

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



Steven W. Troxler
Commissioner

Scott Bissette
Assistant Commissioner

October 1, 2013

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 Trogon, 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,

Scott Bissette

Attachment

Cc: Steve Troxler, Commissioner, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
David Smith, Chief Deputy Commission, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Tina Hlabse, General Counsel, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Joy Hicks, Policy Development Analyst, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services



**N.C. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AND CONSUMER SERVICES**



NORTH CAROLINA FOREST SERVICE

DuPont State Recreational Forest
Fiscal Year 2013 Legislative Report



October 1, 2013

Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler
Assistant Commissioner Scott Bissette

Pursuant to G.S. 106-887 (i), the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, North Carolina Forest Service respectfully submits this annual report on the B.R.I.D.G.E. Young Offenders Program.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

G.S. 106-887 (i) The Department shall report no later than October 1 of each year 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

The N.C. Forest Service (NCFS) DuPont State Recreational Forest (DSRF) contains 10,473 acres in Transylvania and Henderson Counties. It has 83 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 has increased dramatically during the past two years, but frequent rain events slowed visitation the first half of 2013.

This fiscal year witnessed unprecedented progress within the Forest due to support from the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Steve Troxler and other important partners. Major accomplishments in the past year include:

- Completing the Aleen Steinberg Visitor's Center with a July 1 grand opening.
- Completing an additional 60-car parking lot near Hooker Falls Access Area.
- Completion of a pedestrian trail bridge near Hooker Falls.
- Initiated preparation of a Forest Master Plan by HH Architecture.
- Cooperating with Haywood Community College to fund two 10-week summer interns.
- Filling two vacant positions and adding an eleven-month temporary Visitor's Center Manager.
- Completing a \$44,000 trail contract funded by Friends of DuPont Forest.

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 1, 2012.

ALEEN STEINBERG VISITOR'S CENTER

Commissioner Troxler was instrumental in the development and support for the newly completed Aleen Steinberg Visitor's Center (ASC). Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) settlement funds and private donations were used to complete the center. WNC Communities managed the funds, hired the architect and contractors, and supervised the construction. The center is named in honor of Aleen Steinberg, a conservationist and long time supporter of the Forest. The ASC is a much needed point of contact for visitors. The center contains a reception counter, educational exhibits, and a classroom. Opening of the ASC has increased staffing. The welcome center manager has recruited and trained a core group of 28 volunteers to greet visitors and provide information.



ROAD AND TRAIL MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION

Commissioner Troxler worked with the Governor's Office, Senate Pro Tempore, and the Speaker of the N.C. House of Representatives to identify approximately \$600,000 from discretionary funds for the design and construction of a 120-foot pedestrian bridge across the Little River. Construction of this bridge eliminated a long-term visitor safety issue along Staton Road at the Hooker Falls Access Area.



To accompany the bridge, the NCFS, N.C. Department of Soil and Water Conservation, and N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) worked together to construct a 60-car parking addition to the Hooker Falls Access area.

DSRF trails are recognized as some of the best in the region and are used as a model for other trail systems. Trails require maintenance to prevent

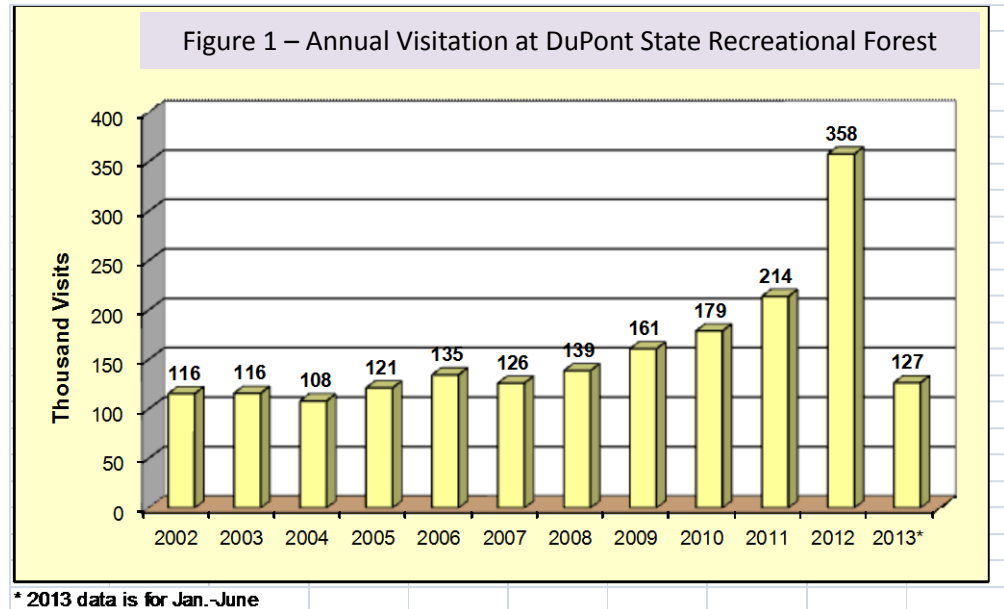
erosion and remain safe and enjoyable to use. Trail maintenance has been a challenge for the past six months because of heavy rain.

Forest staff, volunteers and trail contractors work hard to create safe, sustainable trails that are enjoyable to use. Staff and forest volunteers completed trail maintenance (trimming vegetation and improving drainage) on several miles of forest roads and trails during the past year. Long Cane Trails completed a \$44,476 trail contract that included 9,724 feet of new trail construction, 1,825 feet of trail reroutes, and construction of a 22 foot trail bridge. Friends of DuPont Forest funded this trail work.

FOREST VISITATION

Visitation increased dramatically in 2012, but is down slightly for the first half of 2013 because of abnormally high rainfall (See Figure 1). The Forest always has more visitors the second half of the year. Demand for parking space and the need for trail maintenance has also increased.

Parking on the road shoulders at Hooker Falls access areas is much less since a new 60-car parking lot was opened July 1, 2013. The additional parking and opening of the pedestrian bridge across Little River has increased public safety for visitors to Hooker and Triple Falls.



Increased parking capacity improves public safety, but larger crowds 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. If one is seeking solitude they will not find it at Hooker or Triple Falls during the summer and fall.

DSRF is a primary destination for thousands of people from across the country. More staff, operating dollars and capital improvement funds will be needed in the future to manage the demand for quality outdoor recreation and to manage and protect the natural resources of the forest.

DUPONT STATE RECREATIONAL FOREST VOLUNTEERS

Over 5,000 hours of volunteer service were contributed to the forest in 2012. Leading volunteer organizations are Friends of DuPont Forest (FODF), DSRF regular volunteers, Southern Off-Road Bikers, Western Piedmont Community College (WPCC) and Pisgah Trail Blazers.

WPCC and DSRF staff constructed a pedestrian bridge on High Falls Trail and replaced flooring on two porches at the forest office in the past year. This work was funded by FODF. FODF conducted eleven volunteer work projects during the year in addition to conducting Tour de Falls in May and October. The Carolina Mountain Club (hikers) and Four Circles (drug recovery program) conducted work

projects at HESF. The DSRF/HESF staff works closely with many individuals and volunteer groups to increase accomplishments and save the state thousands of dollars each year.

EVENTS, ACTIVITIES, AND RESERVATIONS

Over 9,000 people visited the forest for special events, activities or by reservation (See Table 1). Thirty seven picnic shelter reservations accommodated 975 people. There were 44 volunteer work projects by organized groups involving 442 individuals. Muddy Sneakers, an environmental education program, was the leading outside group conducting classes in the forest with 1,205 participants. The Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education conducted fishing events and educational programs in the forest throughout the year. The FODF conducted bus tours in the forest in October and May attracting over 1,000 participants. The Transylvania Arts Council conducted The Hunger Games guided hikes and tours for 527 people. Field training is conducted by search and rescue and law enforcement personnel and several branches of the military.

Table 1 - DSRF Reservations, Meetings & Events Summary for 2012-13	
Activity	People
Shelter use by reservation	975
Access by disabled permit	543
Meeting attendees	213
Work project participants	442
Training session attendees	276
Class by outside group	1,263
Educational programs	737
Forest tours	2,188
Guided hikes	629
Guided bike rides	60
Other special event attendees	2,150
Total participation	9,476

FOREST MANAGEMENT

In 2011, the DSRF Land Resource Management Plan was completed, with an approach to manage the multiple forest resources of the Forest in a sustainable and ecologically viable manner. 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.

The management forester, hired in May, is working with the summer interns to set up a timber sale that will be put out for bids later in the summer. Some storm damaged and diseased timber was salvaged last winter in conjunction with chainsaw operator training for wildland firefighters. Over 8,000 board feet of logs were harvested from the new parking lot site and sold to a local sawmill.

The Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) Control Program has been treating eastern and Carolina hemlocks in DSRF and HESF since 2006. The HWA control program is coordinated with NCFS and USFS pest control foresters. The goal is to maintain a population of treated trees until a sustainable natural control method is discovered. Over 780 hemlocks have been treated for HWA, many more than once. Many untreated hemlocks are starting to die and fall creating a safety hazard along forest trails. DSRF staff and BRIDGE crews have cut many dead and dying hemlocks along roads and trails in high use areas.

WILDLIFE RESOURCES

The forest is in the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission's (NCWRC) 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. NCWRC personnel maintain several wildlife openings around the forest. Some plots were sowed with plants beneficial to a variety of wildlife species.

There is research being conducted by NCWRC on non game species including green salamanders and timber rattlers. DSRF has the highest concentrations of green salamander sites known anywhere. DSRF is also known for the presence of rare blue ghost fireflies that appear for about three weeks in late may and early June.

The Center for Wildlife Education used the forest to conduct fishing clinics and teach educational programs to 337 people during the past year.

FACILITIES & EQUIPMENT

Two porch floors were replaced at the forest office. Trail bridges were constructed on High Falls Trail and Turkey Knob Trail. The N.C. Department of Transportation contracted the construction of a 120-foot long, 6-foot wide trail bridge across the Little River. Expansion of the Hooker Falls parking lot was completed creating an additional 60 parking spaces. Numerous plumbing and electrical repairs were made to forest buildings. The DSRF staff worked with WNC Communities, NCDOT NCDA&CS and contractors to get the ASC and trail bridge completed and ready for ribbon cutting ceremonies.

Trucks, lawnmowers, tractors, heavy equipment and an electronic gate were maintained and repaired. A maintenance supervisor, equipment operator and temporary maintenance mechanic maintain the following:

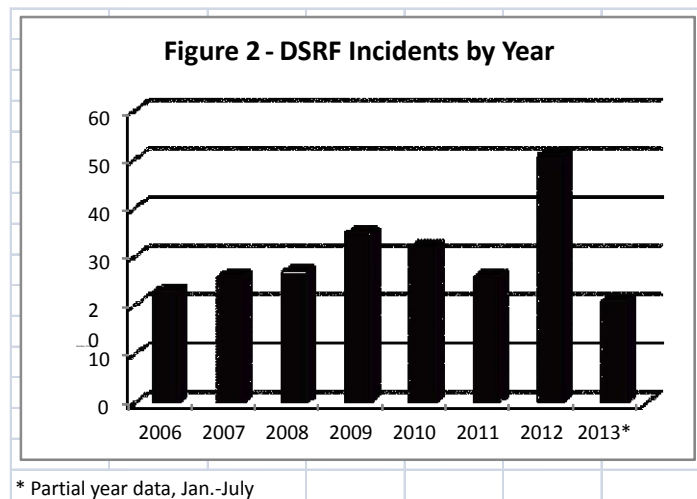
- 20 buildings (5 houses, 4 storage sheds, 2 offices, 2 public restrooms and 7 other buildings)
- 7 picnic shelters
- 7 piers
- 6 information kiosks
- 6 parking lots
- 5 dams
- 3 vehicular bridges
- 6 pedestrian bridges
- 3 viewing platforms

A shop facility is needed to provide adequate heated work space for fabrication and repairs in cold weather. Three old Camp Summit buildings are scheduled for demolition as soon as the asbestos is removed. The DSRF maintenance staff also assists with facility and equipment maintenance and repair at HESF.

INCIDENT REPORT SUMMARY

Forest staff and local emergency personnel respond to incidents in the forest. Incidents may involve trauma, illness, search and rescue, theft, vandalism or other illegal activities. One person was arrested in July for riding a stolen motorcycle in the forest. The number of incidents has increased as visitation has increased (See Figure 2). In 2012 there were 51 incidents. In 2013 there have been 21 incidents as of July 31. They include:

- 6 traumas
- 2 law enforcement
- 6 Illnesses
- 3 Search & rescues
- 2 Vandalisms
- 2 Other incidents



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

HOLMES EDUCATIONAL STATE FOREST

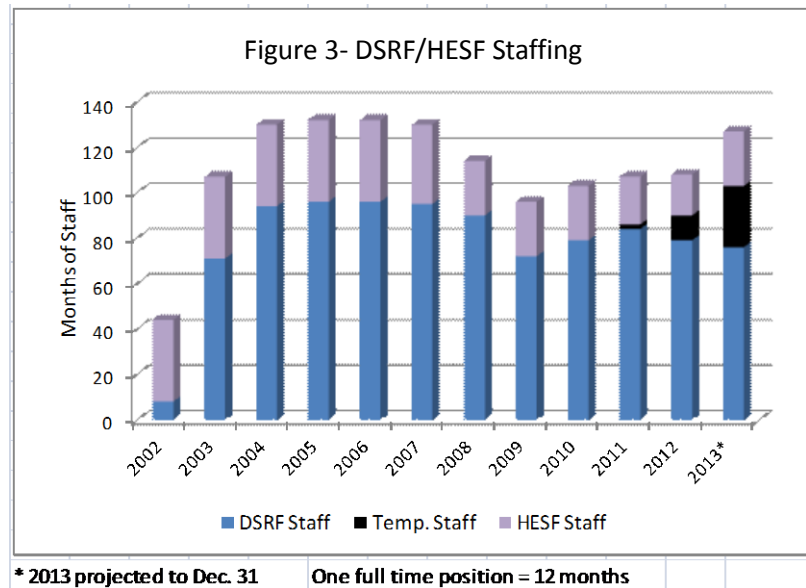
The new Holmes Educational State Forest (HESF) supervisor started in July 2013. She has worked with the educational ranger to improve and maintain the facilities and trails at the forest with assistance from the DSRF maintenance staff. They also maintain a picnic area and group campground. Educational programs are presented to school and other groups March through November. Table 2 shows the statistics for HESF for July 2012 through June 2013.

Table 2 - Holmes Educational State Forest Statistics					
Students in organized groups	3,248	Correlated classes	99	On-site students taught	2,786
Individual visitors	30,499	Other classes	140	Off-site students taught	460
Campers using group camp	3,186				
Total attendance	36,933	Total classes	239	Total teaching hours	158

FOREST STAFF

David Brown, the DuPont Forest Supervisor since 2002, retired from the N.C. Forest Service on August 31, 2013. Mr. Brown had 42 years of service with the State of North Carolina and was the Forest's first supervisor. Jason Guidry was hired to replace David on August 20th, 2013. Mr. Guidry previously worked with the NCFS in Clay County. DSRF has seven full time certified staff, two 11-month temporary positions and two 10-week interns (see Figure 3). HESF has one education ranger and a forest supervisor.

The management forester position was filled in May, 2013 after being vacant for 10 months. An educational ranger retired in December and was replaced in April. A Visitor's Center Manager was hired in January and will work through November.



PROJECTED FOREST ACTIVITIES FOR FY 2014

Master Planning Process: The DSRF Master Plan will be completed by the end of FY14. This document will provide the basis for future direction on the Forest in terms of facility development, recreational activities, and associated staff needs and or development.

Resource Management: As previously noted, staff is in place to continue to implement the Forest Land Management Plan. Scheduled resource management activities include:

- Completion of 300-500 acres of prescribed burning. A joint research effort with NCWRC on the effects of prescribed fire on green salamander habitat and populations are included in these acres.
- Continued treatment of approximately 40-50 hemlock trees to combat the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.
- Completion of 100-200 acres of intermediate and regeneration harvests.
- Completion of approximately 10 acres of invasive species control

Information and Education: Staff is currently developing scoping criteria for the development of smart phone applications for Forest users and staff and potential website improvements. Staff are also identifying opportunities to provide additional internal Information and Education programming on the Forest.

Facilities: Asbestos removal has been completed on three structures identified as unsalvageable. These structures will be demolished in FY 2014. Remodeling and Renovation funds have been identified for several buildings on the forest to include repair of a hanger, replacement of windows in staff quarters, and window replacement and exterior maintenance on the Guion Farm classroom.

Recreation: The primary form of recreation at DSRF is associated with trail use. With over 80 miles of roads and trails, prioritizing the efforts of staff and funds provided by FODF is a major challenge. Staff has begun collecting GPS data to be used in the development of a Trails Management Plan. Efforts are being made to identify funds to contract the development of this plan in order to minimize workload on existing staff.

The summer of 2013 was an extremely wet year. The additional rainfall reduced the amount of time available to perform trail maintenance projects and resulted in additional maintenance needs. Staff will work with FODF to fund at least \$20,000 of trail improvements in FY 2014. Additional maintenance projects will be completed by volunteers, and staff with BRIDGE program support.

As the result of the completion and opening of the Aleen Steinberg Visitor Center staff is exploring options for additional recreational activities that may generate additional receipts such as canoe rentals at Lake Julia. Further action on these efforts is dependent on the direction provided by the soon to be completed Forest Master Plan.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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