

Steven W. Troxler
Commissioner

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




Wib L. Owen
Assistant Commissioner
State Forester

September 28, 2012

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. 106-887(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

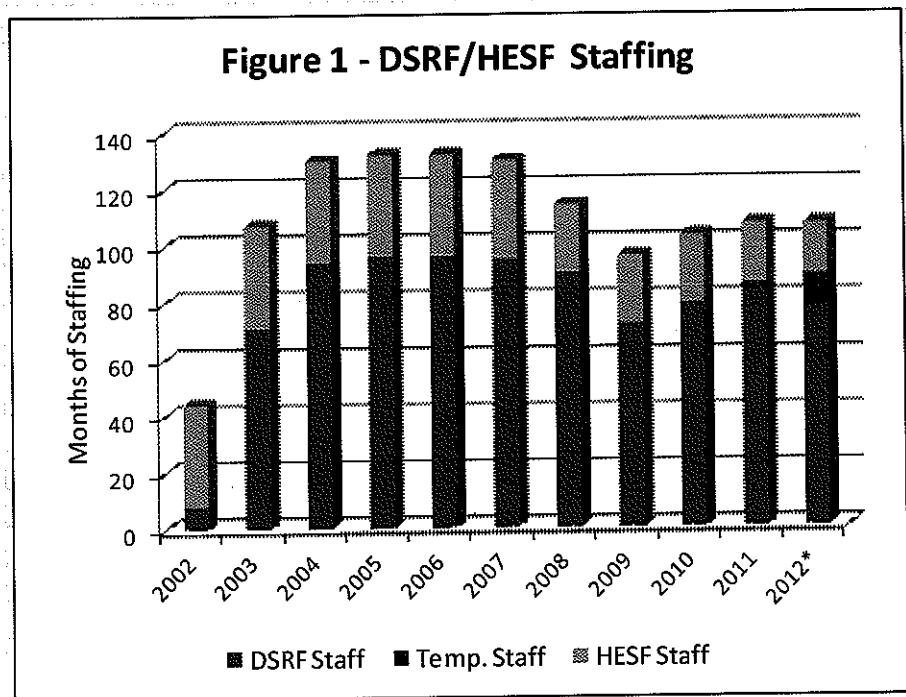
DuPont State Recreational Forest 2011-12 Fiscal Year Report

Sept. 25, 2012

General Information - DuPont State Recreational Forest (DSRF) contains 10,500 acres in Transylvania and Henderson Counties. It has 82 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, two waterfalls on Grassy Creek and five mountain lakes. Visitation increased dramatically during the past year. It is estimated there were 253,000 visits in the 2011-12 fiscal year. The first commercial timber harvest was conducted in 2012. There was a 65-acre addition to the forest this year. The forest is in the NC Wildlife Resources Commission's Game Lands program. Anglers can fish in mountain lakes and the Little River and its tributaries. Hunting is by permit only with seasons established for deer, turkey and small game. Nearby Holmes Educational State Forest (HESF), 230 acres with two rangers, is supervised by the DSRF Forest Supervisor. The following report highlights forest events, activities and accomplishments since July 2011.

Forest Staff (See Appendix A for the forest organizational structure.)

- DSRF has seven full time certified staff plus a temporary maintenance mechanic.
- HESF has one education ranger and a forest supervisor, and has lost one position since 2008.
- The Management Forester position is currently vacant.
- Additional staff is needed to keep up with maintenance needs, handle the increased visitation, monitor commercial use permits and manage the office.
- An additional position will be needed to manage the visitor education center when it is opened to the public.
- The forest has less staff now than when the forest had 2.3 times fewer visitors in 2004. (See Figure 1.)



* Projected to Dec. 31, 2012

One full time position = 12 months

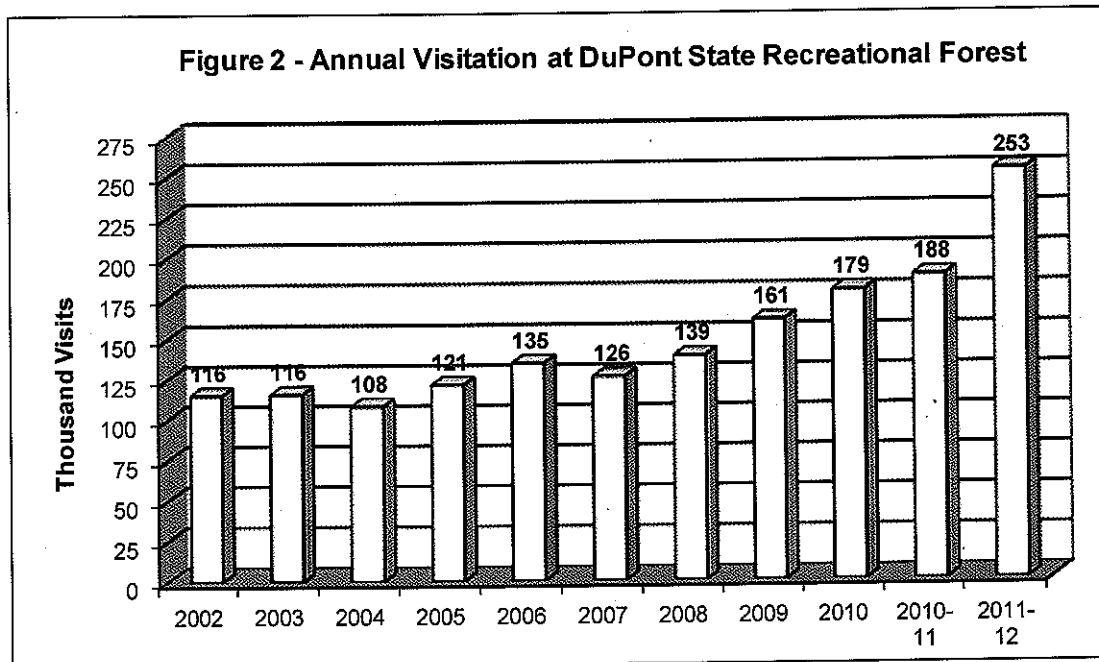
Fire Control

- Five staff members completed two week assignments on the Simmons Road Fire in Bladen County in July 2011. One staff member completed a two week fire assignment in Pender County in August 2011.
- DSRF and HESF staffs are available for forest fire assignments locally, statewide and in the Southeast Region.
- Five staff members have Incident Management Team assignments or serve as technical specialist.
- All staff members are required to train to fill important roles in fire and all risk incident management.

- DSRF staff may assist with fire training, and the forest hosted an air operations training school in 2012.

Forest Visitation

- The estimate of visitation for 2011-12 fiscal year is 253,000. See Figure – 2.
- Visitation has increased 134% since 2004. There is a corresponding increase in the demand for parking space and trail maintenance and an increase in negative impacts on natural resources.



- Parking on the road shoulders at Hooker and High Falls access areas is a public safety hazard. Additional parking spaces have been constructed at the High Falls access area, but will not handle the parking demand during peak visitation periods.
- Adding more off highway parking spaces would be desirable from a safety standpoint, but larger crowds will have a negative impact on natural resources and the visitor experience.
- Vegetation along Little River is being trampled. Loss of vegetation causes loss of soil during flood events.
- DSRF was named one of the top five State Forest/Parks in the nation by *Outside Magazine*.
- The March issue of *Our State Magazine* contained an 18 page photo essay on the forest.
- *Bike Magazine*, a national publication, featured the forest as a mountain biking destination.
- DSRF is the primary destination for thousands of people from across the country.
- More staff, operating dollars and capital improvement funds will be needed to manage the demand for quality outdoor recreation and manage and protect the natural resources of the forest.
- State and local tourism offices have advertised DSRF as a primary destination to see sites where *The Hunger Games* was filmed.

DSRF Volunteers

- Over 6,000 hours of volunteer service were contributed to the forest in 2011. See Table 1.

- Leading volunteer organizations are FODF, DSRF regular volunteers and Southern Off-Road Bikers.
- WPCC completed carpentry and rock masonry projects at the future visitor education center.
- The FODF trail crew conducts a work project the second Saturday of each month.
- The Carolina Mountain Club (hikers) rebuilt a footbridge at HESF.
- The DSRF staff works closely with many individuals and volunteer groups to increase accomplishments.
- Table 2 contains a summary of volunteer activities for 2011.
- Trail maintenance was the leading volunteer activity.
- At \$12/hour the total value of the volunteer service was \$76,680.

Table 1 - DSRF Volunteer Hours, 2011

Organization	Hours
Friends of DuPont Forest	2,086
DuPont regular volunteers	1,164
Southern Off Road Bikers	682
Western Piedmont CC	653
Pisgah Trail Blazers	465
Prof. Trail Builders Assoc.	362
Trail Dynamics, LLC	200
Recovery Group	186
DuPont Equestrian Crew	145
Trout Unlimited	117
Other groups	331
Total	6,390

Events, Activities and Reservations

- Over 8,600 people visited the forest for special events, activities or by reservation. See Table 3.
- There were 42 picnic shelter reservations accommodating 1,216 people.
- There were 49 volunteer work projects by organized groups involving 570 individuals.
- The Muddy Sneakers, an environmental education program, was the leading outside group conducting classes in the forest with 320 participants.
- The Pisgah Wildlife Education Center conducted fishing events in the forest throughout the year.
- The FODF conducted bus tours in the forest in October and May attracting 1,105 participants.
- Film project personnel and runners from the Brevard Running Camp were the largest groups under Other Special Event Attendees.

Movies and Photo Shoots

- The Hunger Games and The Healer were partially filmed in the forest during the past year.
- Publicity from The Hunger Games has significantly increased visitation as movie fans from across the county and around the world have visited to see where scenes were filmed.
- The Healer has not yet been released.
- LL Bean did a photo shoot in the forest for their on-line catalog.

Table 2 - DuPont State Recreational Forest Volunteer Hours by Activity & Value, 2011

Activity	Hours	Value*
Trail & Road Maintenance	2,726	\$32,712
Facility Repair & Maintenance	1,034	\$12,402
Tours	993	\$11,916
Administration	803	\$9,630
Visitor Services	500	\$6,000
Litter Pick Up	170	\$2,040
Fish Stocking	117	\$1,404
Forest Management	48	\$576
Total	6,390	\$76,680

* Volunteer service valued at \$12 per hour

Table 3 - DSRF Events, Activities & Reservations Summary for 2011-12

Activity	People
Shelter use by reservation	1,216
Access by disabled permit	481
Lodging (person nights)	32
Meeting attendees	121
Work project participants	570
Training session attendees	442
Class by outside group	892
Educational programs	15
Forest tours	1,382
Guided hikes	203
Other special event attendees	3,255
Total participation	8,609

Visitor Education Center

- A visitor education center is needed as a point of contact for visitors. Currently visitors obtain forest information from websites and at the Henderson or Transylvania County visitor centers.
- A partially finished log building at the High Falls access area has been designated as a future visitor education center. Funding has recently been designated, but engineering support is required to contract the work.
- Approximately \$180,000 are needed to finish the main floor (1,200 square feet) so the building can be used.
- Private donors have expressed interest in donating substantial sums of money for the project, and the FODF Board is very interested in the completion of the building.
- DSRF staff and volunteers from WPCC have made improvements to the building, but the inside is unfinished.

Road and Trail Maintenance

- Forest staff, volunteers and contractors work hard to create safe, sustainable trails that are enjoyable to use.
- Staff and forest volunteers conducted trail maintenance (trimming vegetation and improving drainage) on 8.8 miles of forest trails during the past year.
- Trail Dynamics, LLC completed a trail maintenance contract on 8.75 miles of trails. The contract included trail reconstruction, re-routes, construction of drainage structures and trimming back vegetation.
- A motor grader was obtained from Department of Defense to use for road maintenance.
- DSRF trails are recognized as some of the best in the region and are used as a model for other trail systems.

Forest Management

- Implementation of the Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) was initiated in 2011-12.
- The maintenance of healthy and functional natural communities as well as the creation and protection of priority wildlife habitat components are the primary drivers of forest management on the property.
- An integrated program of forest inventory, prescribed burning, invasive species control and timber harvesting has been developed through the planning process to support these initiatives.

Forest Inventory

- A continuous forest inventory system has been developed and data collected from all plots.
- This will establish baseline growth information to be re-assessed at ten year intervals.
- The inventory information is the best source of growth and yield data across all natural communities.
- A more detailed inventory was developed and implemented this year to assess the condition of the Natural Heritage Program dedicated reserve areas and to develop spatially explicit, natural community-specific prescriptions.

Timber Harvest

- A commercial harvesting operation was conducted in the Guion Farm compartment under the LRMP.
- Storm damaged and mature white pines were removed using the shelterwood and group selection regeneration harvest methods.
- The harvest produced over 150,000 board feet of white pine sawlogs plus several loads of pulpwood.

Wildlife Management

- NCWRC personnel maintained several wildlife openings around the forest.
- Some plots were sowed with plants beneficial to a variety of wildlife species.
- One feral hog was trapped and removed.
- Research on green salamanders is ongoing.

- Research was uninitiated on timber rattlesnake gestation sites.

Prescribed burning

- Wet weather conditions and a heavy work load limited burning in 2011-12.
- Lake Julia Dam was burned off, and one 50 acre burn was conducted near Bridal Veil Falls.

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) Control Program

- HWA has been present on eastern and Carolina hemlocks in DSRF and HESF since 2006.
- The HWA control program is coordinated with the NCFS pest control foresters.
- A variety of control methods have been tried including:
 - Insecticidal soap
 - Soil drench with chemicals
 - Basal bark chemical application
 - Time release chemical tablets
 - Predator beetle release
- The strategy is to maintain a population of treated trees until a long term solution is discovered.
- The HWA control database currently contains 787 treated trees.
- In the spring of 2012, 46 trees were re-treated and 67 trees received an initial treatment.

Invasive Species Control

- Chinese silver grass, oriental bittersweet and Japanese stilt grass were sprayed with herbicide in the fall of 2011 in areas scheduled for harvest in 2012.
- Multiflora rose control measures were initiated in DSRF and HESF this spring and continued into summer.

Property Boundary Maintenance

- Eight miles of boundary lines were located and remarked.
- Boundary maintenance is a shared effort between DSRF staff and NCWRC personnel.
- The boundary of a 65-acre addition to the forest was marked
- A property swap (1.5 acres) was conducted to straighten the boundary near Cascade Lake Road.

Facilities

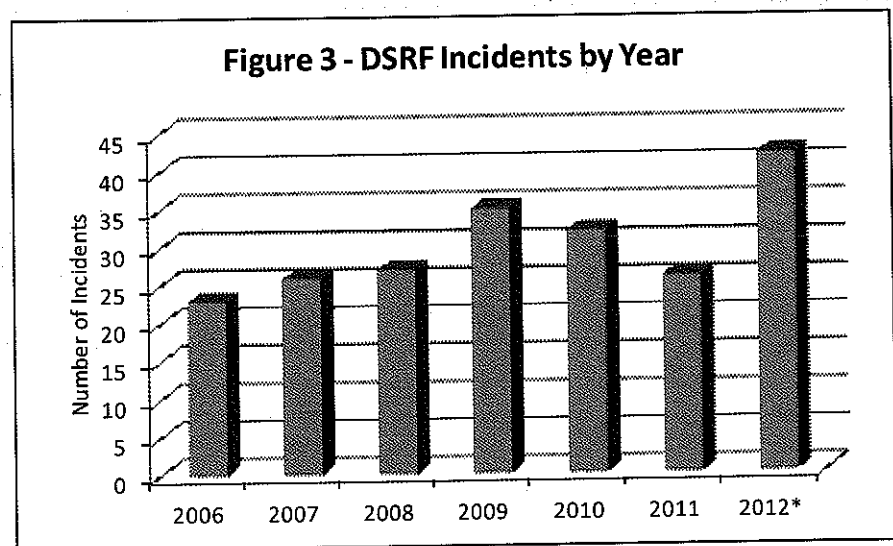
- The front porch was added to the future visitor education center.
- A stone retaining wall was constructed at High Falls access area.
- The electronic gate was repaired and put into operation.
- Expansion of the High Falls parking lot was completed creating an additional 32 parking spaces.
- A pedestrian bridge and handicap accessible boardwalk were replaced at HESF.
- Improvements were made to the HESF ranger residence.
- Numerous plumbing and electrical repairs were made to forest buildings.
- A maintenance supervisor and temporary maintenance mechanic are attempting to maintain the following:
 - 20 buildings (5 houses, 4 storage sheds, 2 offices, 2 public restrooms and 7 other buildings)
 - 7 picnic shelters
 - 7 piers
 - 6 information kiosks
 - 6 parking lots
 - 5 dams
 - 3 vehicular bridges
 - 5 pedestrian bridges
 - 3 viewing platforms

- A shop facility is needed to provide adequate heated work space for fabrication and repairs in cold weather.
- There are four old buildings that need demolition, three of which require an asbestos removal plan.

Incident Report Summary – Forest incidents involving the public include accidents involving trauma, illnesses requiring staff response, search and rescues, theft, vandalism and other illegal activities and emergency calls from central dispatch. One incident involved illegal picking of galax. The NC Wildlife Resources Commission and Transylvania Sheriff's Department handled the case, and four illegal aliens were arrested and deported. The number of incidents has increased as visitation has increased. See Figure 3. The 2012 incidents are for January 1 through August 31 and include:

- 13 traumas
- 7 law enforcement
- 6 illnesses
- 5 Search & rescues
- 2 Vandalisms
- 2 Motor vehicle accidents
- 7 Other incidents

Responding to these incidents require rangers be on duty seven days per week, and be available after regular work hours.



* Partial year data, Jan.-Aug.

Educational Accomplishments by HESF and DSRF Staffs - Holmes Educational State Forest only had one ranger on staff for nine months of the past year. DSRF staff members helped to fill the gap and maintain accomplishments until a Forest Supervisor was hired in July 2012. Below are the statistics for HESF for July 2011 through June 2012.

- Students in organized groups 2,470
- Individual visitors 43,285
- Campers using group camp 3,967
- **Total attendance 49,722**
- Correlated classes 158
- Other classes 99
- **Total classes 257**
- On-site students taught 2,452
- Total teaching hours 176

Planned Improvements Projects

- Complete RFP and award contract for Master Plan
- Complete construction work on Visitor Contact Center
- Coordinate construction of pedestrian bridge with DOT

Report submitted by

David R. Brown, Forest Supervisor