

State Nature Conservancy Chapter Marks 15th Year With Green Swamp Talks, Tours

BY SUSAN USHER

On May 9, the North Carolina Nature Conservancy will celebrate its 15th anniversary in the state with an open house at its Green Swamp Nature Preserve in Brunswick County.

The main event for the open house will be held at Brunswick Community College from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. It will feature music by the 4 Seasons Saxophone Quartet, refreshments, environmental education activities for children, exhibits, talks and slide shows on the Conservancy and the Green Swamp preserve's multifaceted cultural and natural history.

As Ida Phillips of the Conservancy staff notes, the Green Swamp is "many things to many people".

Ask a local, and he might talk about seeing a cougar, or about the hunter who got lost in the jungle-like pocosins of the swamp and emerged three days later naked to the world, his clothes shredded.

A botanist might rave about the swamp's incredible diversity of plant species, particularly its carnivorous plants, while an ornithologist might mention the countless birds flying through the treetops.

"There is no doubt that anyone who visits the Green Swamp will be enraptured by some aspect of the preserve," observes Ms. Phillips in a new release.

The open house will provide an opportunity to see the preserve firsthand. A shuttle bus service will transport visitors to the preserve for field trips, which will be held rain or shine unless dangerous conditions exist.

Each trip will take about an hour and a half, starting at 10:30 a.m. People can sign up at BCC that morning for the trips, on a first-come, first served basis. Visitors are asked advantage of the tours and not venture into the swamp on their own.

The Green Swamp preserve comprises 15,722 acres, donated to the Conservancy by Federal Paper Board Corp. in a series of gifts that began in 1977.

It is part of a larger tract of 24,800 acres of the swamp, designated by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1974 as a National Natural Landmark, one of only eight in the state.



N.C. NATURE CONSERVANCY PHOTO

GUIDED TOURS OF the Big Island Savanna with its towering sentinel longleaf pines and grasses, as well as other areas of the Green Swamp Nature Preserve at Supply will be offered, rain or shine, at a May 9 "open house" as the N.C. Nature Conservancy begins its 15th anniversary celebration.

Early American botanist John Bartram of Philadelphia described the Green Swamp as "the pleasantest place that I ever saw in my life."

He was attracted by the broad expanse of glistening, dark water, the huge moss-draped cypress trees and the rich diversity of plant and animal life.

Visitors today can still enjoy glimpses of the swamp's earlier splendor in the savannas—expanses of green grasses and wildflowers stretching beneath towering longleaf pines.

The Green Swamp has major biological significance as well as great beauty, and serves as an outdoor laboratory for botanists, educators and zoologists from across the country and abroad. Studies have included the use of prescribed burning in maintaining habitat for fire-dependent plantlife and effects on the preserve of drainage of adjacent pine plantations.

A remnant of what was once a much larger ecosystem, the preserve features the most outstanding examples of pine savannas, bay forest and pocosins in the Southeast.

Much of the area is pocosin, a thick shrub habitat that provides living quarters for animals such as deer, black bear, bobcat and cougar.

The swamp is also home to the red-cockaded woodpecker, the gopher tortoise, the American alligator, the Eastern diamondback rattlesnake and Bachman's sparrow.

Plant life is just as diverse. In one area, for example, 52 species per square meter have been identified. These include the Venus flytrap, found only within 75 miles of Wilmington and threatened not only by changing habitat, but by poachers. Twelve types of orchids, 17 endangered species and 12 varieties of sphagnum are found within the boundaries of the preserve.

The Conservancy owns and manages 50 preserves in North Carolina with 32,000 acres of natural habitat. Another 305,000 acres preserved through the Conservancy's efforts has been turned over to public ownership in the form of national and state parks, wildlife refuges and game lands.

The Conservancy works closely with the state's Natural Heritage

Program to identify and inventory unique natural areas or habitats, then establishes priorities for protection based on collected data.

While it protects land primarily through gifts or purchase of acreage, the Conservancy has also used conservation easements, leases, lease options and voluntary agreements with landowners.

For more information on the open house, contact the North Carolina Nature Conservancy, Car Mill, Suite D-12, Carrboro, N.C. 27510, or call 919-967-7007.

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Open House Events Varied

The Green Swamp Open House will offer a variety of speakers at Brunswick Community College's main campus on U.S. 17, as well as guided tours of the N.C. Nature Conservancy's preserve north of N.C. 211.

The schedule is as follows:

- 10:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Guided tours; sign up in advance at BCC.
- 11 a.m.-11:30 p.m. Rare plant communities, Robert Peet, biology professor, UNC-CH;
- 11:30 a.m.-12 noon Endangered plant species, poaching and protection laws, Cecil Frost, Plant Conservation Program;
- 12 noon-12:30 p.m. Fire maintained communities, fire management, Carol Mayes, N.C. Nature Conservancy;
- 12:30 p.m.-1 p.m. Cultural history of the longleaf in the Southeastern U.S., Larry Earley, Assoc. Editor, *Wildlife In North Carolina*;
- 2 p.m.-2:30 p.m. Fire maintained communities, fire management, Carol Mayes, N.C. Nature Conservancy;
- 2:30 p.m.-3 p.m. Cultural history of the longleaf pine in the Southeastern U.S., Larry Earley, Assoc. Editor, *Wildlife In North Carolina*.

Romp In Swamp With Humphreys

Can't make the 15th anniversary celebration, or simply just can't wait?

Join Wilmington naturalist and author Charles "Buster" Humphreys on a specially guided tour of the Green Swamp Saturday, May 2, from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

This Swamp Romp excursion is an opportunity to study the natural habitat of many endangered species,

such as the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker.

Today (Thursday) is the deadline to register. Cost is \$5 for associate members of the Cape Fear Museum and \$7 for non-members. Call the museum at 919-341-4350 for more information such as what to bring and wear and where to meet Humphreys, and to register.

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