

# Congaree Swamp National Monument



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

For millennia, the majestic swamps of the eastern United States harbored diverse plant and animal populations. Southern swamps were changed little by native Americans. Then, in the mid-1800's, the history of these swamps became intertwined with the history of American progress. After the northern forests had been cut, the lumbermen turned south. "One by one, the swamp forests fell to the broad ax and cross-cut saw. . . now, there is only the Congaree Swamp in South Carolina to remind us of what was once so common a part of our natural heritage," wrote Gary Soucie in the July 1975 issue of *Audubon Magazine*.

Protection of the Congaree was discussed in the 1950's but no study was done until 1961. In 1963 the National Park Service published its first report which stated, "The virgin forest and large trees of Congaree give it national significance. . ." but there was little public support for protection and the idea waned. In 1974 after another area study, the Congaree was established as a National Landmark, another step toward preservation. Finally, in 1976, twenty-six years after the idea, Congaree Swamp National Monument was established by an act of Congress. Now, 15,135 acres are protected by law.

Although the park is administered by the National Park Service, it will not be opened to the public until the General Management Plan has been completed. Until then, there are no facilities available for the public. However, bona fide educational organizations are encouraged to visit and participate in research of the monument. The current authorized park is located in Richland County, South Carolina, twenty miles southeast of the city of Columbia.

A natural resource study, completed in 1979, includes 6 national and 19 state record trees within the monument and immediate surrounding area. Located and mapped were 11 potential state records; 5 of them potential national records. Sixty-four trees were found to be 80% of national record size. More than 150 trees larger than 12 feet in circumference were found. Of more than 85 tree species found in the park, 25 have attained record size. Below the high ground which borders the river floodplain stand loblolly pines 10 feet in circumference and 100 feet tall, which remind one of a large, silent and dim room in a medieval castle. As far as we know, this is the only place where loblollies reach such proportions. The American elm grows to 17 feet in circumference, the bald cypress to 27 feet. The trees and watershed, teeming with a great variety of wildlife, provide a haven of natural beauty.



*Oxbow Lake*

Most of the 15,000-acre monument lies on the Congaree River floodplain between 80 and 100 feet above sea level. One-third of the monument is continuously covered by water. Ten times per year on an average, floods cover approximately 90% of the park, providing nutrients from fertile, upriver farmlands. The floods usually occur after frequent and abundant rains, but also come when water is released from upriver dams. The frequently replenished soil supports a

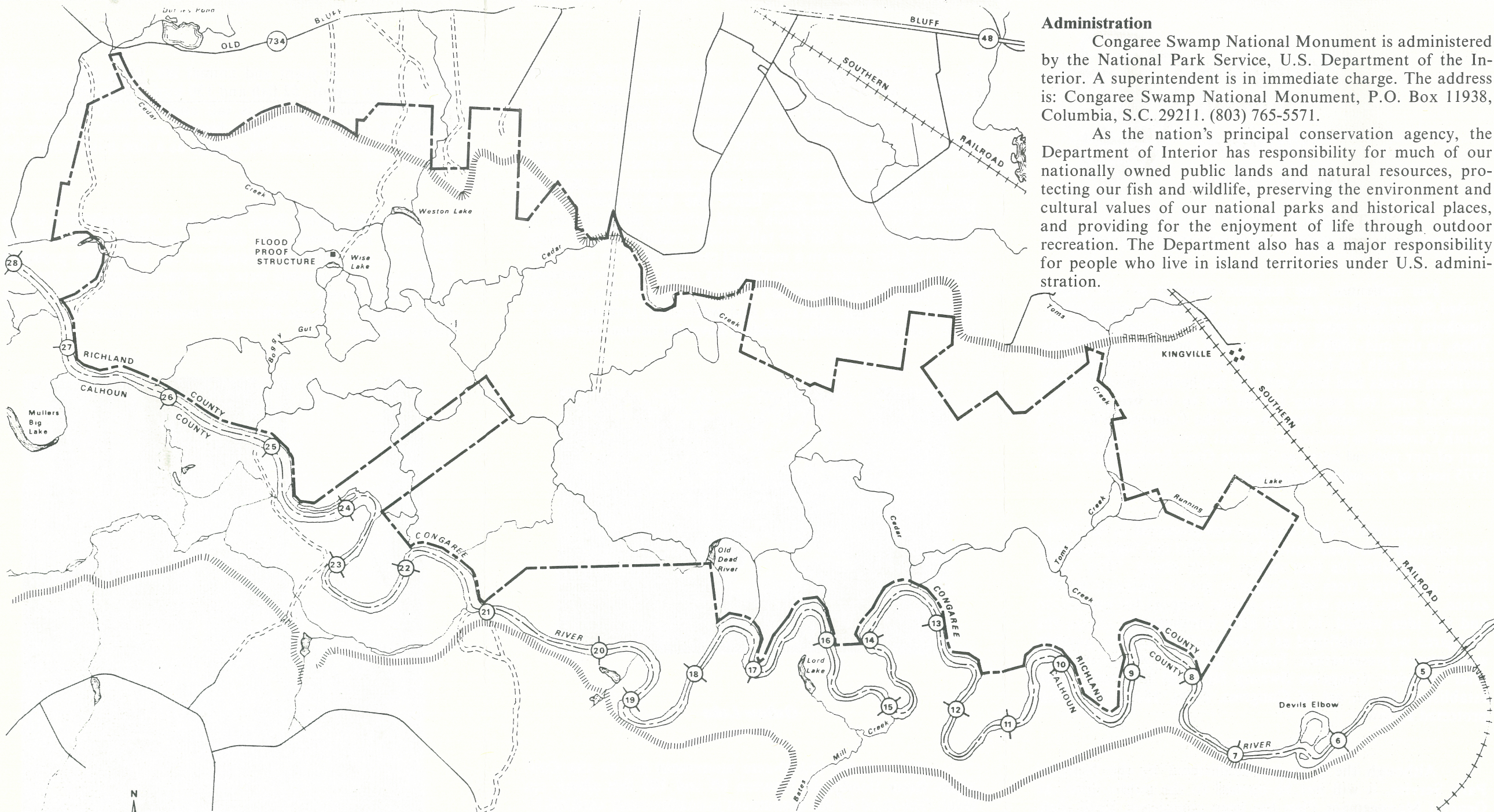
great diversity of plant and animal life. Over 320 plant, 41 mammal, 24 reptile, 52 fish and 130 bird species thrive in the park. The forest canopy is tall and thick, enhancing the illusion of perpetual twilight; barred owls hoot at noon; in summer, rain is seldom felt, except as a fine mist, below the forest's roof.

On the forest floor, man has left reminders of his presence. Earthworks or earthen mounds, called "cattle mounds", are scattered throughout the park. The probable purposes of the mounds were to prevent crops from destruction during floods or vice-versa — the levees may have kept water inside rice fields which are thought to have been in the area years ago.



*Bald cypress tree and "Knees"*





### Administration

Congaree Swamp National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent is in immediate charge. The address is: Congaree Swamp National Monument, P.O. Box 11938, Columbia, S.C. 29211. (803) 765-5571.

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of Interior has responsibility for much of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environment and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department also has a major responsibility for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

# AUTHORIZED BOUNDARY

## CONGAREE SWAMP NATIONAL MONUMENT

### SOUTH CAROLINA

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR-NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NOTE: RIVER MILEAGE IS COMPUTED UPSTREAM  
FROM THE CONFLUENCE OF THE CONGAREE  
AND WATREEE RIVERS

