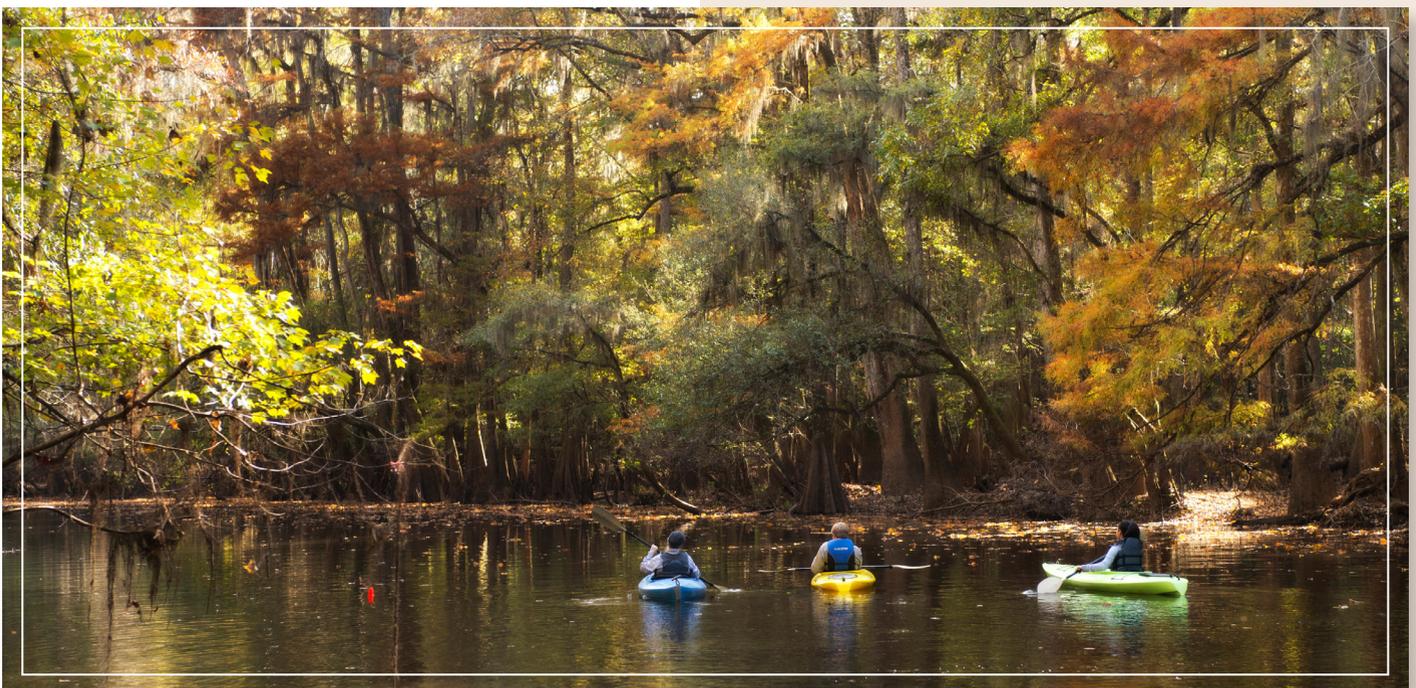


CONGAREE NATIONAL PARK protects, studies, and interprets the resources, history, stories, and wilderness character of the nation's largest remaining tract of southern old-growth bottomland forest and its associated ecosystems.

Significance

Significance statements express why Congaree National Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Congaree National Park protects the nation's largest remaining tract of Southern old-growth bottomland forest and a significant expanse of associated floodplain.
- Congaree National Park preserves unique regional cultural history, archeological sites, and landscape features that document evolving agricultural, commercial, and social practices in the bottomlands and forests of the South Carolina Midlands.
- The Congaree National Park Wilderness preserves the wilderness character of the largest expanse of old-growth bottomland forest in the National Wilderness Preservation System and provides opportunities to experience solitude, challenge, and adventure that are unique to this landscape.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Bottomland Hardwood Forest**
- **Big Trees**
- **Floodplain**
- **Cedar Creek**
- **Biodiversity**
- **Wilderness**
- **Historic and Prehistoric Sites**

Congaree National Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Human Interaction with the Land**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Congaree National Park contains significant expanses of federally designated wilderness, which is relatively uncommon in the Eastern United States. As such, it provides diverse opportunities for recreation, solitude, reflection, challenge, discovery, and understanding.
- Congaree National Park inspires stewardship for current and future generations as they access, experience, and learn about the natural and cultural history of the park and surrounding community.
- Congaree National Park collects, preserves, and shares stories about human interactions and adaptations with the river, floodplain, and surrounding landscapes over thousands of years.
- Congaree National Park is internationally recognized as the largest remnant of old-growth bottomland forest in the eastern United States. The river, floodplain, and associated ecosystems support processes and provide habitat that benefit a large diversity of plant and animal species.
- The landscape, with its majestic trees, diversity of life, and geologic features embodies endurance, interrelationships, and change through time.



Description

Congaree National Park extends northwest from the confluence of the Congaree and Wateree rivers. Encompassing more than 26,000 acres of mostly floodplain forest, the park protects towering trees and diverse plant and animal life characteristic of the old-growth southern bottomland hardwood ecosystem. Included within the park's borders are 11,000 acres of old-growth forest, the largest contiguous tract of southern old-growth bottomland forest remaining in the United States.

The park is sustained by the rivers that bound it. Periodic floodwaters from the Congaree and Wateree rivers sweep through the bottomland forest, carrying nutrients and sediments that nourish and rejuvenate the rich floodplain ecosystem and its diverse assemblage of plants and animals. Due to the minimal relief in the floodplain, even slight elevation changes affect the duration and frequency of flooding, and thus the composition of plant communities.

The fertility of the floodplain, favorable growing conditions, and lack of logging allow trees to grow to very large size. The park contains numerous champion trees and great potential for future champions. Champion trees in the park range from pine and oaks on more elevated sites to cypress and tupelo in sloughs and depressions.

In 1988, Congress included the majority of the park in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Approximately 21,700 acres in the park are currently designated as wilderness.

Although largely a wilderness today, the park has a long history of human use and occupation.

In addition to agriculture in parts of the park, intermittent commercial logging occurred from the days of first settlement. However, it was not until the 1880s and 1890s that the park was logged on a truly industrial scale. From 1899 to around 1914, the Santee River Cypress Lumber Company logged cypress and hardwoods over much of the park's current acreage. Santee focused primarily on the largest cypress trees, leaving much of the old-growth hardwood forest intact. When logging of old-growth resumed in 1969, local residents undertook the citizen action campaign that resulted in the establishment of the park.

More than 100,000 people visit the park each year to experience its remnant old-growth forest. Visitor activities include hiking, fishing, bird watching, canoeing, and camping.

