



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service
Congaree National Park
100 National Park Road
Hopkins, South Carolina 29061



March 10, 2011

Congaree National Park Superintendent Tracy Swartout announced today that the park is releasing a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) of a proposal to improve two Cedar Creek canoe launch sites and expand visitor parking. The EA will be available for public and regulatory review starting March 10, 2011, and comments will be accepted through April 9, 2011.

The proposed improvements would address safety and natural resource concerns at the Bannister Bridge and South Cedar Creek public access areas. Both boat landings receive a high degree of visitor use. At both boat landings, the transition from the landing to the creek is awkward and potentially hazardous and soil erosion at the access points impacts the water quality of Cedar Creek. Both parking lots are inadequately sized to support current use and any increases in park visitation. Additionally, both parking lots are laid out in a manner that increases the likelihood of accidents involving motor vehicles and pedestrian traffic. Improved access at these sites would enhance the overall visitor experience, reduce the risk of visitor injuries, and protect park resources

At the canoe launch sites, the proposed improvements would address safety and natural resource concerns while maintaining a natural look to the areas and blend any new structures in with the surrounding environment as much as possible. Possible improvements at each launch site would include bank stabilization with retaining walls, removal of old steps, construction of new steps, installation of launch platforms and revegetation with native trees and shrubs.

The proposed improvements would also address safety and size limitations at the parking areas. At the South Cedar Creek parking lot, the parking area would be enlarged to provide more parking spaces and allow for both head-in and pull-through parking with adequate room for backing and maneuvering. The area footprint would be extended to eliminate the necessity for vehicles to back out of the single lane roadway onto the South Cedar Creek Road. The Bannister Bridge parking lot would be enlarged to provide more parking spaces for accommodating more vehicles and to provide safe egress to Old Bluff Road.

A public information session will be held when the preliminary design drawings are ready. Notice of this session will be posted on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website, available at the Congaree National Park, Harry Hampton Visitor Center, or will be mailed upon request.

Comments can be provided in writing on-line or by mail. Comments may be made on-line at the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/CONG>. Please follow the appropriate links to "Improve Cedar Creek Canoe Launch Sites and Expand Visitor Parking, Environmental Assessment."



Comments by mail may be sent to:

Tracy Swartout, Superintendent

Attn: Improve Cedar Creek Canoe Launch Sites and Expand Visitor Parking EA

Congaree National Park

100 National Park Road

Hopkins, SC 29061

Please note:

Before including an address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment including your personal identifying information may be made publicly available at any time. While you may ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Comments are requested by April 9, 2011. Once the comment period concludes, all comments submitted will be considered and the National Park Service will make a decision about the proposed action.

Thank you for your interest in Congaree National Park.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tracy Swartout". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T".

Tracy Swartout
Superintendent