



Proposal to Upgrade Two Canoe Launch Sites and Expand Visitor Parking along Cedar Creek Canoe Trail

Project Scoping

February 26, 2010

Dear Interested Party:

Congaree National Park is planning to upgrade two existing canoe landing sites along the Cedar Creek Canoe Trail at Bannister Bridge and South Cedar Creek access points. Both landing areas have dedicated parking and receive a high degree of visitor use from recreational boaters.

The Bannister Bridge Landing consists of an unimproved silt embankment with a steep drop into the waters of Cedar Creek. This landing area exhibits signs of increased erosion due to increased visitation and use within recent past. The South Cedar Creek Landing consists of several degraded concrete steps anchored by rusted iron poles that have partially eroded into Cedar Creek. At both locations, the transition from the landing to the creek is difficult, and the current conditions of each site present a serious safety threat to most visitors.

The parking areas at each site are also inadequately sized to support visitor use and do not meet current design standards. Multiple vehicular accidents have been reported due to overcrowded lots and inadequate space.

Congaree National Park proposes to improve the existing landing sites and expand visitor parking at both locations. Improved access will enhance overall visitor experience, reduce the risk of visitor accidents and injuries, and protect park resources.

An Environmental Assessment will be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide the decision-making framework that 1) explores a reasonable range of alternatives to meet project objectives, 2) evaluates potential issues and impacts to park resources and values, and 3) identifies mitigation measures to lessen the degree or extent of these impacts.

The National Park Service encourages public participation throughout the NEPA process during which the public has two opportunities to formally comment on the project; once during initial project scoping and again following release of the Environmental Assessment. We are currently in the scoping phase of this project, and I invite you to voice your ideas, comments, or concerns in this effort. These comments will be considered during preparation of the Environmental Assessment. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Tracy Swartout, Superintendent

Alternatives

Following is the preliminary range of alternatives to be evaluated in the Environmental Assessment:

- **No-Action Alternative:** The two existing launch sites and associated parking areas would not be modified, and park visitors would continue to utilize each site without improvements. This alternative serves as a baseline from which to compare the impacts of other action alternatives.
- **Alternative A. Proposed Action:** The two existing canoe launches would be upgraded and improved, and the associated parking areas at each site would be expanded in their current locations. The upgraded facilities would be maintained by park staff.
- **Alternative B:** The Bannister Bridge launch site would be improved and the associated parking area would be expanded. The South Cedar Creek launch site and parking area would be abandoned and restored. A new public access area would be constructed approximately 0.5 miles downstream at the Dawson's Cabin site.

Overview of the Process

Project milestones include:

("*" indicates opportunities for public comment):

- Public scoping (closes March 31, 2010)*
- Preparation of the Environmental Assessment
- Public review of the Environmental Assessment*
- Analysis of public comment
- Preparation of decision document
- Announcement of decision

Resources and Concerns

The Environmental Assessment will analyze potential impacts to a number of resources including:

- Geology, soils, and vegetation
- Wildlife and species of special concern
- Water resources, floodplains, and wetlands
- Wilderness
- Climate change
- Visitor use and experience
- Public Health and Safety

Ideas to Consider

Following are a few ideas to keep in mind as you develop your comments on this proposal:

1. Do you have any ideas to share about issues/concerns, or are there any issues/concerns about the project that you think we should consider?
2. Are there any other alternatives that you think should be considered?
3. Do you have other comments and suggestions for us to consider in the environmental assessment?

How Do I Comment on This Project?

Please submit your comments online at the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov>

Please provide all comments by March 31, 2010. If you wish to be added to the Park's mailing list for future correspondence, please indicate that in your response.

If you are unable to submit comments electronically through this website, then you may also submit written comments to Congaree National Park, Attention: Bill Hulslander, 100 National Park Road, Hopkins, SC 29061. You may also hand-deliver written comments to the Harry Hampton Visitor Center at Congaree National Park.

Current Conditions at South Cedar Creek



Entrance from S. Cedar Creek Rd



Existing canoe launch



South Cedar Creek parking area

Current Conditions at Bannister Bridge



Entrance and parking from Old Bluff Rd



Existing canoe launch



Area surrounding canoe launch