



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Congaree National Park

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Congaree National Park News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Congaree National Park Seeks Public Comments on Proposed Fee Program

Beginning September 3, 2013, Congaree National Park will begin a 30-day public comment period on the proposed addition of expanded amenity fees at the park. Under the proposed program, fees will be collected for front country camping, picnic pavilion reservations and ranger-guided canoe tours. Fee revenue will be used in the park for improvements to existing amenities and/or the addition of new amenities for the benefit of the visiting public. Park staff would like to receive public input and address any concerns before implementing the fee program in the summer of 2014, if approved.

The park currently offers free tent camping in designated campground sites in the front country. Individual and group campsites at the Longleaf and Bluff Campgrounds have fire rings and picnic tables and access to a water spigot and restroom at the nearby Harry Hampton Visitor Center. Campers self-register and obtain a free permit at each campground. Congaree's free camping is currently undercutting local parks and businesses who offer comparable camping for a fee. The initiation of a camping fee at Congaree will facilitate improved competition with these businesses and also offer the park the opportunity to improve campground amenities to potentially include additional individual and group campsites, accessible campsites, tent pads, water spigots, lantern hangers, electric hookups and improved informational and interpretive media and signage at the campgrounds.

A single picnic pavilion with ten picnic tables is located adjacent to the visitor center parking lot. Additional picnic tables and grills nearby provide a gathering place for large groups. Use of the pavilion is currently free on a first-come first-served basis. Groups often inquire about reserving the pavilion for large family gatherings. A fee for pavilion reservations would allow Congaree the opportunity to provide a system for reserving use of the facility and improve amenities such as grills, tables, and potentially the addition of new pavilions to other areas of the park. When not reserved, the pavilion would remain free and open to the visiting public.

Congaree currently offers a limited number of free ranger-guided canoe tours on Cedar Creek. The park provides all required equipment and visitors are led by an interpretive park ranger on a two-hour paddle trip. Local canoe outfitters operating under park-issued Commercial Use Authorizations conduct over one hundred similar tours each year in the park, for a fee. The free ranger-guided programs are in direct competition with these outfitters. Additionally, although the ranger-guided tours are very popular with park visitors, the program is not sustainable long term with the park's current staffing and budget levels. A fee program would provide for improved competition with local outfitters. It would also allow the park to recover the cost of operating the tours, possibly offer additional tours and purchase safe and adequate equipment, including personal flotation devices, canoes, kayaks, paddles and canoe trailering equipment.

A 30-day public comment period will open on September 3, 2013. Congaree National Park will actively seek input from public officials, visitors, gateway communities, community groups and the tourism industry during the comment period. Public comments will be compiled and addressed by park staff and a fee proposal will be forwarded to regional and Washington offices of the National Park Service for review and approval.

The park seeks public input as we move forward.

To comment online visit <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>.

Two public meetings will be held in the local community to allow the public to direct questions, concerns or comments to park staff:

Thursday, September 5, 2013; 6:00-8:00 pm @ Richland Library Main, Bank of America Conference Room, 1431 Assembly St., Columbia, SC

Tuesday, September 10, 2013; 5:30-7:30 pm @ Richland Library Eastover, 608 Main Street, Eastover, SC

Direct questions or concerns may also be addressed to Superintendent Tracy Stakely, 100 National Park Rd., Hopkins, SC 29061, tracy_stakely@nps.gov or by calling 803-647-3971.

For additional information about Congaree, call 803-776-4396 or visit <http://www.nps.gov/cong>. Join Congaree National Park on social media: facebook.com/CongareeNP, twitter.com/CongareeNPS, flickr.com/photos/congareenps/, pinterest.com/congareenps and [http://instagram.com/congareenps/](https://instagram.com/congareenps/).

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