

Review of the 2018 Congaree National Park Resource Condition Assessment

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The purpose of this document is to provide a review and commentary on the Congaree National Park (CONG) Natural Resource Condition Assessment (NRCA; Burkholder et al., 2018). From a current CONG staff perspective, a combination of editorial and content concerns significantly undermines the confidence, utility, and value of the document as a standing park reference. Unfortunately, however, the document cannot be “un-published” from the NPS Integrated Resource Management Applications (IRMA) website (<https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore>). It could be replaced by revised document, but the work required to edit and update it is beyond current CONG staff.

As a background, the NPS Southeast Coast Inventory and Monitoring Network (SECN) contracted with the authors in 2014 on a large cooperative agreement to simultaneously prepare NRCA documents for multiple parks. This effort was begun and developed with minimal awareness, or input from park staff. A draft was shared with CONG staff around 2016. Park staff did not have the time to provide a thorough editorial review, but a cursory review indicated that, while the document was very cumbersome and had abundant issues, it might—with significant editing—be salvageable. Park staff assumed that the cooperator would be responsible for editing and that there would be another round of reviews. Due to a miscommunication, however, this response was misconstrued as approval to publish with only limited edits by SECN staff.

Further review by CONG staff have identified fundamental flaws. Editorial concerns include abundant copy edit issues (typographical errors and basic English grammar; sloppy, redundant use of copy-and-paste; inconsistent application of any sort of style guide [e.g., presentation of numbers and units]); excessive length compounded by cumbersome, non-parallel, and inefficient organization; inconsistent voice/style changes from multiple authors; and extraneous, generic information obviously intended to address multiple NRCA documents. Bona fide content concerns undermine trust in the document writ large. Examples include (1) misinformation (e.g., misstating the park acreage), (2) misunderstandings (e.g., about the nature of erosion and deposition in the park), (3) inconsistencies (e.g., conflicting names for the Saluda Dam at Lake Murray), (4) omissions (of important issues such as legacy sediment that park staff would have pointed out if consulted), (5) less-than-comprehensive compilations (e.g., CONG administrative history timeline table); and (6) misplaced priorities (e.g., a supposed emphasis on erosion at the park, which is actually opposite from real concerns about increased deposition). Furthermore, many of the datasets used were captured only through 2014, and several subsequent publications (including the 2017 Foundation Document, available online at: https://www.nps.gov/cong/learn/management/upload/CONG_FD_SP.pdf) have authoritatively superseded this publication. Subsequent CONG developments, including the 2017 fire management plan, 2014 feral hog management plan, and hugely popular synchronous firefly festival (<https://www.nps.gov/cong/fireflies.htm>) also affect the implications of the analysis contained in the NRCA. As a result of these issues, readers can have little confidence to distinguish between true contributions, incorrect information, or dated information without significant, additional research to validate every point.

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