



**N.C. Department of Agriculture
and Consumer Services**



N.C. Forest Service



**Aleen Steinberg Visitor Center
at DuPont State Recreational Forest
Annual Legislative Report for Fiscal Year 2022-2023**

Oct. 1, 2023

Steve Troxler, Commissioner
Scott Bissette, Assistant Commissioner
David Lane, State Forester

Pursuant to the funding agreement executed March 18, 2021, between the N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS), certain funds are provided for the operation of DuPont State Recreational Forest's Aleen Steinberg Visitor Center in Transylvania County.

REPORTING REQUIREMENT

The following information is to accompany the annual request for payment appropriation and disbursement of funds for the Aleen Steinberg Visitor Center, hereafter referred to as the visitor center:

- A. Overview of DuPont State Recreational Forest and Visitor Center**
- B. Visitor Counts: Monthly Visitor Counts and Methodology**
- C. The Visitor Center Annual Budget**
- D. The Visitor Center Operating Plan**
- E. Copies of Operating and Maintenance Agreements**

A. OVERVIEW OF DUPONT STATE RECREATIONAL FOREST

DuPont State Recreational Forest (DSRF) encompasses more than 12,400 acres in Transylvania and Henderson counties. The forest is managed for natural resource conservation, scenic enjoyment and recreational purposes including horseback riding, hiking, bicycling, hunting, fishing and other activities that are sustainable within the context of natural resource protection. DSRF strives to provide an exemplary model of scientifically sound, ecologically based natural resource management for the social and economic benefits of a diverse community of users. DSRF is also required to protect and restore natural areas to meet the intent of a grant agreement that designates most of the forest as a dedicated nature preserve.

DSRF has more than 40 miles of multiuse roads and nearly 60 miles of multiuse trails supporting the forest's recreational opportunities. In addition, DSRF features four waterfalls on the Little River, two waterfalls in the Grassy Creek watershed, six mountain lakes, and unique low elevation granitic domes and slickrock formations.

DSRF's popularity stems from many sources. There are three waterfalls located within 3.5 miles of the visitor center and the forest's topography is not quite as steep or technical as other nearby public lands, making the forest accessible to a wider variety of visitors. The forest also has a unique limited mobility vehicle permit program that increases the diversity of visitors by enabling individuals with disabilities to drive in to view one of the larger waterfalls. In addition, DSRF receives heavy visitation from local, regional, national and international guests who come to enjoy the forest's trails and experience the natural features that have been present in a variety of publications, movies, websites and social media outlets.

During the 2018-2019 fiscal year, DSRF installed a more reliable system of estimating the number of visitors, and recorded data suggested that previous years had been undercounted, especially in those access areas not directly linked to the popular waterfall access points. Visitation estimates for DSRF are shown in Figure 1.

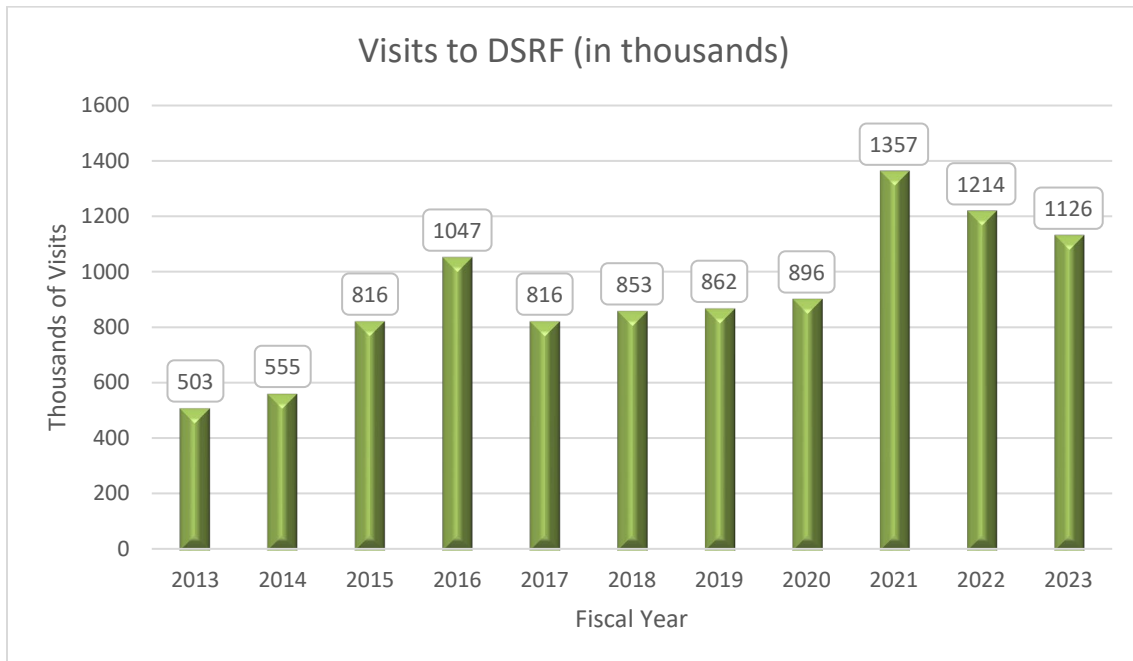


Figure 1: DSRF visitation by fiscal year

The visitor center is one the most important stops for a guest to DSRF. Visitors drop by to acquire important information about:

- updated trail maps and map reading;
- safety and outdoor preparedness;
- DSRF rules and regulations;

- directions to waterfalls;
- recreational opportunities within the forest;
- multiuse trail etiquette;
- educational offerings;
- general area information;
- permits for vehicles for disabled visitors; and
- picnic shelter reservations.

More than 1 million visitors have come to the visitor center since its opening in 2013. Its classroom serves as a meeting place for various community groups, educational programs, staff meetings, field trips and programs for volunteers. The visitor center also provides forest and local information through an outside self-service information station and an indoor information desk staffed by volunteers.

During fiscal year 2022-2023, the visitor center was managed by:

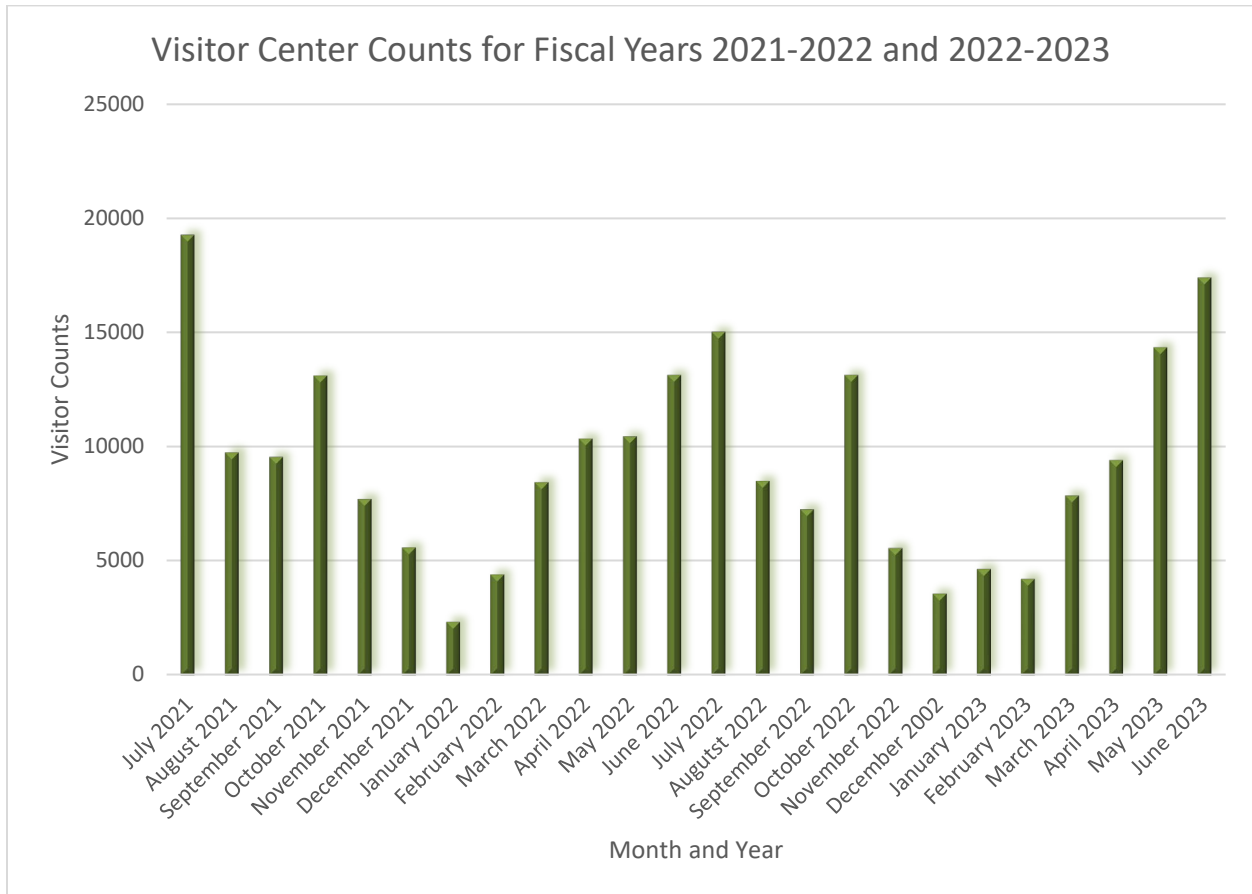
- a visitor center coordinator (temporary) - Geoff Saltarelli and John Helbling
- a maintenance construction technician (temporary) - Bob Twomey
- housekeepers (temporary) - Kayla Cartwright and Mary Ann Hamilton
- a DSRF education and outreach coordinator - Katelyn Keller
- a DSRF information and education supervisor - Kirsten McDonald

In addition to these staff members, the visitor center coordinator and DSRF education and outreach coordinator recruited, trained and provided support for a core group of 25 volunteers to greet visitors, answer questions, provide safety information and help relay important communications.

B. VISITOR COUNTS

Estimates for the number of people who use the visitor center are based on an informed comparison of vehicle counters for the High Falls Access Area with the automated door counters that records entries onto the main porch of the building. These counters depend on Wi-Fi connectivity to capture their visitation counts. Power fluctuations and other internet crashes can disrupt the counters' connection and lead to lost counts. Due to this issue linked to our DSL internet connection, DSRF always compares the counter numbers with those from the vehicle counters. When there are discrepancies, DSRF relies on the verified visitation methodology that estimates the number of individuals using the visitor center to be 43% of the monthly parking lot numbers for the High Falls Access Area.

Visitor Center Counts	
Fiscal Year 2022-2023	
<i>Month</i>	<i>Visitors</i>
July 2022	14,997
Aug. 2022	8,496
Sept. 2022	7,257
Oct. 2022	13,126
Nov. 2022	5,568
Dec. 2022	3,576
Jan. 2023	4,655
Feb. 2023	4,222
March 2023	7,869
April 2023	9,412
May 2023	14,335
June 2023	17,379
Total	110,892



C. VISITOR CENTER BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

During fiscal year 2022-2023, the visitor center staff collaborated with DSRF staff and outside vendors to accomplish five major projects and events.

Hazard Tree Removal

To enhance visitor safety and prevent damage to the High Falls Access Area restrooms, several hazard trees were removed by an outside contractor. These trees were extremely close to the restrooms, and several had branches that touched the rooftop. The tree removal also improves sightlines from the parking area to the restroom to help visitors more easily locate the facility.

Parking Area Renovation

During the winter of 2023, the DSRF staff collaborated on renovating the High Falls Access Area used by the visitor center. This work included road scraping, spreading of gravel, replacement and repair of parking stops, installation of fencing and signage and replacement of the gate into the staff parking lot. The work significantly improved the ability for staff and emergency vehicles to safely exit the staff parking lot while improving the overall parking lot condition for all visitors.

Entrance Landscaping and Signage

During fiscal year 2022-2023, the visitor center hired a landscaper to renovate the entrance to the High Falls Access Area, the entrance visitors use to reach the visitor center. This work included removing unhealthy trees and shrubs as well as planting new ones. A separate contractor fabricated and installed signage to inform visitors that they were entering the High Falls Access Area and parking for the visitor center.



New signage on the left side of the High Falls Access Area entrance.

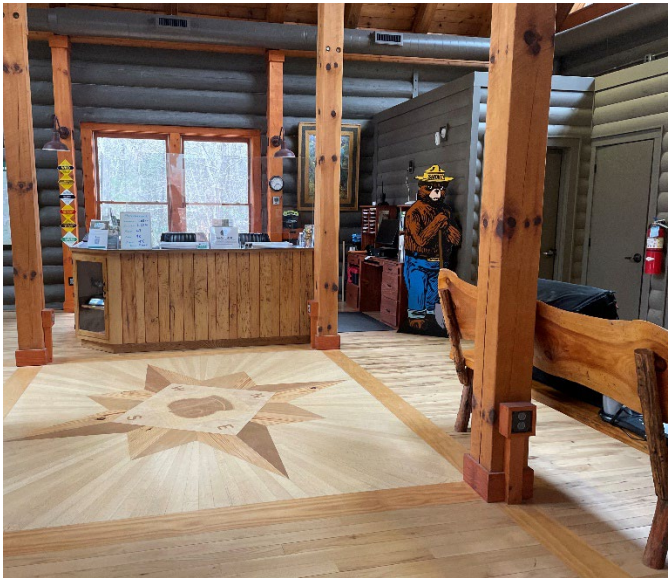


New signage on the right side of the High Falls Access Area entrance.

Interior Reconfiguration

To increase visitor center volunteer safety and improve the visitor experience, DSRF staff reconfigured the layout of the visitor center's interior space. The new design provides volunteers with clear sightlines to the building's main and secondary entrances as well as a

to the parking area. The new design also places the information desk directly in front of the main door, which has reduced visitor confusion and improved the flow of people through the space.



View of the relocated information desk as seen from the main entrance.



View of the relocated information desk as seen from the secondary entrance.

10th Anniversary Celebration

2022-2023 was the 10th year of operation for the visitor center. The event was celebrated with speeches from NCDA&CS Commissioner Steve Troxler, former special assistant to the NCDA&CS Commissioner Bill Yarborough and Forest Supervisor Jason Guidry. The event honored Aleen Steinberg who passed away in April 2023 and recognized the commitment and enthusiasm of the volunteers who staff the visitor center.

N.C. Forest Service
Aleen Steinberg Visitor Center at
DuPont State Recreational Forest
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Steve Troxler, N.C. Forest Service Commissioner, addresses the crowd at the 10th Anniversary Celebration.



Bill Yarborough, former special assistant to N.C. Forest Service Commissioner, addresses the crowd at the 10th Anniversary Celebration.



Jacquelyn Rogow (Aleen Steinberg's daughter – third from left) and her friends at the 10th Anniversary Celebration.

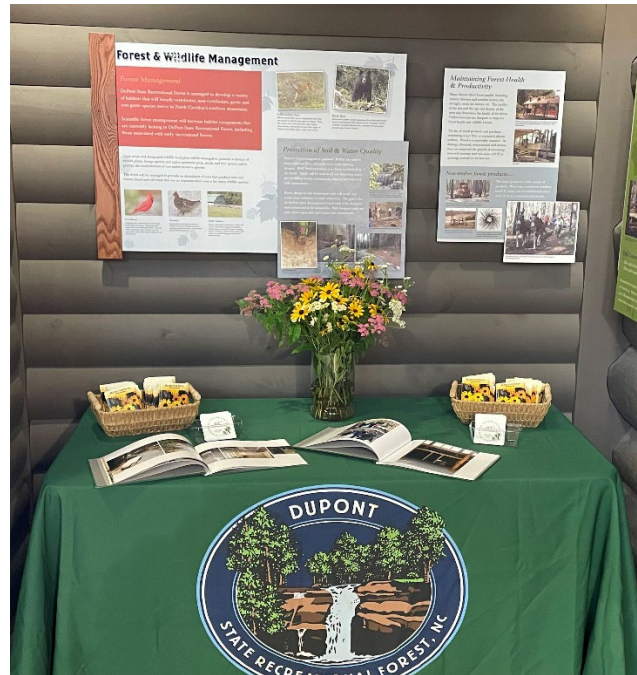


Photo albums from the construction of the Aleen Steinberg Visitor Center for guests to enjoy at the celebration.

Figure 2 is a summary of the expenses used to operate the visitor center for fiscal year 2022-2023. The \$135,000 allocation provided per the NCDOT-NCDA&CS agreement was used in full. Figure 3 is a copy of the contract for dumpster rentals and trash removal from the visitor center for the same fiscal year.

EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT	ACCOUNT DESCRIPTION	TOTAL
531312	REG(N S) TEMP WAGES-RECP	48,300.54
531412	OT PAY - RECEIPTS	169.22
531422	HOLIDAY PAY - RECEIPTS	329.18
531512	SOCIAL SEC CONTRIB-RECPT	3,748.19
	PERSONAL SERVICES	52,547.13
532132	OTHER PROVIDED MED S	0.00
532185	WASTE REM/RECY SER AGREE	1,970.00
532199	MISC CONTRACTUAL SERVICE	540.00
532199017	MISC-WATER IMPROVMT STUD	641.00
532210	ENRG SER -ELECTRICAL	8,108.42
532220	ENRG-NAT.GAS/PROPANE	49.28
532310005	REP BLDG-PLUMBING	1,000.00
532320	REPAIRS-OTHER STRUCTURES	3,068.00
532333	REPAIRS-OTHER EQUIPMENT	0.00
532390	REPAIRS-OTHER	8,540.00
532524	RENT/LEASE-GEN OFF E	2,107.61
532714	TRANS-GROUND- IN STATE	326.88
532724	MEALS- IN STATE	41.30
532811	TELEPHONE SERVICE	1,119.50
532814	CELLULAR PHONE SERVICES	94.19
532817	INTERNET SERV PROV C	1,869.60
532850	PRINT,BIND,DUPLICATE	2,165.15
	PURCHASED SERVICES	31,640.93
533110	GENERAL OFFICE SUPPLIES	5,051.66
533120	DATA PROCESSING SUPPLIES	0.00
533150	SECURITY & SAFETY SUPP	490.97
533190	OTHER ADMIN SUPPLIES	324.43
533210	JANITORIAL SUPPLIES	1,866.00
533240	CARPENTRY & HARDWARE SUP	137.95
533250	AGRICULTURL/ANIMAL SUPPL	52.77
533260	SAND,GRAVEL,CONCRETE SUP	0.00
533290	OTHER FACILITY & HARDWAR	7,054.53
533350	MOTOR VEH REPLACEMNT	99.47
533510	CLOTHING & UNIFORMS	1,952.30
533720	EDUCATIONAL SUPPLIES	7,546.13
533900	OTHER MATERIALS & SU	59.94
533900003	OTHMAT&SUPP-COMM SUP	660.91
	SUPPLIES	25,297.06
534511	FURN-OFFICE	2,397.52
534539	OTHER EQUIPMENT	24918.08
	PROPERTY PLANT & EQUIP	27,315.60
535900	OTHER EXPENSES	0.35
	OTHER EXPENSES	0.35
	TOTAL NON-SALARY ITE	84,253.94
		136,801.07

Figure 2: Summary of expenditure by account for the visitor center at DSRF for fiscal year 2022-2023.

NCDA&CS | N.C. Forest Service
 Aleen Steinberg Visitor Center at
 DuPont State Recreational Forest
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NORTH CAROLINA
 ePROCUREMENT

ASC

ORDER NO. EP5306418

Issued on Thursday, July 7, 2022 EDT
 Created on Thursday, July 7, 2022 EDT by Kimberly A Watson

SUPPLIER:
 BCDA, LLC
 PO Box 2764
 Cashiers, NC 28717
 United States
 Contact: Benjamin Woods

TOTAL AMOUNT
\$2,080.00000 USD

SHIP TO:
 745
 NCDA&CS NC Forest Service
 Dupont State Forest Welcome Center
 89 Buck Forest Road
 Cedar Mountain, NC 28718
 United States
 Phone: +1 828-877-6527

BILL TO:
 10PT
 NCDA & CS / Accounts Payable
 1001 Mail Service Center
 Raleigh, NC 27699
 United States
 Phone: +1 919-707-3064

DELIVER TO:
 Kimberly A Watson
 Company:
 Name: 1001
 Project Company:
 Project Code:
 Cost Center:
 Department Name: 151052261016 - DUPONT STATE FOREST/VISITOR CENTER
 Account:
 Account Description: 532185 - WASTE REM/RECY SER AGREEM
 Federal Award Number:

Title: RJK-NCFS DSRF Visitor's Center Dumpster Service - SFY23
 Pass To Budget Officer: No
 FOB Code: (NCAS) 001 - Destination freight paid by vendor and included in price. Title passes upon receipt. Vendor files any claims.
 Entity: 10 - Department of Agriculture
 Requester: Kimberly A Watson
 PR No.: PR12372591
 Contract Type: No Contract
 Bid Number:
 Blanket Purchase Order? : No
 Stock Keeping Unit:
 Terms Of Payment: N30

LINE ITEM DETAILS (2 LINE ITEMS)

NO.	DESCRIPTION	PART NUMBER	QTY	NEED-BY DATE	UNIT PRICE	DISCOUNT	NET AMOUNT	CHARGES	TAXES	AMOUNT	ORDER CONFIRMATION STATUS
1	ASC Visitor Center- One (1) 8 cubic yard ...		1,860 dollar	-	\$1.00000 USD		\$1,860.00000 USD		\$0.00000 USD	\$1,860.00000 USD	Unconfirmed

Full Description: ASC Visitor Center- One (1) 8 cubic yard dumpster @ \$225.00/month for weekly pickup and \$120.00/month for bi-weekly pickup.

TAX CODE	TAXES	RATE	TAX AMOUNT	AMOUNT
US-EXEMPT	0.00% Sales Tax	0.0%	\$0.00000 USD	\$0.00000 USD

Accounting:
 Req. Line No.: 1
 Recycled Content Indicator: No

NO.	DESCRIPTION	PART NUMBER	QTY	NEED-BY DATE	UNIT PRICE	DISCOUNT	NET AMOUNT	CHARGES	TAXES	AMOUNT	ORDER CONFIRMATION STATUS
2	Extra Service for Visitor Center @ \$110.00		220 dollar	-	\$1.00000 USD		\$220.00000 USD		\$0.00000 USD	\$220.00000 USD	Unconfirmed

Full Description: Extra Service for Visitor Center @ \$110.00 for each additional service, X2

TAX CODE	TAXES	RATE	TAX AMOUNT	AMOUNT
US-EXEMPT	0.00% Sales Tax	0.0%	\$0.00000 USD	\$0.00000 USD

Accounting:
 Req. Line No.: 2
 Recycled Content Indicator: No

TOTAL AMOUNT
\$2,080.00000 USD

COMMENTS

- COMMENT by on 07/07/2022
1:Transaction passed, 2:Transaction passed (Budget Integration User, Thursday, July 7, 2022 EDT)
- COMMENT by Randy J Kinsey on 07/07/2022
Contact the person listed in the "Ship To" section for name and phone number for questions or additional information regarding this purchase.

*****SEND ALL INVOICING TO THE ACCOUNTS PAYABLE ADDRESS INDICATED ABOVE AND INCLUDE PURCHASE ORDER NUMBER TO EXPEDITE PAYMENT*****

Approved by Randy Kinsey, Procurement Specialist, 919-707-3054 (Randy J Kinsey, Thursday, July 7, 2022 EDT)

ATTACHMENTS

- ATTACHMENT by Kimberly A Watson on Thursday, July 7, 2022 at 6:56 AM
Dumpster Scope of Work SFY23 Signed.pdf (209408 bytes)

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF PURCHASE

CONDITIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS

1. This purchase order was issued through the Statewide eProcurement Service and is therefore subject to a fee of 1.75% (20175) on the total dollar amount of goods (excluding sales tax). The following exemptions apply: (A) Purchases from a term contract that has not yet been implemented on the Statewide eProcurement Service; (B) Purchases from an agency-specific term contract that has not yet been implemented on the Statewide eProcurement Service. Note: Fees will be invoiced monthly based on purchase order activity during the prior month.
2. This order is placed subject to shipment at price, amounts and transportation rates not in excess of those indicated on the face of this order.
3. Each shipment must be shipped to the SHIP TO address printed on the face of this order and marked to the attention of the individual, if any, indicated in that address. Each shipment must be labeled plainly with our PURCHASE ORDER number, and must show gross, tare and net weight.
4. Complete packing list must accompany each shipment.
5. Drafts will not be honored.
6. Materials received in excess of quantities specified herein may, at our option, be returned at shipper's expense. Substitutions are not permitted.
7. Invoices must be submitted on the date of shipment to the INVOICE TO address indicated on the face of this purchase order. Invoices must include the INVOICE TO name and address, the PURCHASE ORDER number, terms of payment and routing.
8. On all invoices subject to discount, the discount period will be calculated from the date a correct invoice is received in this office.
9. Each invoice must be accompanied by the following papers: A. Original bill of lading when shipment is made by freight or express. B. Signed delivery receipt when delivery is made by other means. C. Parcel post insurance when shipment is made by parcel post and value is over \$1.00.
10. In cases where parties other than you ship materials against this order, shipper must be instructed to show our PURCHASE ORDER number on all packages and shipping manifests to insure prompt identification and payment of invoices.
11. By accepting this electronic purchase order, you agree that these CONDITIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS are legally binding.
12. By accepting this electronic purchase order, you confirm that this purchase is governed by the version of the North Carolina General Terms and Conditions agreed to by the parties in the executed solicitation document or as otherwise found here if no solicitation document has been issued. (https://files.nc.gov/ncdcs/pandc/Chiles/forms/Form_North-Carolina-General-Terms-and-Conditions_11.2021.pdf)

State Agency Tax Exempt Number: 400013

Figure 3: Contract for dumpsters and trash removal for the visitor center.

D. VISITOR CENTER OPERATING PLAN FOR FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024

Introduction

This plan is designed to provide guidance for the operation of the visitor center located in DSRF and to meet the intent of the visitor center funding agreement between the NCDOT and the NCDA&CS, dated March 18, 2021.

The visitor center staff will be responsible for the management and maintenance of the following facilities and infrastructure as noted in Figure 5:

- the Aleen Steinberg Visitor Center on Buck Forest Road, Cedar Mountain, NC (Transylvania County).
- the restroom facilities associated with the visitor center.
- the entrance road and parking lots of High Falls Access Area adjacent to the visitor center.
- the trails and picnic shelters connected directly to visitor center services.
- the electronic gate and pumphouse that provide direct services to the visitor center.
- storage facilities that support visitor center maintenance staff.



Figure 4: Aerial view of the visitor center and associated amenities.

Staffing

During the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the visitor center staff will include a coordinator, a maintenance construction technician and three housekeepers. All five of these positions will be temporary employees with the N.C. Forest Service. The visitor center coordinator will be supervised by the DSRF education and outreach program coordinator and the DSRF information and education supervisor, both of which are full-time, permanent N.C. Forest Service positions and funded through appropriations outside of the visitor center's funding agreement. Additional operational support for the visitor center will come from DSRF and the N.C. Forest Service's human resources, safety and budgeting/accounting departments.

The visitor center coordinator's main responsibilities will be to:

- maintain a spreadsheet of visitor counts for the most recent calendar year including monthly visitor counts and an explanation of how data was collected.
- attend training related to visitor center management.
- coordinate with the maintenance construction technician and housekeepers regarding visitor center functions and needs.
- recruit, train, schedule and support volunteers who assist with visitor center operations and maintenance.
- monitor the physical condition of all facilities and amenities associated with the visitor center and arrange for repairs and renovations as needed.
- contribute to the development and implementation of sections in the DSRF educational plan focused on visitors to the visitor center.

The visitor center will employ a maintenance construction technician. This position will be a full-time temporary employee with the N.C. Forest Service and will be assigned to provide 60% of full-time duties to the visitor center. The remaining 40% of full-time duties will be dedicated to the entirety of DSRF and to the responsibilities of the N.C. Forest Service. As such, the funding for this position will be split between visitor center funds (60%) and those of the N.C. Forest Service (40%). The maintenance construction technician's main responsibilities will be to:

- assume responsibility for building repairs, maintenance, janitorial services and grounds maintenance;
- assist with managing service contracts associated with visitor center operations, e.g., utility services;
- maintain parking lots and trailheads in the immediate vicinity of the visitor center;
- maintain the picnic shelters and provide janitorial services for nearby High Falls and Hooker Falls access areas; and
- supplement custodial work as needed.

The housekeeper positions will perform daily, year-round service to the visitor center and associated DSRF public restrooms including:

- cleaning and restocking restroom facilities;
- maintaining all floors, windows, doors and fixtures in the High Falls access area bathrooms and visitor center;
- removing litter and cleaning of areas around restrooms and the visitor center; and
- general cleanup around the High Falls Access Area parking lot.

Funding for housekeeper positions will be split between visitor center funds (70%) and those of the N.C. Forest Service (30%).

Annual Operating Plan

In a typical year, the visitor center's activity level closely mirrors DSRF's visitation levels. Summer visitation levels are the highest due to summer breaks for schools and colleges, vacationers, summer camps and special organizational uses. October usually ranks second for number of monthly visitors as people come to view the fall leaves. During the cold winter months, visitation to DSRF drops significantly with most of the visitors coming on weekends. Visitation to DSRF is at its lowest during weekdays in the winter months and during inclement weather.

Based on this usage, the planned dates and hours of operation for the visitor center for the 2023-2024 fiscal year will be:

- March 20 through Dec. 31, open seven days a week, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Jan. 1 through March 19, limited to weekends only, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- All holidays except Thanksgiving day, Christmas Eve, Christmas day and New Year's day.

During days of inclement weather, i.e., snow/ice on roadways, flooding, etc., the visitor center will be closed.

Training Schedule for Employees and Volunteers

Employee training will be provided by the N.C. Forest Service as part of the DSRF work unit. Orientation and recurring training will consist primarily of safety and health programs as required by NCDA&CS guidelines, the N.C. Forest Service, and the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA).

Training for the visitor center employees will include:

- hazard communication programs;
- fire extinguisher usage;
- safe lifting;
- universal precautions;

- emergency planning;
- preventing slips, trips and falls;
- diversity and inclusion; and
- other health, safety and customer service topics.

Volunteers will be provided orientation training by the visitor center coordinator and other DSRF staff. Training will explain visitor center operations including:

- opening and closing procedures;
- operation of DSRF radios and phone systems;
- emergency response plans;
- distribution and explanation of tourism and destination-based publications;
- general background on DSRF's attractions, trail system and mission;
- safety and preparedness information about recreational activities, e.g., mountain biking, hiking near waterfalls, horseback riding, multiuse trail system, trail difficulty information, etc.;
- communication procedures and strategies during visitor related incidents;
- procedures for updating the daily information board providing weather, trail closures and safety considerations; and
- policies and procedures for picnic shelter reservations and for limited mobility vehicle and commercial use permits.

Volunteers and employees of the visitor center will be provided training on the principles of hospitality and hosting when cost-effective, local opportunities arise. The visitor center has working relationships with the tourism development authorities and chambers of commerce for Buncombe, Henderson and Transylvania counties. The visitor center and DSRF staff will seek training assistance from these entities and from the NCD&CS throughout fiscal year 2023-2024 to enhance the visitor center's focus on providing high quality customer service to the public.

Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2023-2024

The proposed budget for the visitor center for fiscal year 2023-2024 is illustrated below. It assumes that funding in the amount of \$135,000 will be restored to this budget cycle. Given the amount of public service offered at the visitor center, the budget is weighted toward personnel costs.

NCDA&CS | N.C. Forest Service
Aleen Steinberg Visitor Center at
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EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT	ACCOUNT DESCRIPTION	TOTAL
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531422	HOLIDAY PAY - RECEIPTS	329
531512	SOCIAL SEC CONTRIB-RECPT	3,748
	PERSONAL SERVICES	52,547
532132	OTHER PROVIDED MED S	0
532185	WASTE REM/RECY SER AGREE	1,970
532199	MISC CONTRACTUAL SERVICE	540
532199017	MISC-WATER IMPROVMT STUD	641
532210	ENRG SER -ELECTRICAL	8,108
532220	ENRG-NAT.GAS/PROPANE	49
532310005	REP BLDG-PLUMBING	1,000
532320	REPAIRS-OTHER STRUCTURES	3,068
532333	REPAIRS-OTHER EQUIPMENT	0
532390	REPAIRS-OTHER	8,540
532524	RENT/LEASE-GEN OFF E	2,108
532714	TRANS-GROUND- IN STATE	327
532724	MEALS- IN STATE	41
532811	TELEPHONE SERVICE	1,120
532814	CELLULAR PHONE SERVICES	94
532817	INTERNET SERV PROV C	1,870
532850	PRINT,BIND,DUPLICATE	2,165
	PURCHASED SERVICES	31,641
533110	GENERAL OFFICE SUPPLIES	5,052
533120	DATA PROCESSING SUPPLIES	0
533150	SECURITY & SAFETY SUPP	491
533190	OTHER ADMIN SUPPLIES	324
533210	JANITORIAL SUPPLIES	1,866
533240	CARPENTRY & HARDWARE SUP	138
533250	AGRICULTURL/ANIMAL SUPPL	53
533260	SAND,GRAVEL,CONCRETE SUP	0
533290	OTHER FACILITY & HARDWAR	7,055
533350	MOTOR VEH REPLACEMNT	99
533510	CLOTHING & UNIFORMS	1,952
533720	EDUCATIONAL SUPPLIES	7,546
533900	OTHER MATERIALS & SU	60
533900003	OTHMAT&SUPP-COMM SUP	661
	SUPPLIES	25,297
534511	FURN-OFFICE	2,398
534539	OTHER EQUIPMENT	23,117
	PROPERTY PLANT & EQUIP	25,515
535900	OTHER EXPENSES	0
	OTHER EXPENSES	0
	TOTAL NON-SALARY ITE	82,453
		135,000

Figure 5: Proposed fiscal year 2023-2024 budget for the visitor center.

Operational Support and Facilities

As noted above, the visitor center coordinator will be directly supervised by the DSRF education and outreach program coordinator and will be further supported by the DSRF information and education supervisor. Additional operational support will be provided to the visitor center by the following DSRF and N.C. Forest Service branches, services and activities:

- human resources;
- budgets and accounting;
- purchasing and contracts;
- safety programs; and
- vehicle assignment, fuel and maintenance.

...

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**N.C. Department of Agriculture
and Consumer Services**
N.C. Forest Service



**DuPont State Recreational Forest
Annual Legislative Report**

Oct. 1, 2023

Steve Troxler, Commissioner
Scott Bissette, Assistant Commissioner
David Lane, State Forester

Pursuant to G.S. 106-887 (i), the North Carolina Forest Service, a division of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, respectfully submits this annual report on DuPont State Recreational Forest for fiscal year 2022-2023.

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STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

No later than Oct. 1 of each year, the Department shall report to the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations, the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Natural and Economic Resources, the Fiscal Research Division, and the Environmental Review Commission on the Department's management activities at DuPont State Recreational Forest during the preceding fiscal year and plans for management of DuPont State Recreational Forest for the upcoming fiscal year (2011-145, s. 13.25(o)).

OVERVIEW OF DUPONT STATE RECREATIONAL FOREST

DuPont State Recreational Forest (DSRF) encompasses more than 12,400 acres in Transylvania and Henderson counties. The forest is managed for natural resource conservation, scenic enjoyment and recreational purposes including horseback riding, hiking, bicycling, hunting, fishing and other activities that are sustainable within the context of natural resource protection. DSRF strives to provide an exemplary model of scientifically sound, ecologically based natural resource management for the social and economic benefits of a diverse community of users. DSRF is also required to protect and restore natural areas to meet the intent of a grant agreement that designates most of the forest as a dedicated nature preserve.

DSRF has more than 40 miles of multiuse roads and nearly 60 miles of multiuse trails supporting the forest's recreational opportunities. In addition, DSRF features four waterfalls on the Little River, two waterfalls in the Grassy Creek watershed, six mountain lakes, and unique low elevation granitic domes and slickrock formations.

DSRF's popularity stems from many sources. There are three waterfalls located within 3.5 miles of the visitor center and the forest's topography is not quite as steep or technical as other nearby public lands, making the forest accessible to a wider variety of visitors. The forest also has a unique limited mobility vehicle permit program that increases the diversity of visitors by enabling individuals with disabilities to drive into view one of the larger waterfalls. In addition, DSRF receives heavy visitation from local, regional, national and international guests who come to enjoy the forest's trails and experience the natural features that have been present in a variety of publications, movies, websites and social media outlets.

Nineteen full-time employees and four temporary employees manage the DSRF work unit. Fiscal year 2022-2023 staff included:

- Jason Guidry, DuPont State Recreational Forest supervisor
- Michael Santucci, assistant forest supervisor
- Kimberly Watson, office manager
- Greg Hall, administrative associate
- Jordan Luff, management forester
- Jeremy Waldrop, forestry technician
- Jane Dauster, recreational specialist
- Eric Folk, recreation technician
- Jimmy Patterson, firefighting equipment operator
- Nathan Sweat, facility maintenance supervisor
- Sammy Breeden, maintenance technician
- Gary Lykins, vehicle and equipment repair technician
- Bob Twomey, maintenance technician (temporary)
- Mary Ann Hamilton, housekeeper (temporary)

- Kayla Cartwright, housekeeper (temporary)
- Katelyn Keller, education and outreach coordinator
- Kirsten McDonald, information and education supervisor
- John Hilbling, visitor center coordinator (temporary)
- Susan Fay, Holmes Educational State Forest supervisor
- EJ Dwigans, educational ranger
- Andy Norman, law enforcement agent
- Daniel Britt, law enforcement agent
- Josh Kujawa, law enforcement agent

The DSRF forest supervisor also supports the operation and staff at Holmes Educational State Forest (HESF) in Henderson County. The DSRF forest supervisor reports to Mountain Division Director Greg Smith, who is based in the N.C. Forest Service (NCFS) regional office in Asheville.

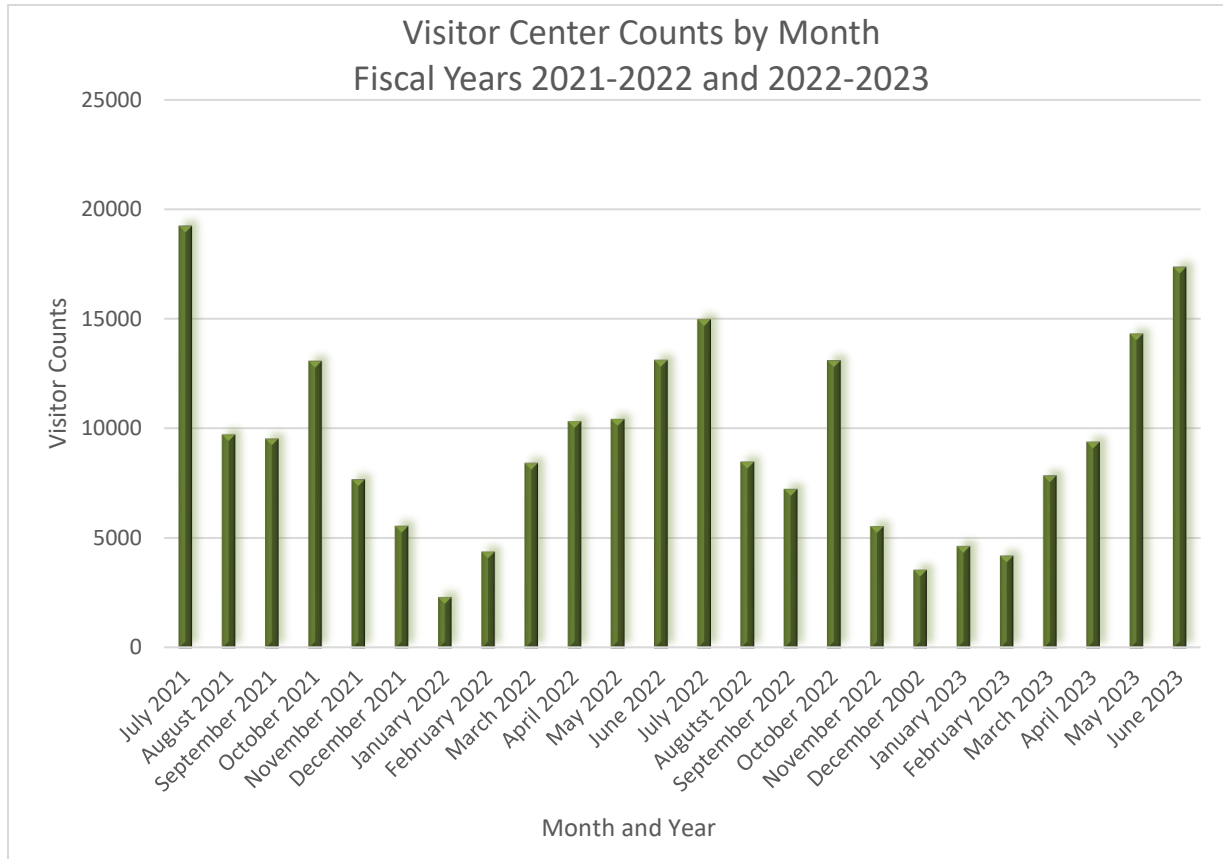
THE ALEEN STEINBERG VISITOR CENTER

The visitor center is one the most important stops for a guest to DSRF. Visitors drop by to acquire important information about:

- updated trail maps and map reading;
- safety and outdoor preparedness;
- DSRF rules and regulations;
- directions to waterfalls;
- recreational opportunities within the forest;
- multiuse trail etiquette;
- educational offerings;
- general area information;
- permits for vehicles for disabled visitors; and
- picnic shelter reservations.

More than 1 million visitors have come to the visitor center since its opening in 2013. Its classroom serves as a meeting place for various community groups, educational programs, staff meetings, field trips and programs for volunteers. The visitor center also provides forest and local information through an outside self-service information station and an indoor information desk staffed by volunteers.

Visitor Center Counts	
Fiscal Year 2022-2023	
<i>Month</i>	<i>Visitors</i>
July 2022	14,997
Aug. 2022	8,496
Sept. 2022	7,257
Oct. 2022	13,126
Nov. 2022	5,568
Dec. 2022	3,576
Jan. 2023	4,655
Feb. 2023	4,222
March 2023	7,869
April 2023	9,412
May 2023	14,335
June 2023	17,379
Total	110,892



PUBLIC USE OF THE FOREST:

During fiscal year 2022-2023, more than one million people visited DSRF. This number represents a slight decrease in visitation from the previous year that is partially attributed to the eight-month closure of the Guion Farm Access Area to construct a new parking area and restroom facility.

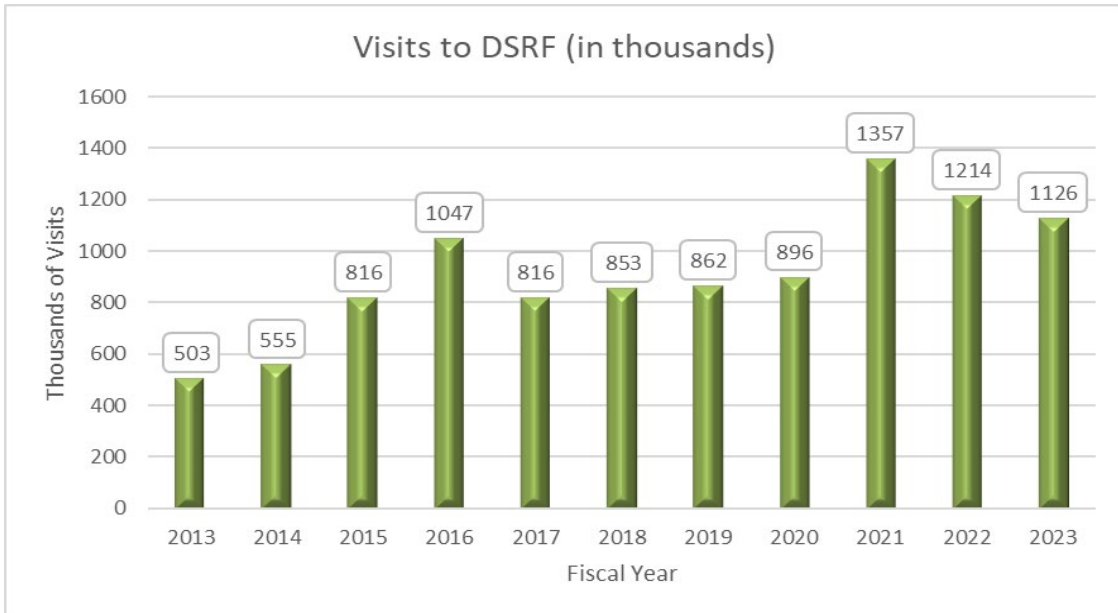


Figure 1: Visitors to DSRF per fiscal year since 2013.

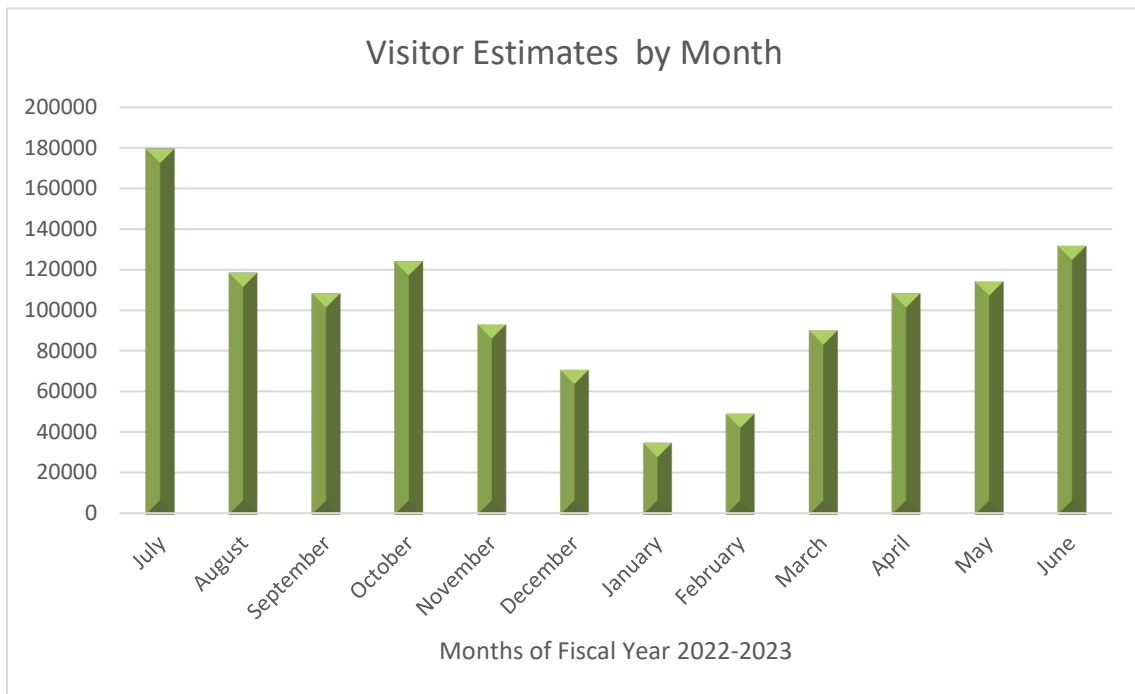


Figure 2: Visitors by month for fiscal year 2022-2023.

Public Safety Enhancement

DSRF staff and county emergency personnel are dispatched to a variety of emergency incidents in the forest throughout the year. These incidents may involve trauma, illness, search and rescue, property damage or medical emergency evacuation. In general, emergencies are linked to visitors engaging in risky behaviors such as entering restricted areas, climbing on rocks, sliding on or jumping off waterfalls and using intoxicating substances. Despite high visitation numbers, incidents at DSRF have continued to decline. Figure 4 shows this recent trend in incident rates.

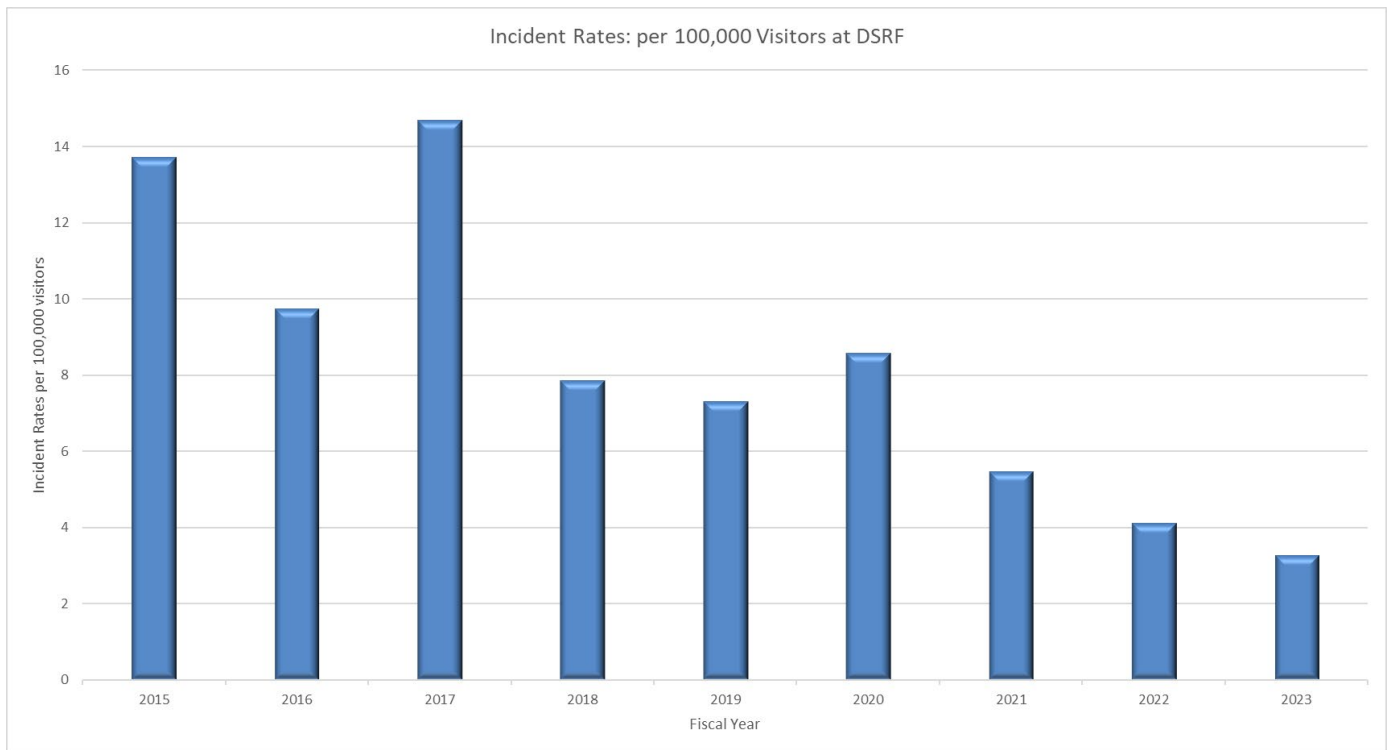


Figure 3: Visitor incident rates per fiscal year since 2015.

DSRF law enforcement agents and forest rangers provide routine patrols of the forest during normal operating hours and enforce forest rules when actionable violations are observed. Enforcement actions included issuing citations, written and/or verbal warnings and expulsions from the forest. Most of these actions occurred at High Falls, Triple Falls, Fawn Lake and Hooker Falls and primarily consisted of verbal warnings that resulted in visitor compliance. The ability for the staff at DSRF to intervene and gain rule compliance has been made possible by having the forest fully staffed and trained to respond quickly. In addition, the introduction of an app-based reporting form during fiscal year 2022-2023 has allowed DSRF to compile and analyze visitor compliance with forest rules more accurately. Figure 4 depicts the prevalence of the most common forest rule violation during fiscal year 2022-2023.

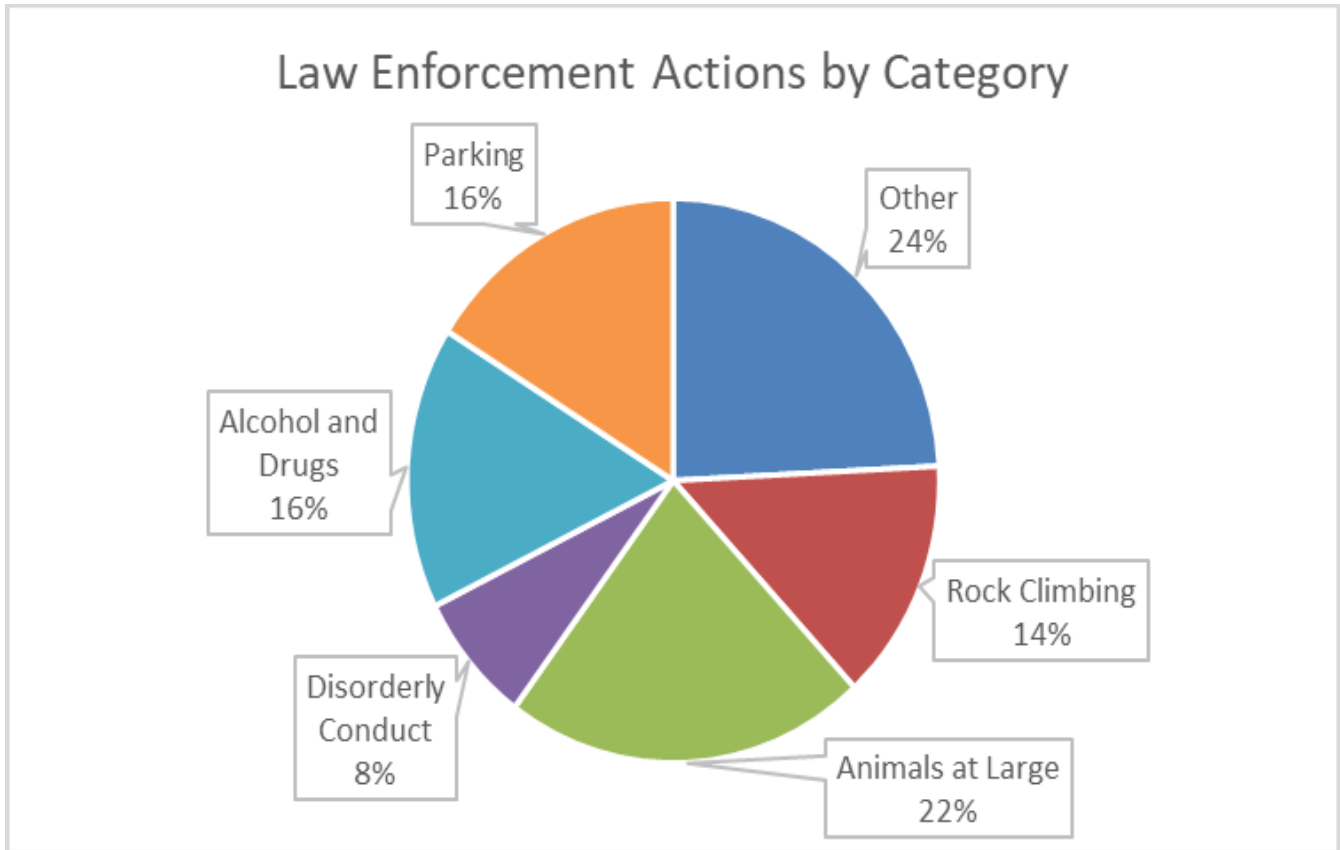


Figure 4: Categories of forest rule violations in fiscal year 2022-2023.

Permit Programs: Managing Public Use of DSRF

Staff at DSRF utilize permits to manage uses that are prohibited by Administrative Rules (02 NCAC 60B .1002-.1036). Each permit request is evaluated by a DSRF ranger to determine impacts to the forest’s natural resources, road and trail system and the overall visitor experience. Figure 5 compares the type and number of permits issued during fiscal years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, while Figure 6 illustrates reimbursement revenue since 2015.

Permit Type	Permit Use	Permits in Fiscal Year 2021-2022	Permits in Fiscal Year 2022-2023	% Change
After hours	Recreational trail use after 10 p.m. and before 5 a.m.	11	12	+9%
Commercial Use	Youth camps and businesses using DSRF as part of commercial enterprises	90	69	-23%
Film/Videography	Filming/videography for use in TV, internet and feature length films	5	7	+40%
Limited Mobility Anglers and Hunters	Vehicle access to select areas of DSRF for limited mobility anglers and hunters	27	30	+11%
Limited Mobility Visitors	Provides vehicular access to High Falls and the covered bridge	9	34	+278%
Picnic Shelter	Picnic shelters at High Falls, Triple Falls, Lake Dense, Lake Imaging and Guion Farm	14	27	+93%
Special Use	Foot race events, equestrian facility rentals, firewood, research permits, etc.	36	42	+17%
	Total	192	221	+15%

Figure 5: Permits issued in fiscal years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.

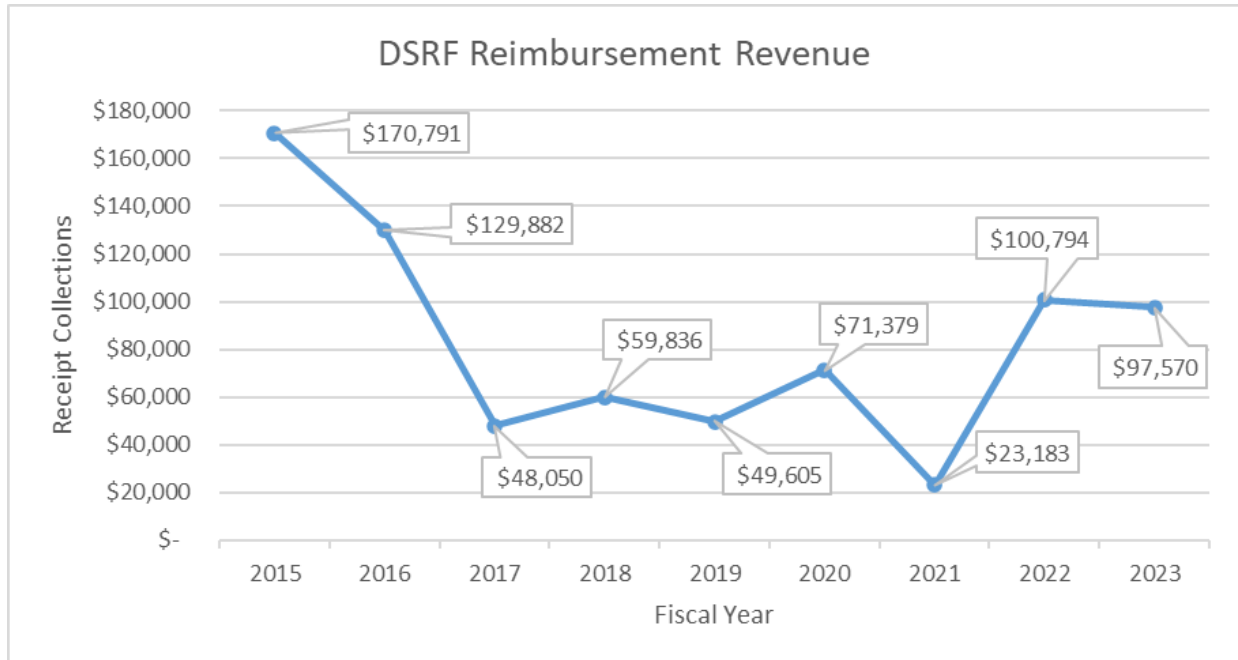


Figure 6: Reimbursement revenue generated through DSRF programs since fiscal year 2015.

Although DSRF issued 29 more permits than in the previous fiscal year, reimbursement revenue slightly decreased. Timber receipts, commercial use permits and reimbursement for filming activities were the main sources of reimbursement revenue during fiscal year 2022-2023.

PROMOTING FOREST RESOURCES:

Education and Outreach Opportunities with Holmes Educational State Forest

During the 2022-2023 fiscal year, HESF offered and hosted a variety of programs including guided hikes, curriculum related school field trips and the N.C. Future Farmers of America (FFA) Regional Forestry Competition for western North Carolina. A total of 2,176 students participated in on-site programming at HESF, and the HESF rangers provided off-site programming to an additional 1,139 students. Programs included subjects such as forestry, forest soils, fire weather, insects, mushrooms, birds, wildflowers, skins and skulls, paper making and Smokey Bear. HESF rangers also served as staff for envirothons and conservation days, planned and implemented a Project Learning Tree workshop and collaborated with a Clemmons Educational State Forest ranger to offer educational opportunities at an annual N.C. Science Teachers Association annual meeting. The forest hosted a total of 757 participants during 17 events including K9 Search and Rescue Training, World Labyrinth Day and programs by other outdoor

educators such as the Hemlock Restoration Initiative, Western Carolina Botanical Club and Camp Tekoa. To help inform area schools about free educational opportunities offered at the forest, HESF created a flyer that was emailed to key contacts at schools located in Henderson, Transylvania and Buncombe counties. This campaign to promote the forest resulted in visits from several schools that had never scheduled field trips to HESF. In addition, during fiscal year 2022-2023, HESF worked with the NCFS Information and Education branch to develop and print a new rack card. Rack cards help promote the forest to organizations, individuals and tourists which led to 48,907 visitors to HESF during the 2022-2023 fiscal year.



Elementary school students enjoy a relay race with practice fire shelters and fire shirts.



Students participating in the N.C. Future Farmers of America (FFA) Regional Forestry Competition for high schools in western North Carolina.

Education and Outreach Opportunities with DuPont State Recreational Forest

During the 2022-2023 fiscal year, education and outreach opportunities offered by DSRF nearly doubled. The DSRF forest management branch led five natural resource focused field tours of forest management activities for local and regional colleges and universities covering topics such as silviculture, forest management, biology, environmental science, forest ecology and environmental careers. The recreation branch offered 16 education and outreach programs on topics such as recreation management, trail maintenance techniques, best practices for sustainable trail management and the role of specific wildlife species within the DSRF ecosystem. DSRF law enforcement rangers collaborated with area and regional organizations to provide an intensive three-day workshop focused on emergency medical search and rescue procedures and practices. Some of the most

significant growth in education and outreach came from the information and education branch, which offered programs for school groups and adults both on and off-site. This growth was fostered through participation in the N.C. Arboretum’s Project Explore and through continued and expanded relationships with area libraries and schools. In addition to these specific activities, all branches with DSRF collaborated with other NCFS offices within the region to plan and staff booths at the N.C. Mountain State Fair.

Educational programming hosted at DSRF also increased during fiscal year 2022-2023. The increase in hosted programs reflects both the Friends of DuPont Forest and Muddy Sneakers (a statewide outdoor and environmental education organization) rebounding from low programming numbers during and immediately following the COVID pandemic. During fiscal year 2022-2023, the N.C Wildlife Resources Commission held programming at DSRF until their programming model was updated in January, which discontinued the types of programs previously hosted by DSRF.

Figure 7 illustrates the increase in programs and participants since last fiscal year but does not include the N.C. Mountain State Fair, which had an estimated attendance of more than 960,000 people.

Presenter	Educational Programs 2021-2022	Educational Programs 2022-2023	Change	Participants 2021-2022	Participants 2022-2023	Change
HESF staff	61	70	+15%	2,208	3,315	+50%
DSRF staff	32	63	+97%	1,683	3,081	+83%
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission	42	12	-71%	280	168	-43%
Friends of DuPont Forest	48	23	-52%	964	1,100	+14%
Muddy Sneakers	18	23	+28%	1,285	1,526	+19%
Total	201	191	-5%	6,420	9,190	+43%

Figure 7: Educational offerings provided by the DSRF/HESF work unit in fiscal years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 – excluding the N.C. Mountain State Fair with an estimated attendance of 960,000 people.



DSRF ranger tags trees for students participating in a tree ID hike.



DSRF ranger explains the role of prescribed burns within the DSRF ecosystem and forest management program.



DSRF exhibit at an elementary school career day.



DSRF ranger teaching 4-H Young Naturalists basic tree identification techniques.

MANAGING FOREST RESOURCES:

The DSRF Forest Management Program is guided by the forest’s Land and Resource Management Plan, a document developed by a multidisciplinary group of natural resource agencies and citizen stakeholder groups. Protection and promotion of the long-term integrity of the natural communities, in balance with outdoor recreation and aesthetic considerations, drive the forest management decisions at DSRF. Because of this foundational planning, DSRF has developed a renowned program of forest management demonstrations firmly rooted in the concepts of multiple use and sustainability. DuPont’s Forest Management Program actively manages natural resources using mechanical (harvesting), biological (prescribed fire) and chemical (pesticide application) methods that have proven to be effective by generations of forestry research. The primary objectives of the program are to increase species and structural diversity, maintain or improve forest health, protect water quality and enhance terrestrial and aquatic habitats. Figure 8 highlights the forestry practices across DSRF since 2011 that have created more than 500 acres of multiage forest and returned more than 1,800 acres of natural fire disturbance to the forest communities.

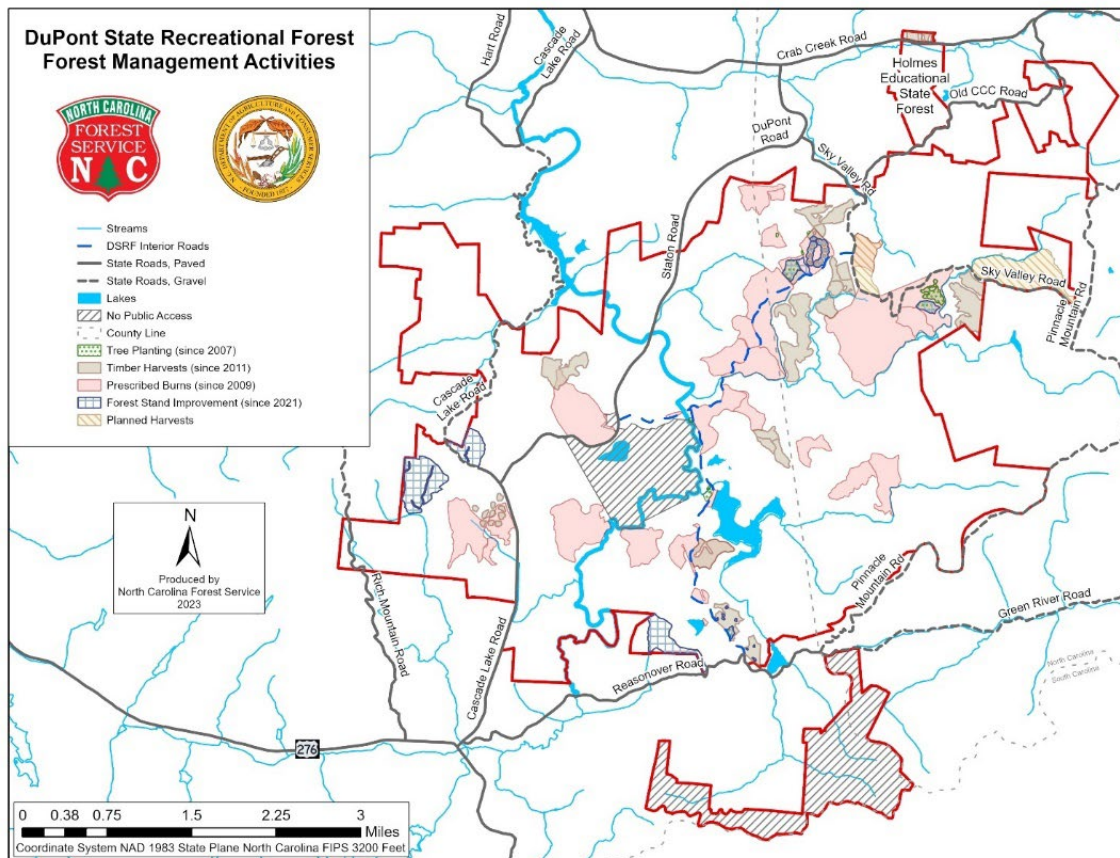


Figure 8: Forest management activities from 2011 to fiscal year 2022-2023.

Forest Stand Improvements

During Fiscal year 2022-2023, 19 acres of oak saplings underwent a crop tree release in the expanding gap timber harvest expansions. This forest stand improvement practice eliminates competing trees that would prevent the young oaks from advancing to maturity. Twenty-one acres of young shortleaf pine trees were mechanically released by a contract crew under a grant through American Forests to increase growth rates and ensure they capture a dominant position in the canopy. Also, an acre of recently planted shortleaf pine seedlings were chemically released to suppress competing vegetation during the crucial first year of establishment. These projects will serve to accomplish DSRF forest restoration goals while also promoting and supporting the private forest products industry in the region.

Timber Harvests

During the 2022-2023 fiscal year, DSRF completed the second entry of the “femelschlag” (i.e., expanding gap) forest restoration treatment in a 45-acre stand along Hickory Mountain Road. This stand was initially treated with small gaps in 2012, and this most recent treatment increased the gaps to 24 acres. The stand will be evaluated in about ten years for a third and final entry to remove the remaining overmature white pines. In addition, a 34-acre white pine-mixed hardwood stand was thinned by removing ice-damaged white pines and small, poor quality hardwoods such as red maple and sourwood. This thinning is designed to improve the overall health and vigor of the stand by reducing stand density, enhancing structural diversity and increasing the balance of oak and yellow poplar.



Contractor selectively harvesting trees.



Cut timber being moved to the logging deck.



Harvested timber waiting to be loaded.



Logs from the 2022-2023 timber activity ready for transport.

Prescribed Burning

One of the main goals of the DSRF Forest Management Program is to reintroduce fire into fire adapted forest communities. This past year was highly productive as DSRF staff completed four prescribed burns on 277 acres. Three burns were conducted off Joanna Road: the 38-acre Twin Oaks Trail burn, the 25-acre Vista Trail burn and the 55-acre Briery Fork Trail burn. All were third entries in these stands as the program continues to capitalize on the history of burning at this forest. Additionally, 159 acres of the Cedar Rock Trail and Big Rock Trail burn units were treated this past spring. These sites, which are comprised of exposed granite and forest communities that contain fire dependent species such as pitch pine, post oak, blueberry and warm season grasses, were burned for the second time. The Nature Conservancy's Southern Blue Ridge Burn Crew assisted with every prescribed burn as part of ongoing collaboration with this partner organization.



Green salamander rock habitat protected before the prescribed burn.



Post prescribed burn image shows green salamander habitat fully protected from the fire.



Twin Oaks prescribed burn reaches the fire break.



Twin Oaks prescribed burn in progress.

Trail Planning and Maintenance

During fiscal year 2022-2023, the DSRF recreation branch maintained or improved 31 miles of forest trails, which is approximately one-third of DSRF's trails. The trail work was completed with support from DSRF maintenance and forest management branches, 1,961 volunteer hours provided by the Friends of DuPont Forest Trail Crew and

volunteers from other area organizations such as the Pisgah Trailblazers. These collaborative teams repaired and improved the following trails:

Airstrip Trail	Hilltop Trail	Ridgeline Trail
Briery Fork Trail	Holly Road	Rocky Ridge Trail
Burnt Mountain Trail	Isaac Heath Trail	Ruffed Grouse Trail
Cascade Loop	Jim Branch Trail	Shoal Creek Trail
Corn Mill Shoals Trail	Joanna Road	Tarkiln Branch Road
Grassy Creek Falls Trail	Longside Trail	Thomas Cemetery Road
Grassy Creek Trail	Mine Mountain Trail	Turkey Knob Trail
Hickory Mountain Trail	Nooks Trail	Wintergreen Falls Trail
High Falls Shelter Trail		

The collaborative hand and machine work performed on these trails by NCFS staff and volunteer groups focused on repairs and improvements to direct water off the trail surface, reduce erosion, and improve the trail tread, visitor safety and trail sustainability. Additionally, DSRF staff completed heavy trail maintenance, repair and improvement projects to improve water quality, visitor safety and trail longevity on the following trails: Base of Falls Trail, Corn Mill Shoals Trail, High Falls Loop, Little River Trail/Cedar Rock social trail closure, Shelter Rock Trail and White Pine Connector Trail.

During the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the DSRF recreation branch helped the Friends of DuPont Forest Trail Crew expand their leadership from two trail crew leaders to five. This expansion has increased frequency of maintenance on the high use trail system as well as increased collaboration with DSRF staff and BRIDGE crews on the closure of social trails and completion of hand work.

Additionally, through the efforts of the DSRF recreation branch, the equestrian community reestablished their participation in the trail crew. The shared maintenance of the trail system by all user groups fosters stewardship of the trail system and builds relationships among diverse user groups.



Two rangers building a "turnpike" for a persistent, muddy section of trail.



DSRF ranger and Friends of DuPont Trail Crew volunteers collaborate to improve a section of trail.



DSRF ranger lifts large rocks for use in a stream crossing.



Friends of DuPont Forest volunteers maneuvering a large rock as part of a trail repair and restoration project.

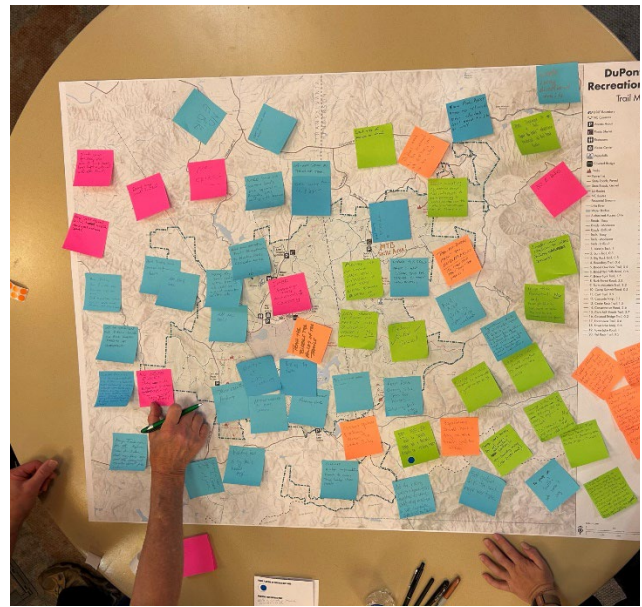
Master Recreation Plan

During fiscal year 2022-2023, DSRF hired Mattern & Craig to research and develop a master recreation plan for the forest. The consultant initiated the first steps in the planning process by creating maps and gathering information through public outreach and engagement. The process will continue into the next fiscal year with additional opportunities for public input and comment.

When complete, the DSRF master recreation plan will include recommendations for the forest's recreational infrastructure based on trail density analysis, input from user groups, wildlife management and natural resource preservation objectives. The plan will also include recommendations for trail system management, new and extended trail segments, trail improvements, trail consolidations and closures and trail sustainability. Additionally, the plan will make recommendations for the management of the trail system and interventions to lessen the impacts of high visitation.



More than 200 individuals attended the first DSRF Master Recreation Plan Public Information drop in.



Participants at the first DSRF Master Recreation Plan Public Information drop in leave comments about specific trails.

TEAMWORK and COLLABORATION

In accordance with the agency value of teamwork and collaboration, DSRF staff came together with a variety of government, non-profit and private agencies including The Nature Conservancy to N.C. State University.

Fiscal year 2022-2023 marked the second year of a coordinated agreement with DSRF, Headwaters State Forest and The Nature Conservancy to improve conditions for fire-dependent natural communities. Through this collaboration, DSRF and Headwaters saw 180 acres of mixed pine-hardwoods and oak forest undergo forest stand improvement treatments. This included the removal of heavy midstory in two stands totaling 117 acres to promote the oak and hickory regeneration, and a 62-acre crop tree release to increase oak growth rates and promote greater preponderance of white oaks in the canopy. These forest stand improvement projects were contracted out to EcoForesters, a private forestry contractor, using grant funding provided by the Wildlife Conservation Society.

DSRF staff also collaborated with state, regional and local resources to help control and eliminate five wildfires in North Carolina. The forest supervisor for DSRF served on the incident management team for the Great Lakes Fire, which burned 32,156 acres in Croatan National Forest in April 2023. DSRF and HESF rangers also assisted other wildland firefighters to control, extinguish and mop-up the Baby Larmen, Cedar Rock, Spivey Mountain and Substation wildfires.



Smoke rising from the Baby Larmen Fire.

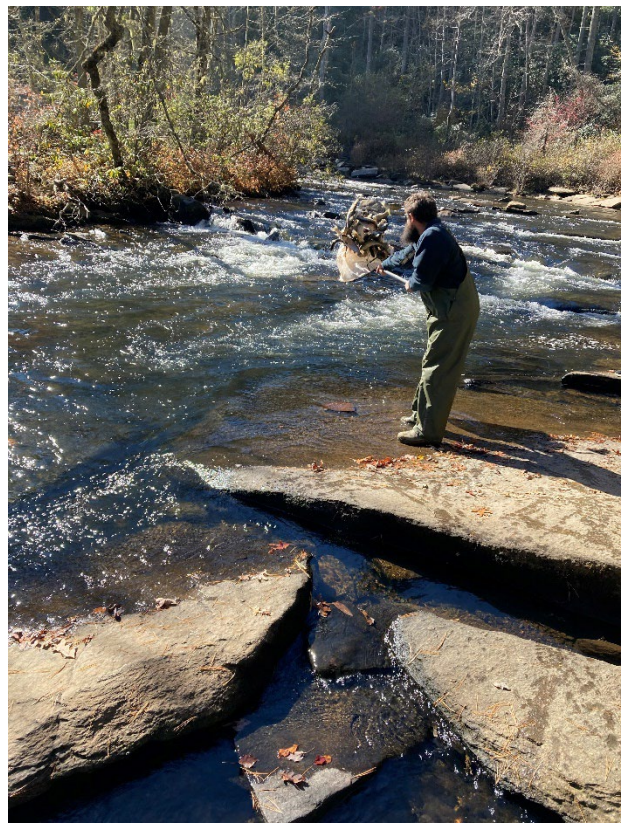


Fire containment line on the Spivey Mountain Fire.

To increase DSRF's capacity to work on its extensive system of single-track trails (approximately 50 miles), the DSRF recreation branch worked with Friends of DuPont Forest, Transylvania Always Committee and Henderson County Tourism Development Authority during 2022-2023 to apply for and secure grant funding for a mini excavator. DSRF staff will use this small machine to repair narrow trails, restore proper trail drainage, clear small stream culverts and place rocks for trail armoring and hardening.

In September 2022, the DSRF recreation branch coordinated with Friends of DuPont Forest and a trail planner from Destination by Design to provide a three-day sustainable trails maintenance training workshop for NCFS staff and forest volunteers. The training included classroom instruction and field work to increase understanding of practices to maintain trails and increase competency and technical skills.

In cooperation with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) Game Lands Program, DSRF maintained wildlife food plots, assisted with wildlife law enforcement, supported the trout stocking of Little River and provided important hunting and fishing opportunities across the forest. Personnel with the NCWRC also offered water quality and fishing educational programming at DuPont. Lastly, the NCWRC oversaw seasonal hunting permits at DSRF through a lottery system for various game species while DSRF staff provided limited mobility vehicle permits to assist disabled hunters and anglers with accessing the forest's interior.



Stocking DSRF's Little River with brook, brown and rainbow trout in collaboration with the NCWRC.

Figure 9 reveals deer harvests were slightly lower during the 2022-2023 fiscal year than the previous fiscal year. A variety of factors influence annual deer harvests such as weather, community interest in hunting, food and gas prices and skill level of hunters. While these factors are beyond DSRF's control, deer and other wildlife populations typically thrive in managed forest settings where the plant communities vary in structure and age. This diversity is a keystone objective in DSRF's Land and Resource Management Plan and the planning recommendations in the NCWRC's Wildlife Action Plan.

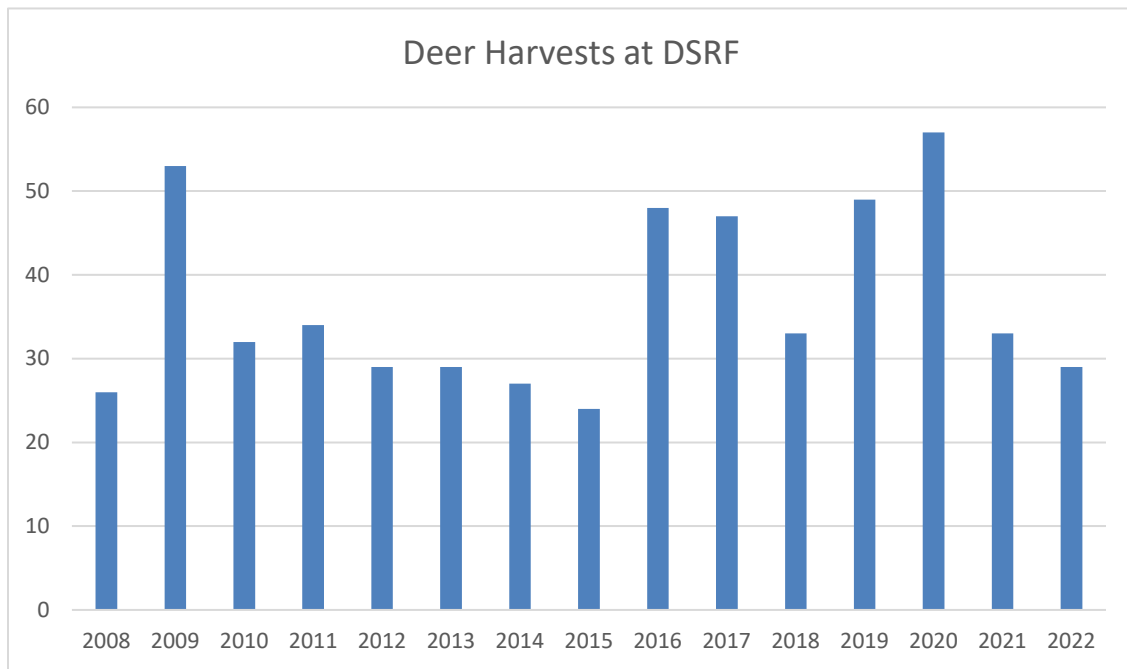


Figure 9: Deer harvest levels at DSRF since 2008.

Fiscal year 2022-2023 marked the second year of a collaborative effort to control invasive species at DSRF. Volunteers from Friends of DuPont Forest worked under the guidance of DSRF foresters and MountainTrue staff members to effectively treat 164 acres for large infestations of multiflora rose, Chinese privet, Chinese silvergrass, shrubby lespedeza and other species. These invasive species displace native species, which in turn negatively impacts forest diversity and wildlife habitat.



Volunteers in the early stages of removing invasive plants along a section of Tarkiln Branch Road.



The same area of Tarkiln Branch Road after treatment.



A volunteer lops off a woody invasive plant in preparation for follow-up chemical treatment.



Chemicals being applied to the freshly cut stem of an invasive plant.

DSRF also partnered with the Hemlock Restoration Initiative (HRI) and the NCFS Forest Health Branch to continue the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Mitigation Program. A total of 2,771 hemlock trees representing 11,445 diameter inches (d.b.h) were treated across 171 acres, including 88 acres of previously untreated hemlocks on Briery Fork Creek south of Joanna Road. Figure 10 shows the areas that have been treated for either invasive species or hemlock woolly adelgid.



Hemlock restoration team members meet with DSRF staff to review the day's treatment goals.



DSRF staff member applies chemicals along the root of a hemlock tree.



Treating for woolly adelgid by applying chemicals to the roots of the tree.



Hemlock restoration team member consolidating chemicals for treating hemlocks for woolly adelgid.

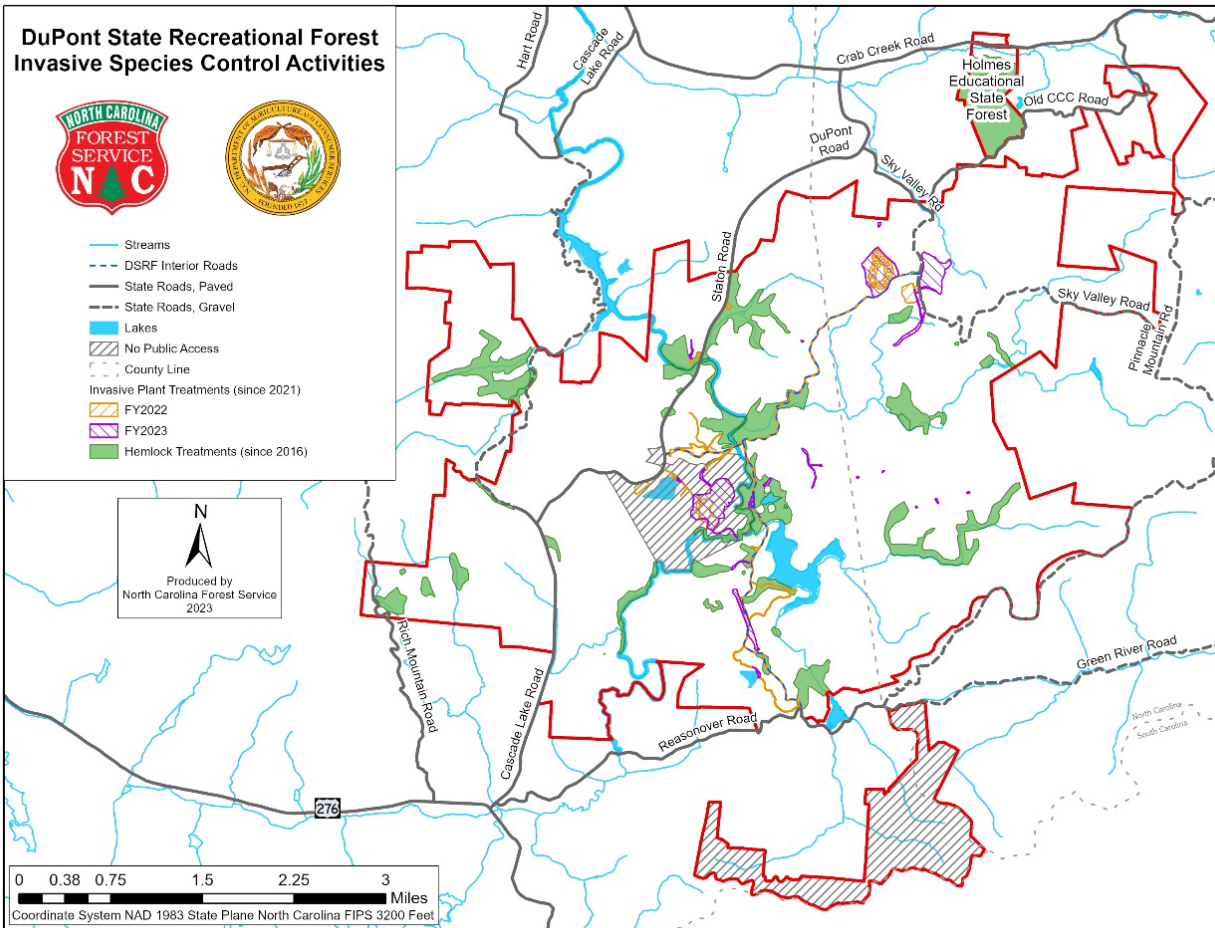


Figure 10: Areas that have been treated for either invasive species or hemlock woolly adelgid.

Lastly, DSRF hosted 13 forest ecology and wildlife research projects during fiscal year 2022-2023, including three new research projects initiated by researchers, undergraduate students and graduate students from UNC-Asheville, Pennsylvania State University and N.C. State University. Ongoing research continues to be facilitated for scientists from the NCWRC, N.C. State University, Clemson University and U.S. Forest Service (USFS). All approved research projects on the forest assist with forest management decisions and support the DSRF mission.

IMPROVING FOREST INFRASTRUCTURE: Capital Projects

N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF)

In 2017, the North Carolina General Assembly authorized DSRF to have access to the PARTF for the purposes of capital improvements, repair and renovation of facilities and land acquisition. Forest staff made progress on capital improvement projects supported by PARTF funds during fiscal year 2022-2023, expending \$651,675.92. Figure 11 provides a summary of those expenditures.

Capital Project	Expenditures
Grassy Creek Falls Trail Repairs and Renovations	\$29,970.00
Hooker Falls Trail and Triple Falls Trail Repairs and Renovations	\$29,839.00
Isaac Heath, Jim Branch, Ridgeline, and Ruffed Grouse Trail Repairs, Renovations, and Consolidations	\$109,410.00
Lake Julia Office Repair and Renovation	\$14,309.67
Law Enforcement Office Lower Level Enclosure	\$29,500.00
Mechanic Shop Renovation Design	\$16,910.00
Overflow Parking Lot and Gravel	\$129,038.19
Replacement Dock at Lake Dense	\$15,748.74
Roadside Wooden Bollards and Maintenance Facility Fencing	\$276,950.32
Total	\$651,675.92

Figure 11: Summary of fiscal year 2022-2023 PARTF expenditures at DSRF.

Grassy Creek Falls Trail Repairs and Renovations

During fiscal year 2022-2023, DSRF hired a trail contractor to make significant repairs to Grassy Creek Falls Trail. The contractor installed a series of stone slab steps and landings to allow visitors to navigate the steep path to the Grassy Creek Falls viewing area. The stonework and grading that accompanied the work eliminated a severely eroded section of trail, greatly reduced erosion and significantly enhanced visitor safety along this pedestrian-only path. This project along Grassy Creek Falls Trail will increase the trail's sustainability, protect trailside habitat and improve the visitor experience.



Trail contractor installing steps along Grassy Creek Falls Trail.



Finished steps on Grassy Creek Falls Trail.

Hooker Falls Trail and Triple Falls Trail Repairs and Renovations

DSRF estimates more than 700,000 visitors walked Hooker Falls Trail or Triple Falls during fiscal year 2022-2023. This high volume of use on two trails, which are each less than a half mile long, creates significant wear and tear to both the trail and the adjacent trailside. DSRF hired a trail contractor to restore proper drainage, reestablish drainage structures, reduce silt runoff into the Little River, smooth and re-gravel the walking surface and repair general trailside degradation. These efforts will improve the visitor experience and protect the trails and surrounding forest.



A trail contractor makes improvements to Hooker Falls Trail.



Triple Falls Trail added an improved walking surface and erosion control measures.

Isaac Heath, Jim Branch, Ridgeline and Ruffed Grouse Trail Repairs, Renovations, and Consolidations

One of the largest trail projects during fiscal year 2022-2023 involved extensive repairs to more than seven miles of extremely popular single and double track trail. This included the Hooker Creek Trail, Hickory Mountain Trail, Isaac Heath, Locust Trail, Jim Branch, Ridgeline Trail and Ruffed Grouse Trail. The trail contractors closed off a severely eroded, fall line section of the Isaac Heath Trail and inserted a short, parallel trail along Hooker Creek Trail with recommended directional use. Rock armoring was installed in several severely degraded sections of trail, and rolling grade dips and rainwater outflows were restored to reduce erosion and drain the water from the trail. The work also merged Locust Trail into Isaac Heath Trail and consolidated sections of White Pine Trail into Ruffed Grouse Trail and Hooker Creek Trail. The repairs and consolidations will improve visitor safety, increase trail sustainability and enhance visitor experience while using these trails.



Contractors working on Jim Branch Trail.



Rock armoring installed along Jim Branch trail to repair severely degraded section of trail.



Hooker Creek Trail repairs completed.



Isaac Heath Trail repairs completed.

Lake Julia Office Repair and Renovation

During fiscal year 2022-2023, backordered furniture and appliances arrived for the Lake Julia office. These items were included in the contract for the repair and renovation of the facility. The conference table offers the DSRF staff an area for

departmental and committee meetings, and the appliances are used for washing and drying items such as special event banners, tablecloths and flags as well as soiled uniforms and other washable materials and supplies.



The conference table at the Lake Julia office.



Washer and dryer in the Lake Julia office.

Law Enforcement Office Lower Level Enclosure

Persistent rodent activity and nesting underneath the law enforcement cabin required enclosing the entire lower level of the facility. The enclosure includes a door for accessing the area under the cabin as well as a wooden barrier spanning from below ground to the underside of the cabin's floor. The enclosure, along with ongoing pest control measures, will help protect the insulation, wiring and ductwork that was completed in the previous fiscal year.



Contractors enclosing the lower level of the law enforcement cabin.



A section of the completed lower level enclosure of the law enforcement cabin.

Maintenance Facility Renovation Design

During fiscal year 2022-2023, plans for major health and safety improvements at the DSRF maintenance facility were completed by a designer. The facility houses the DSRF mechanics shop, maintenance department office space and a variety of supplies and equipment. The plans for the maintenance facility include a permanent restroom for employees, enhanced ventilation, emergency exits and improved interior lighting for the facility.



The DSRF maintenance facility is scheduled for renovation.

Overflow Parking Lot and Gravel

During fiscal year 2022-2023, DSRF established an overflow parking area to provide additional parking for visitors. Four thousand tons of gravel was brought in for the overflow and other parking areas and on visitor trails and roads. The overflow parking area was formed by leveling land on each side of a small spur road and covering the raw dirt with gravel. DSRF installed signage to direct traffic within the new parking area and to ensure access for emergency vehicles. DSRF also installed fencing to help direct traffic and limit visitor access to areas closed to the public. The overflow parking area accommodates passenger cars, oversized vehicles such as buses and RVs and will help reduce parking pressure at the High Falls Access Area.



DSRF staff grading for the overflow parking area.



Gravel for parking areas, trails and roads.



Roadside signage directing visitors to the overflow parking area.



Signage to help with the flow and parking patterns in the overflow parking area.

Replacement Dock at Lake Dense

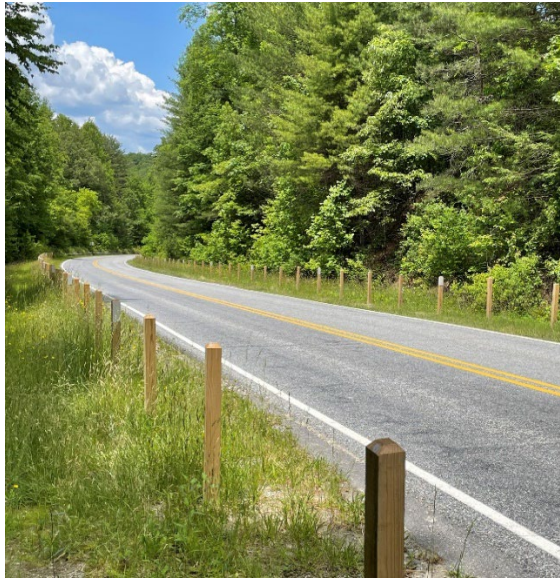
After many years of use, the old dock at Lake Dense was determined to be unsafe and replaced. The new dock arrived in sections that DSRF staff floated onto the lake and secured together. The assembled floating dock was then attached to a small concrete apron along the lakeshore. The new dock offers visitors a safe and versatile platform for fishing, swimming, boating and generally enjoying the beauty of Lake Dense.



The new Lake Dense dock provides visitors with a wide variety of recreational opportunities.

Roadside Wooden Bollards and Maintenance Facility Fencing

In 2020, DSRF installed metal t-stakes to serve as roadside fencing to support the CDC recommendations to reduce crowding in public places during the COVID-19 pandemic. DSRF observed several positive impacts from the installation of the roadside fencing and the resulting shift in the duration, timing and location of visitors. Even though a record 1.3 million visitors came to DSRF during the 2020-2021 fiscal year, there were fewer safety hazards in the roadway, less crowding in public spaces within the forest and fewer negative impacts to forest facilities and natural areas. In fiscal year 2022-2023, DSRF replaced the metal t-stakes with roadside wooden bollards. The wooden posts span approximately 12 thousand linear feet of Staton Road near the High Falls/visitor center parking area and the Hooker Falls parking area. The wooden bollards are more visible to drivers, provide a better barrier between pedestrians walking beside the road and the vehicles driving on it, and enhance safety for both groups. In addition to the roadside bollards, this project included the installation of fencing around the DSRF maintenance facility, which houses the DSRF mechanics shop, maintenance department's office space and a variety of supplies and equipment. The fencing will increase forest visitor safety by preventing them from accessing and climbing on the vehicles and heavy equipment parked outside of the maintenance facility. The fencing will also increase security for the items stored at this location.



Roadside wooden bollards enhance safety along Staton Road.



Fencing around the maintenance facility improves security and safety.

PLANS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024:

Continuing Capital Improvements

New Restroom for Guion Farm Access Area

During fiscal year 2023-2024, the Guion Farm Access Area restroom will be completed and opened for forest visitors. Work on the project began during fiscal year 2022-2023 but was delayed by supply chain disruptions. When finished, the restroom will offer visitors to the Henderson County side of the forest a restroom, water fountains and water bottle refill units and bike washing/horse watering stations.



Work under way on the Guion Farm Access Area restroom.

Forest Trails and Roads: Repair and Renovation

Forest trails and gravel roads at DSRF constitute one of the most extensive outdoor recreational systems in North Carolina. These natural surface pathways endure traffic from bicyclists, equestrians, hikers and forest ranger vehicles. In addition, these trails and roads are exposed to significant rainfall contributing to continuous erosion and sedimentation. Trail and road system maintenance is a year round operation and requires a significant investment of materials and labor. During fiscal year 2023-2024, DSRF will use PARTF funds to purchase gravel, fencing and erosion control materials to repair and renovate sections of Conservation Road, Buck Forest Road, Sheep Mountain Road and all parking lots. These materials will also be used to create a pathway to connect the renovated Guion Farm Access Area to the DSRF trail system. In addition, PARTF funds will be used to hire a professional trail builder to improve, repair and realign selected portions of Hilltop Trail, Sandy Trail, Wintergreen Falls Trail, Briery Fork Trail and Grassy Creek Trail. This contracted trail work will help the trails withstand a high level of use, improve sustainability, reduce environmental impacts and improve visitor safety.

Health and Safety Improvements at the Maintenance Shop

The maintenance shop serves as the garage space for repairing and servicing forest vehicles and equipment as well as the office area for the DSRF maintenance branch. During fiscal year 2023-2024, construction will begin on a single user restroom to replace the portable toilet that has heretofore served as the building's restroom. The construction project will also include a second exit for the building and an enhanced ventilation system.

Managing Forest Resources

During the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the DSRF forest management branch plans to focus on timber harvests, prescribed burns and invasive species control. The forest management branch is preparing two areas to be improved through harvests in the next two years. Both areas will be harvested using a combination of a patch cut-shelterwood system and thinning to increase species diversity, structural complexity and overall health. The first stand is a 56-acre stand of overmature and declining white pine off Flatwoods Trail, and the second stand is a 113-acre stand of storm-damaged planted white pine and mixed hardwoods near the intersection of Sky Valley Road and Pinnacle Mountain Road.

During the coming fiscal year, the forest management branch also plans to meet the annual objective of burning at least 200 acres. Potential areas being prepared for prescribed burns include:

- Briery Fork Trail, 55 acres (burned twice)
- Cedar Rock Trail, 113 acres (burned once)
- Grassy Dam Trail, 34 acres (burned twice)
- Short Cut Trail (HESF), 20 acres (first entry)
- Thomas Cemetery Road, 54 acres (burned once)
- Twin Oaks Trail, 40 acres (burned twice)
- Vista Trail, 25 acres (burned twice)

Because elements such as staffing, weather and forest conditions determine the execution of prescribed burns, the forest management branch may consider additional or alternative areas for burning.

The forest management branch will also continue making strides against invasive species in the coming fiscal year through retreatment of several areas of hemlocks for woolly adelgids, evaluation of two new areas for initial woolly adelgid treatment and continued focus on combatting invasive plants such as multiflora rose, kudzu and Japanese honeysuckle. The final major focus area for 2023-2024 will be monitoring for spotted lanternfly and educating forest visitors about this invasive pest that has recently been discovered in North Carolina.

Improving the Visitor Experience

Master Recreation Plan

In November 2021, the N.C. General Assembly's state budget allocated \$750,000 for the development and implementation of a master recreation plan for DSRF. Much of the data gathering for the plan occurred in fiscal year 2022-2023, but some will continue in fiscal year 2023-2024. In addition, the consultant for the project will analyze the data gleaned from the public input sessions and surveys and will use it to draft a proposed master recreation plan, which will be presented to the public. When complete, the DSRF master

recreation plan will include recommendations for the forest's recreational infrastructure as well as a plan for how to implement those recommendations.

Trail Work Collaboration

Throughout the 2023-2024 fiscal year, DSRF will continue to collaborate with the Friends of DuPont, Pisgah Trailblazers, and other area organizations to support shared stewardship and maintenance of the single-track trail system at DSRF. This collaborative trail maintenance will improve trail surfaces, repair drainage features and reroute trails to make them more sustainable and improve water quality. In addition, DSRF staff members will support and further the work of volunteer hand crews using small equipment such as compact utility loaders and mini excavators.

Educational Opportunities

During fiscal year 2023-2024, DSRF will enhance educational opportunities through the installation of six trailside informational panels that will be used with self-guided school groups and with a "passport" style hike designed for the general public. HESF will enhance educational activities through the renovation of its forestry center building and the installation of new displays that can be used for both ranger-led and self-guided learning opportunities. In addition to these new opportunities, DSRF and HESF plan to maintain education and outreach programming at levels like those of fiscal year 2022-2023.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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