

THE
FUTURE
OF
AMERICA'S
NATIONAL
PARKS

First Annual
Centennial Strategy for

Congaree National Park

August 2007

CENTENNIAL INITIATIVE



Site: COSW

Year: 2007

Vision Statement

In celebration of the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service in 2016, Congaree National Park seeks to reconnect the world to the park, both as a place of inspiring resource discovery and a place of engaging recreational and educational opportunities. The park also seeks to recommit itself to its resource stewardship and wilderness management goals while demonstrating environmental leadership and professional excellence. Congaree programs for the Centennial will be coordinated around the themes of stewardship, education, recreational experience, environmental leadership, and professional excellence and will represent the best that National Parks have to offer.

Through increased partnerships with local, state, and national organizations, Congaree National Park will be a model for finding win-win opportunities for protecting park resources as well as providing exciting opportunities for a diverse group of on-site and virtual visitors whose needs and interests change over time. As we build partnerships- we build interest. As we build interest- we build a sense of ownership for parks. As we build that sense of ownership, we build a shared vision for the future of Congaree National Park.

Park/ Superintendent/ Program Manager

Tracy Swartout

Site: COSW

STEWARDSHIP

Provide inspiring, safe, and accessible places for people to enjoy - the standard to which all other park systems aspire.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Congaree National Park will provide excellent opportunities for visitors to enjoy safe, inspiring, and accessible programs connecting them with park resources. By providing a robust mix of up-to-date programs, centered on the park's resources, and ensuring that priority assets are in top condition, we can inspire a generation of stewardship.

During the next few years, some of our specific activities will include:

-Reducing invasive species across the 14-park network with the Congaree-based Exotic Plant Management Team. This partnership with the Student Conservation Association, not only provides necessary field work to accomplish resource goals, but also exposes young people to park resources and NPS careers.

-Partnering with the US Forest Service to conduct Traditional Tool Use training for trail clearing on land and water trails inside the park's wilderness areas. This will improve the wilderness character of those areas while also providing opportunities for interpretive staff to develop corresponding public programs demonstrating traditional tool use. Making this training available to non-NPS partners in the area enables a shared stewardship ethic.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

STEWARDSHIP

Improve the condition of park resources and assets.

Rehabilitate high-priority historic buildings to good condition, and help communities to preserve their history through programs like Preserve America.

Congaree National Park, by working as a part of the Lower Richalnd County Heritage Corridor, will assist the local community in preserving important cultural and historical sites and promote heritage events. Through partnership events, such as Swampfest, the park will share cultural history of the area with park visitors, while also encouraging stewardship for historic resources that build the fabric of the community in which the park resides.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Restore native habitats by controlling invasive species and reintroducing key plant and animal species.

Congaree National Park will reduce the impact of invasive plant and animal species inside the park.

In particular, invasive plants will be addressed through the Congaree-based Exotic Plant Management team, which supports invasive species removal from 14 parks within our network. This program, a partnership with the Student Conservation Association, will not only address invasive species needs at parks in the network, but will also expose scores of young adults to park resources and NPS career opportunities. In addition, through the use of volunteer events, such as "Service Saturdays," Congaree will seek to reconnect visitors to the park though service work that assists the park in meeting its invasive plant removal goals.

Congaree will also assess the exotic wild hog problem within the park, reviewing methods used by other parks to mitigate resource damage and developing a proposed methodology for mitigating damage at Congaree.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Improve high-priority assets to acceptable condition, as measured by the Facility Condition Index.

Congaree National Park will improve high-priority assets to an acceptable condition.

Specific actions the park will take to bring assets up to acceptable condition include:

Hosting a Traditional Tool training and workshop for wilderness trail clearing on land and water, the park's high-priority trail assets will be improved in their condition and visitor safety will be improved. continuing

Site: COSW

STEWARDSHIP

Improve the condition of park resources and assets.

Use of seasonal trail crews to maintain priority trails on land and water.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Improve the natural resources in parks, as measured by the vital signs developed under the Natural Resource Challenge.

Congaree National Park will improve the natural resources in the park through a combination of invasive species management, revegetation of social trails, and conversion of fleet vehicles to hybrid fuel options when possible.

Specifically, the Congaree-based Exotic Plant Management Team will assist with addressing invasive species management goals. The traditional tools training will improve wilderness character.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Complete all cultural resource inventories for designated priority resources.

Congaree National Park will complete all cultural resource inventories for priority resources.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

STEWARDSHIP

Assure that no compelling chapter in the American heritage experience remains untold and that strategically important landscapes are acquired, as authorized by Congress.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Acquisition of the 1840 acre Riverstone tract will ensure protection of important natural and cultural resources, provide a wider range of visitor recreational opportunities including boating, fishing, hiking, and wildlife viewing, as well as potentially mountain biking (pending a GMP review of this proposed activity). This acquisition will also protect an important wildlife migration corridor, connecting the two separate parts of the park (the eastern and western portions).

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

STEWARDSHIP

Serve as the Preeminent resource laboratory by applying excellence in science and scholarship to understand and respond to environmental changes.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Congaree National Park will serve as the preeminent resource laboratory in the area. Both the Congaree Science Field Academy, and the Congaree National Park Academy projects will provide opportunities for students to be involved in long term environmental education and information gathering in support of park resource management goals.

In addition, Bioblitzes at Congaree and other National Parks will provide opportunities for people to reconnect to their parks by becoming "citizen-scientists" where they receive training and then use that training in a resource-related "blitz" within the park. Recent blitzes, such as a "Spider blitz" on Halloween in the park provided dozens of children with exciting, educational park experiences, and led to the addition of two new species to the park list of spiders found in the park.

The Congaree Research Symposium will track 30 years of research completed within the park, and identify research needs and avenues for the next 30 years of the park's existence. Connecting scientific inquiry with management decisionmaking not only helps connect potential researchers with our most important research needs, but also gives managers the ability to h

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

STEWARDSHIP

Encourage children to be future conservationists.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The park will seek to encourage children to be future conservationists by reconnecting them to their park, both through new interpretive programs and materials... but also through greater collaboration with the local school districts to ensure curriculum-based program features and partnerships.

Special events, ,such as Congaree Day Camps, Congaree Field Academies, or Bioblitzes will all provide opportunitites for children to enjoy engaging and educational experiences out in the park.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

ENVIRONMENT

Reduce environmental impacts of park operations.

Reduce the environmental impacts of park operations on air and water quality.

The park will seek to improve air and water quality by limiting the use of motorized equipment in its wilderness areas. This can be achieved though partnering to offer traditional tools (such as crosscut saw) training for both park and partner agency staff.

Replacing the park's aging fleet with clean or alternative-fuel vehicles where possible, replacing regular lights with compact fluorescent bulbs, and putting lighting and fans on motion sensors will assist in improving and leading by "green example."

in addition, replacing the old campground porta-pottys with an ADA-accessable composting toilet facility that has UV-powered lighting will also allow the park to demonstrate Environmental Leadership.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

ENVIRONMENT

Inspire an environmental conscience in Americans.

Establish programs to showcase exemplary environmental practices and increase visitor awareness of how the practices apply to their daily lives, as measured by surveys.

Congaree National Park will showcase exemplary environmental practices and inspire an environmental consciousness in visitors by increasing visitor awareness of how these issues impact their daily lives.

By hosting the Traditional Tools training, and then developing specific interpretive programs related to traditional tool demonstrations, energy efficiency, alternative fuels, and climate change, park interpreters and educators will work alongside park maintenance and trail crew staff to showcase, through talks and demonstrations, environmentally-friendly practices to park visitors and make this message meaningful for visitors daily lives and in the choices they make.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Demonstrate environmental excellence through increased use of alternative energy and fuels at every park.

Congaree National Park will demonstrate environmental leadership through increased use of alternative fuels and clean technologies.

Specifically, by replacing the existing porta-pottys at the park campground with UV-powered facilities, replacing regular lights with compact fluorescent bulbs, and by replacing older fleet vehicles with clean or hybrid-fueled vehicles, the park can demonstrate environmental excellence to the visiting public.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

ENVIRONMENT

Engage partners, communities, and visitors in shared environmental stewardship.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

By providing traditional tools training to partners, we demonstrate a shared environmental stewardship. By providing the park as a location for a bulb swap (old regular bulbs for compact fluorescents) we also demonstrate shared stewardship.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

RECREATION

Encourage collaboration among and assist park and recreation systems at every level—federal, regional, state, local—to help build an outdoor recreation network accessible to all Americans.

Rehabilitate over 2,000 miles of trails within or connected to national parks, including trails accessible to those with disabilities.

Congaree National Park will encourage collaboration among park and recreation programs at all levels.

Specific tasks for this goal include rehabbing our backcountry land and water-based trails through the use of tradiitonal tools.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Congaree National Park will encourage collaboration among park and recreation programs at all levels.

Congaree will continue and increase its involvement with partnership events such as Swampfest, Three Days for Three Rivers, the SC Trails Conference and other such events to foster opportunities for the various park management organizations may share best practices, training opportunities, expertise, and promotiopn of events.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

RECREATION

- Establish "volun-tourism" excursions to national parks for volunteers to help achieve natural and cultural resource protection goals.
- Increase annual volunteer hours by 100 percent, from 5.2 million hours to 10.4 million hours.

Congaree National Park will establish increased theme-based "volun-tourism" opportunities to allow visitors to assist with park natural and cultural resource protection goals.

Specifically, Congaree NP will partner with the University of South Carolina's office of Community Service for "Service Saturday" events to bring 40-80 university students out on Saturdays to accomplish large-scale projects quickly and expose students to park resources as well as NPS career opportunities.

In addition, through events like Public Lands Day, National Trail Cleanup Day, National Park Week, Naturefest, Swampfest, and others, Congaree will develop unique, interesting opportunities for people to gain appreciation and understanding about the parks resources while also contributing to the accomplishment of park mission goals.

- The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

RECREATION

- Expand partnerships with schools and boys and girls associations to show how national park experiences can improve children's lives.
- Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Congaree National Park will expand school and other children's group associations to provide engaging, educational opportunities for young visitors to forge connections to the park resources and inspire learning for all students. Specific events, such as science immersion and other "Congaree Academies" will be created to provide themed focus for group activities at the park.

- The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

RECREATION

Focus national, regional, and local tourism efforts to reach diverse audiences and young people and to attract visitors to lesser-known parks.

Increase visitation by 25 percent at lesser-known parks through a national tourism effort aimed at helping people to discover the breadth of parks and experiences.

Conagree National Park will continue and increase partnership tourism efforts to bring the message of Congaree to an ever-widening audience. Specifically, the park is working on the following initiatives:

- Working with area counties and regional transit representatives to develop extended public transit out to the park. The park is not currently served by mass transit.
- Developing exhibits for use at area museums and the regional metropolitan airport to encourage tourism at the park.
- Working with other SC park units to develop regional tourism opportunities.
- Working as a participant in the Lower Richland County Heritage Corridor to develop regional heritage tourism in the area surrounding and including the park (and associated special events).
- Developing a three minute "park promo" as part of the update to the park film, so that it may be used to showcase the park on local television spots, as well as in the Convention and Visitor Bureau/Tourism office.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Increase the number of visitors that attend ranger-facilitated programs such as campfire talks, hikes, and school programs.

The park will continue to work with regional convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, and local, regional and national advertisers to highlight/promote park programs.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

EDUCATION

Cooperate with educators to provide curriculum materials, high-quality programs, and park-based and online learning.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Conagree National Park will work with area educators and School Districts to develop high quality, curriculum-based programs for use in the park, in the classroom, and online.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

EDUCATION

Introduce young people and their families to national parks by using exciting media and technology.

Increase the number of web hits through the introduction of advanced, interactive features that attract young people to national parks.

Conagree National Park will introduce young people and their families to the park through virtual park tours, online activities and interactive media exhibits in the Visitor Center. In addition, the park will continue its use of a variety of traditional, but up-to-date interpretive media for face-to-face programs for children and their families.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

EDUCATION

Promote life-long learning to connect generations through park experiences.

Enroll an additional two million children in the Junior Ranger program.

Conagree National Park, through in-park and offsite programs, will enroll an increased number of children in the Junior Ranger program. Visits to underserved schools to introduce the Junior Ranger program will also be initiated. Conagree will also create a park-specific "River Ranger" program for Junior Rangers.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Conagree National Park will promote life-long learning to connect generations through park experiences by providing "family program" opportunities, special events, and historical/cultural information provided at the park. In Addition, the park will continue its work to present off-site programs for children as well as seniors where they meet/congregate.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

EDUCATION

Impart to every American a sense of their citizen ownership of their national parks.

Increase visitors' satisfaction, understanding, and appreciation of the parks they visit.

Conagree National Park currently has a 100% satisfaction rating, so the park will continue to develop and provide programs that are valued by park visitors, provide great and unique opportunities for the visitors to connect with park resources, and communicate the park's messages.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Conagree National Park will impart every American with a sense of their own personal ownership of the park through the following:

- Engaging stakeholders in development of programs
- Keeping lines of communication open
- Responding to visitor requests for information with a personal letter within one week
- Incorporating the message of "your national park" in everything that the park does
- Develop programs at visitors' requests, and let them know about it!
- Always- ALWAYS take the time to listen to our visitors about what is important to them, and never getting complacent about the job that is entrusted to our care.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

PROFESSIONALISM

Be one of the top 10 places to work in America.

Meet 100 percent of diversity recruitment goals by employing people who reflect the face of America.

Congaree National Park will meet diversity recruitment goals through the regular hiring process, but supplemented with on-campus information sessions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). In addition, through work programs, such as SCA and SCEP/STEP, the park will seek to ever increase its ability to grow interest in NPS careers in underrepresented populations.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

PROFESSIONALISM

Use strategic planning to promote management excellence.

Establish a structured professional development curriculum to provide park managers with the skills to apply best business practices and superior leadership.

Conagree National Park will work to promote management excellence by increasing training and career-advancement opportunities for staff where possible. Regular staff meetings will ensure that communication and respect are in focus at all times. Staff with demonstrated supervisory skill will be given opportunities to expand this skill through training opportunities where possible.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

PROFESSIONALISM

Promote a safety and health culture for all employees and visitors.

Reduce the number of employee lost-time incidents and serious visitor injuries by 20 percent.

Conagree National Park has over 11 years with no lost time incident. The park will work to keep "safety first" in all that we do.

Safety messages will be provided to visitors, regarding water levels, flooding, and trail hazards.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

PROFESSIONALISM

Model what it means to work in partnership.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Conagree National Park will model the partnership ethic.

By incorporating the questions "Who else does similar work?" and "Who would be a good partner for this activity/event?" into everything that we do at Congaree, we will continue to model the partnership ethic. We can do more with out partners than without, and we build a natural constituency through being supporting of such partnerships.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: COSW

PROFESSIONALISM

Make national parks the first choice in philanthropic giving among those concerned about environmental, cultural, and recreational values.

Improve communications and marketing capacity to increase public understanding of our mission, opportunities, and benefits.

Conagree national Park will increase substantially its communications and marketing efforts to ensure visitor and nonvisitor alike know about the park, are provided an opportunity to learn about the importance of the park, and are given cause to become park stewards.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS