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Commissioner

North Carolina Department of Agriculture
and Consumer Services
N.C. Forest Service



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October 5, 2011

Honorable Members of the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations, Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittee on Natural and Economic Resources, Environmental Review Commission and Director Mark Trogdon, Fiscal Research Division:

On behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, I respectfully submit the Dupont State Recreational Forest Report, completed in accordance with the requirements of G.S. 106-857(i). I am available to answer questions regarding the results of the Department's review. I look forward to working with each of you to achieve the desired results of this report.

Respectfully,

Wib Owen

Attachment

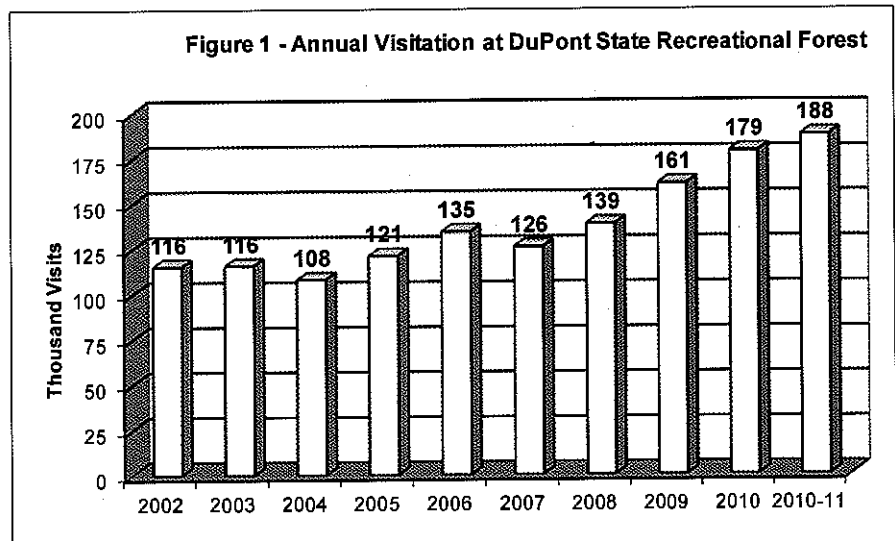
Cc: Steve Troxler, Commissioner, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
David McLeod, Assistant Commissioner, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Ray Starling, General Counsel, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Introduction – DuPont State Recreational Forest (DSRF) contains 10,400 acres in Transylvania and Henderson Counties. It has 80 miles of multi-use roads and trails used by hikers, bikers, equestrians, dog walkers, runners and others that enjoy outdoor recreation. There are four major waterfalls on the Little River and two on Grassy Creek. The waterfalls, high quality trails and scenic beauty attracts thousands of visitors each year.

Forest Staff - DSRF has a seven person staff plus two rangers assigned to Holmes Educational State Forest (HESF). The forest organizational structure can be found in Attachment 1. Two positions have been eliminated in the past three years in spite of increased visitation and maintenance needs. One maintenance supervisor responsible for maintaining over 40 structures at DSRF and 7 at HESF has created a challenge in maintaining safe facilities and a positive visitor experience. The Forest Supervisor has been instructed to look at future staffing needs and develop recommendations to meet those needs.

Fire activity during 2011 impacted the forest staffs ability to complete routine duties. Five staff are members of North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) Incident Management Teams or serve as incident technical specialists. Several staff members went on multiple fire dispatches and spent as much as 30% of their time on fire control during the first half of the year.

Visitation & Public Safety - The estimate of visitation for 2010-11 fiscal year is 188,000. The data in Figure 1 is by calendar year from 2002 to 2010. Visitor data will be reported by fiscal year starting July 2010. Visitation has increased 74% since 2004. As the number of visitors increases, so does the demand for parking and the impact on the trails and natural resources.



High demand for public access to the Little River waterfalls (Hooker, Triple, & High) has resulted in **public safety hazards** along Staton Road. These hazards include parking on the shoulders of Staton Road at Hooker Falls and High Falls parking areas as well as pedestrian traffic along and crossing Staton Road primarily at Hooker Falls parking area. The DSRF staff has consulted with DOT traffic engineers concerning these issues. This consultation has resulted in the speed limit on Staton Road being reduced to 45 mph. Additionally, expansion of the High Falls parking area by approximately 30 spaces was initiated this summer and should be completed by November, but will not handle the parking demand during peak visitation periods.

Additional options being considered include establishing NO PARKING zones on the road shoulders, additional traffic control signage (caution lights and/or flip signs), adding more off highway parking spaces, and building a pedestrian bridge at Hooker Falls to eliminate pedestrian traffic on Staton Road.

In order to be effective, the NO PARKING zones will need to be enforced. Consultation with the NC Highway Patrol and the Transylvania Sheriff's Department revealed that while they understand the safety concerns at DSRF, they have higher priorities than enforcing parking at DSRF. Adding a forest law enforcement position to the DSRF staff to address this issue should be considered.

Increased parking would be desirable from a public safety standpoint. However, increased visitation at these locations has a negative impact on natural resources and the visitor experience. Trail degradation and the trampling of vegetation are occurring at current use rates. These conditions result in the loss of soil during rain events and associated negative impacts to water quality. Some forest visitors have already started avoiding the waterfalls because of the crowds. Therefore, funding should be identified to complete a traffic flow and use study before the implementation of major changes to parking infrastructure.

Forest staff respond to an average of 30 incidents per year in DSRF. The number has increased from 23 in 2006 to 32 in 2010, and there have been 19 so far in 2011. These include injuries, illnesses, lost person searches and illegal activity. Water related injuries average about 8 per year. Lost person searches average 4 per year and are usually short-term lasting less than two hours. There have been 8 fatalities in 9 years. Two were caused by falls at the waterfalls, 3 from drowning and 3 were heart attacks. Signs are in place warning visitors not to climb up rocks and to stay out of the water above the waterfalls. There is not a designated swimming area, so visitors swim at their own risk.

DSRF has quickly become a primary destination for many people visiting WNC. Henderson and Transylvania visitor centers promote the forest in an effort to increase tourism dollars spent in the two counties. Trends indicate that visitation will continue to increase. As a result of this increased use, more staff, operating dollars, and capital improvement funds will be needed to manage the demand for quality outdoor recreation, and to manage and protect the natural resources of the forest.

DSRF Volunteers – Over 5,000 hours of volunteer service were contributed to the forest in 2010. See Table 1. Data for 2011 is being compiled. Western Piedmont Community College (WPCC) completed carpentry and rock masonry projects at the future welcome center. In March 2011 the Professional Trail Builders Association (PTBA) held its national convention in Asheville and conducted five workshops in the forest. The DSF staff works closely with many individuals and volunteer groups to accomplish many tasks and projects.

Table 1 - DSRF Volunteer Hours Contributed in 2010

| Organization | Type Organization | Hours |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| FODF | Friends of DuPont Forest | 1,367.0 |
| DuPont State Forest | Regular Volunteers | 1,242.5 |
| Western Piedmont | Community College | 909.5 |
| Pisgah Trail Blazers | Equestrian Group | 648.0 |
| Carolina Mule Assoc | Equestrian Group | 204.0 |
| DuPont Equest. Crew | Equestrian Group | 176.5 |
| SORBA | Southern Off Road Bikers | 154.0 |
| Chat. Trail Horse Assoc | Equestrian Group | 140.0 |
| Trout Unlimited | Fisheries Group | 60.0 |
| Four Circles | Recovery Program | 54.0 |
| Others | Clubs and groups | 54.0 |
| Brevard College | Move A Mtn Day | 48.0 |
| Total | | 5,057.5 |

Reservations, Events and Activities –

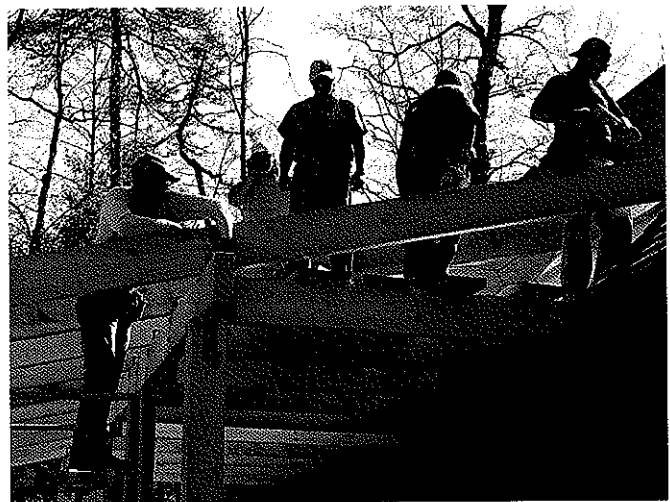
Over 10,600 people participated in special activities and events. See Table 2. Training sessions were conducted by NCFS, fire and rescue units, Emergency Management, NC National Guard, NC Justice Academy, US Air Force, US Army Special Forces, PTBA and other groups. Muddy Sneakers was the leading outside group conducting classes in the forest. The Pisgah Center for Wildlife Educational also conducted classes at DSRF. Other special events included film projects, running camps, a high school cross country meet, FFA forestry contests, canoe events, bike events and a llama pack trial.

**Table 2 - DSRF Events, Meetings & Reservations
Summary for 2010-11 Fiscal Year**

| Activity | People |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Shelter use by reservation | 1,388 |
| Access by disabled permit | 400 |
| Lodging (person nights) | 44 |
| Meeting attendees | 175 |
| Work project participants | 526 |
| Training session attendees | 377 |
| Class by outside group | 1,133 |
| Educational programs | 71 |
| Forest tours | 2,641 |
| Guided hikes | 96 |
| Guided rides | 45 |
| Other special event attendees | 3,721 |
| Total participation | 10,617 |

Facilities – DSRF has 18 buildings (3 to be demolished), 3 vehicular bridges, 5 dams, 7 piers, 6 picnic shelters and 3 viewing platforms. All the buildings came with the property. Many are over 40 years old and require substantial maintenance. The forest equipment shed is partially enclosed for use as a shop, but has no heat or indoor plumbing. An adequate maintenance facility is needed that includes a carpentry shop. As DSRF visitation increases over time, the demands placed on existing and future infrastructure needs will also increase. Funding for the development of a Forest Master Plan should be considered to help guide the NCFS to establish immediate, near term, and long term capital improvement needs.

Contact Station – A partially finished log building at the High Falls access area has been designated as a future contact station. DSRF staff and volunteers from WPCC have made some improvements to the building in the past two years. The side porch roof was added last fall. A front porch was constructed this spring, and the roof for it will be added in November. The stone veneer work was completed on the foundation and a stone retaining wall was constructed in front of the restrooms. Funds are needed to finish the interior of the main floor (1,200 square feet) so the building can be opened as a point of contact for visitors. The NCFS Construction Engineer estimates it will take \$280,000 to complete the building.



Students from WPCC construct a porch roof on the future welcome center.

Forest Management Accomplishments, 2010-11:

- Completion of the Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) for the 10,430 acre property, providing the ecological and social context within which management will be conducted on DSRF for the next 15 years and describing both the current and desired future conditions of the natural resources throughout the property.
- Continuous Forest Inventory (CFI) plots completed across 4,600 acres
- Prescribed burns conducted across 180 acres for the purpose of natural community maintenance and wildlife habitat development
- Approximately 100 hemlock (eastern and Carolina) trees chemically treated for Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) control
- Over 8 miles of property boundary (1/5 of the boundary total) re-blazed and painted

Forest Management Projections and Accomplishments, 2011-12:

- Complete CFI inventory on remaining acreage to develop baseline growth and yield information across forest communities
- Design and implement finer-grained inventory for the development of the DuPont Dedicated Nature Preserve plan supplement to the LRMP
- Continue program of prescribed burning working towards annual target of 300 acres
- A 63 acre portion of the Guion Farm Compartment has been inventoried and marked to implement an expanding gap /shelterwood regeneration harvest. This project will be advertised to potential buyers and harvested this fiscal year. Other potential harvest areas will be assessed based on the criteria established in the LRMP, with the intention of implementing an additional harvest this fiscal year similar in scope to what is currently marked. Regeneration rates will remain below the allowable cut established in the LRMP.
- Chemical and manual invasive species control has been initiated throughout the 63 acre harvest unit. Assessment and further control measures will be implemented post harvest.
- Hemlock tress will continue to be assessed and treated for HWA with a target of treating 100 individuals annually
- At a minimum, an additional 8 miles of property boundary line will be re-blazed and painted this fiscal year.

Special Project - The NCFS Non Point Source Branch administered an ARRA grant project to stabilize 550 feet of stream bank along the Lake Julia spillway. The project will prevent bank erosion and improve fish habitat along the stream. Two tours to the project helped train regulators and contractors on stream restoration work.

Trail Improvements – A \$32,691 trail contract to improve 16,955 feet on four trails was completed during the past year. Additional contracts for trail maintenance and improvements are planned for the

coming fiscal year. FODF reimburses the state for most contract trail work. Volunteers have completed 13 additional smaller trail improvement projects this year.

Wildlife - The forest is in the NC Wildlife Resources Commission's Game Land program. Anglers can fish in mountain lakes and the Little River and its tributaries. Hunting is allowed by permit during seasons established for deer, turkey and small game. An important non-game species is the green salamander. There is ongoing research to determine the extent of this species, their habitat preference and breeding habits.

Educational accomplishments - Classes and workshops conducted through Holmes Educational State Forest are taught by the two educational rangers assigned to HESF and four of the staff members assigned to DSRF, including the two educational rangers, the management forester and the assistant forest supervisor. Educational accomplishments at HESF include:

| | |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Students in organized groups | 2,850 |
| Individuals | 39,193 |
| Campers | 3,820 |
| Total attendance | 45,863 |
| Correlated classes | 173 |
| Other | 54 |
| Total classes | 227 |
| On-site students taught | 2,824 |
| Total students taught | 2,824 |
| Total hours | 182.5 |

Other classes include hosting a two day Woodland Stewardship Series Workshop, conducting Project Learning Tree workshops at Haywood Community College and the Preparing Educators for Adventures with Kids Annual Outdoor Education Conference at YMCA Camp Greenville, Area 1 Envirothon, Polk County and Emma Elementary Career Day, and the Asheville YMCA Earth Day Festival.