Wood Stork Aerial Survey Trip Report

Lake Murray and Saluda River
August 27, 2004

Survey Attendees

Shane Boring	Kleinschmidt
Tom Murphy	SCDNR Endangered Species Biologist
Bucky Harris	SCDNR Pilot

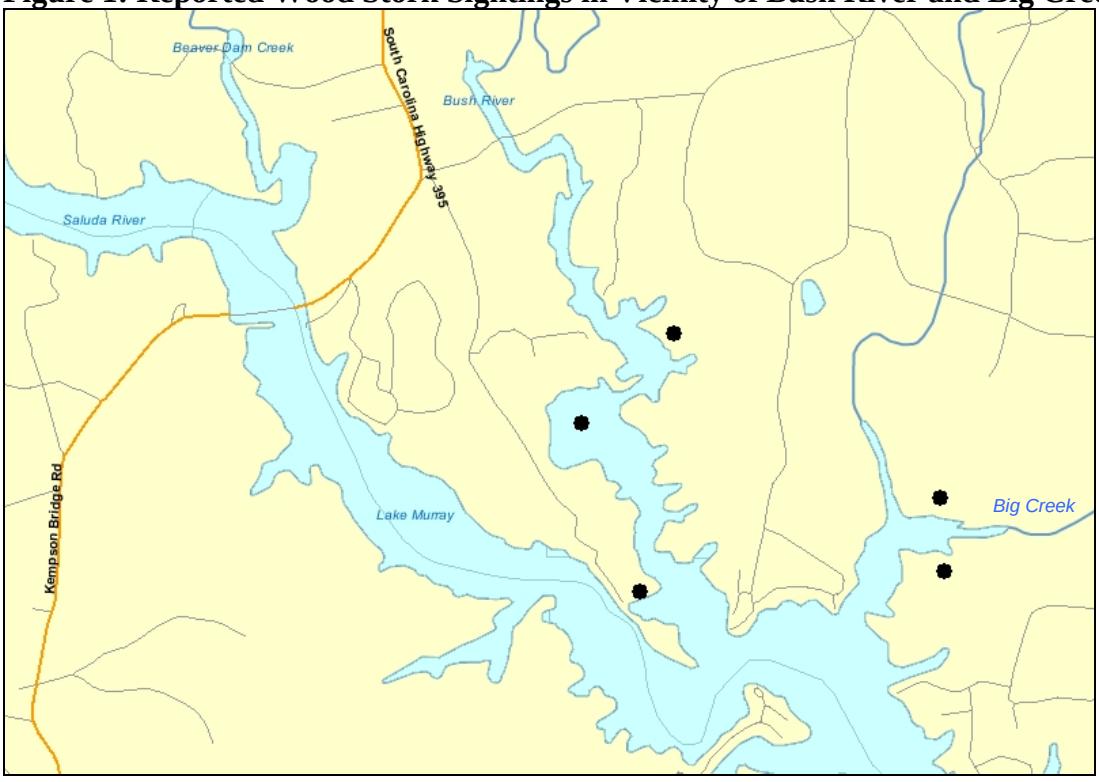
Aircraft: Fixed-Wing Cessna 210 **Survey Duration:** 1300 – 1415 hrs

Survey Observations

The survey crew departed the SC Avionics Facility at Columbia Metropolitan Airport at approximately 1300 hrs. The survey traversed the Lower Saluda River, from the confluence to the Saluda Hydro Dam, and the lower portion of Lake Murray, with the survey crew remarking on the lack of stork habitat in the vicinity. According to the USGS gage (Lake Murray near Columbia, SC), the reservoir elevation at the time of the survey was 349.9 ft.

The survey crew also examined several sites along Bush River and Big Creek where foraging storks have been reported by a local resident for approximately the past three years (See Figure 1). However, no storks were observed at these sites.

Figure 1: Reported Wood Stork Sightings in Vicinity of Bush River and Big Creek



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The remainder of the survey focused on the extreme upper end of Lake Murray and upstream in the middle Saluda River. Four sites where foraging wood storks were previously observed by Tom Murphy on 8/4/04 were examined (See Figure 2). Approximately 60 wood storks were observed foraging on exposed mudflats within the project boundary upstream of Beaverdam Creek on the Saluda River (See Point 1 - Figure 2). Several passes were made to confirm that the birds were wood storks, photograph the birds (See Figure 3), and obtain a more accurate count of the number of birds.

Figure 2: Saluda River Wood Stork Locations Provided By Tom Murphy (SCDNR)

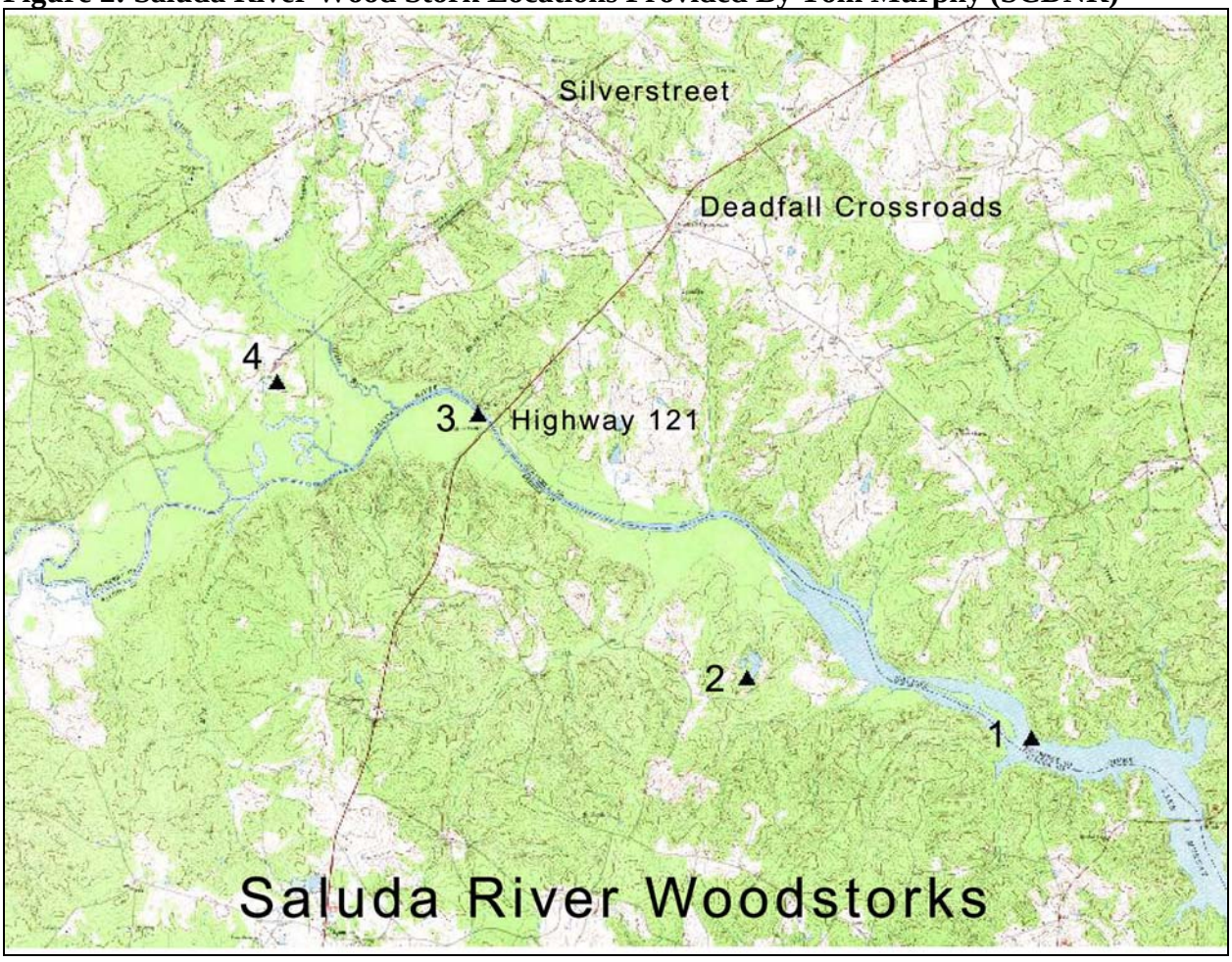

Figure 3: Wood Stork Feeding Assemblage Observed Upstream of Beaverdam Creek

The potential nesting area (See Point 4 – Figure 2; also See Figure 4), originally identified by Tom Murphy on 8/4/04, was also examined as part of the survey. Approximately 12 nests were observed in a small forested wetland (old clay pit) located in the floodplain of the middle Saluda River, south of Silverstreet, and adjacent to International Paper's wood chipping facility (See Figure 5). The nests appeared to be wood stork nests, but no storks were observed in the vicinity at the time of the survey. It should be noted that approximately 20 storks were observed standing on the nests and roosting in the vicinity of the nests when they were first located on 8/4/04; however, none appeared to be freshly-fledged juveniles.

The survey examined another potential nesting site in the Saluda River floodplain near the mouth of Tosity Creek, which was initially located by Bucky Harris (SCDNR Pilot) during a flight on approximately 8/25/04. Approximately 10 nests were observed in two adjacent forested wetlands (See Figure 4). The nests appeared to be wood storks nests; however, no storks were present at the site, and it was noted by Tom Murphy that they could potentially be great blue heron nests. GPS coordinates for the two potential nesting areas are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Latitude and Longitude of Potential Wood Stork Nesting Locations

	Latitude (Deg. / Dec. Min.)	Longitude(Deg. / Dec. Min.)
Silverstreet Site	34 11.20	81 45.28
Tosity Crk Site	34 10.19	81 42.19

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Figure 4: Potential Wood Stork Nesting Sites on the Middle Saluda River

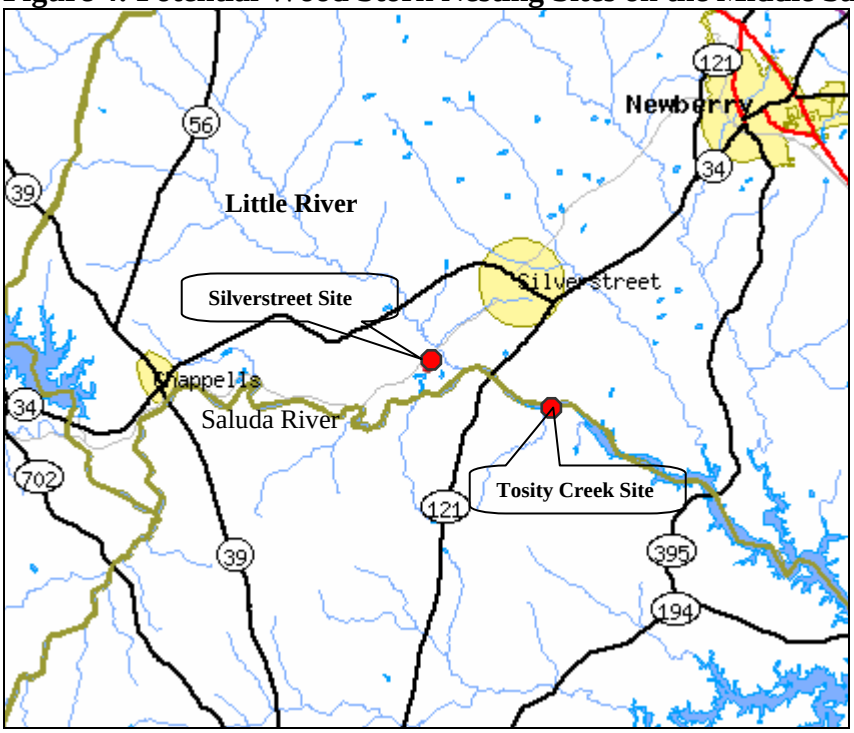
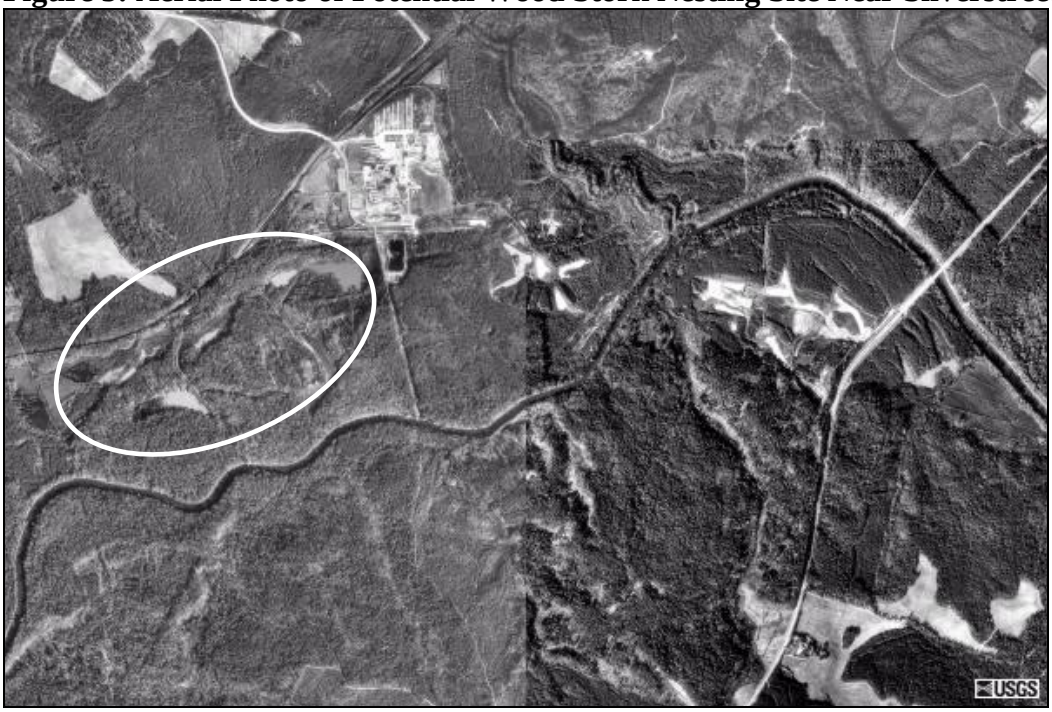


Figure 5: Aerial Photo of Potential Wood Stork Nesting Site Near Silverstreet, SC



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Summary

Approximately 60 wood storks were observed foraging on exposed mudflats within the Saluda Project Boundary upstream of Beaverdam Creek (See Point 1 - Figure 2). This observation, combined with other sightings of feeding assemblages throughout the middle Saluda Basin, suggests that wood storks are readily using a wide range of habitats in the basin for foraging. The storks observed feeding within the project boundary were feeding on mudflats exposed by the Lake Murray drawdown. It remains unclear at this time whether storks will utilize the lake as a foraging area once the lake has returned to full pool elevation. Tom suggested follow-up surveys next year to determine if storks are utilizing the lake for foraging after it is returned to full pool.

Two potential nesting sites were examined during the survey, one just south of Silverstreet and the other along the Saluda River near Tosity Creek (See Figure 4). At the Silverstreet site, approximately 12 nests resembling wood stork nests were observed; however, no storks were present at the time of the survey. When the nests were initially located on 8/4/04, several storks were observed standing in the nests and roosting nearby; however, none appeared to be newly-fledged juveniles. The Silverstreet Site is not located within the Saluda Project Boundary.

Approximately 10 nests were located at the Tosity Creek site. The size, structure, and location of the nests were typical of wood storks; however, no wood storks were observed in the vicinity and it was noted that they could potentially be great blue heron nests. Based on initial field observations, the Tosity Creek site appears to be located within the Saluda Project Boundary.

Some uncertainty remains as to whether the observed nests were wood stork nests, and if so, whether nesting was successful at the Silverstreet and Tosity Creek sites. In discussions with Tom Murphy, it was suggested that a similar survey be conducted during next year's nesting season to determine whether reproduction is taking place at these locations.