



Steven W. Troxler
Commissioner

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



Scott Bissette
Assistant Commissioner

October 1, 2014

Honorable Members of the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations, Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittee on Natural and Economic Resources, Environmental Review Commission, and 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 Commissioner, 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

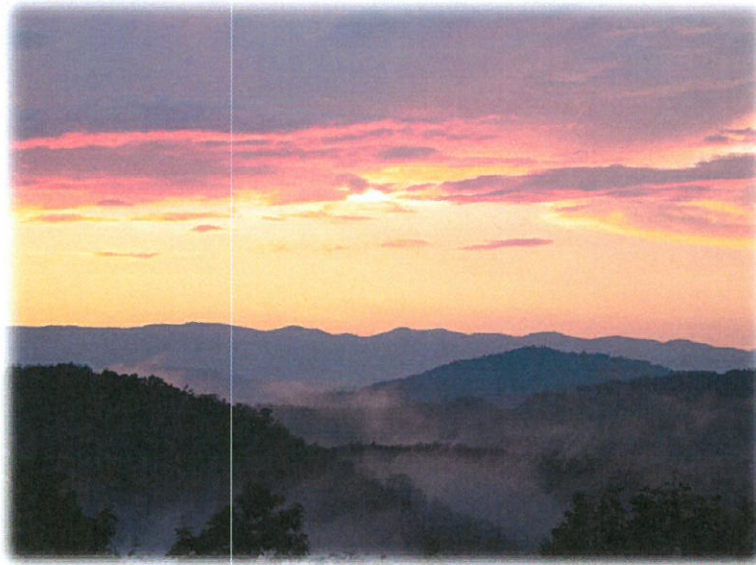


**N.C. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AND CONSUMER SERVICES**

NORTH CAROLINA FOREST SERVICE



**DuPont State Recreational Forest
Fiscal Year 2014 Legislative Report**



October 1, 2014

Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler

Assistant Commissioner Scott Bissette

Pursuant to G.S. 106-887 (i), the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS), North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) respectfully submits this annual report on the DuPont State Recreational Forest.

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 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.

At the forest level, DSRF is managed by seven full-time employees and four temporary employees. The DSRF staff consists of the following positions:

- Forest Supervisor – Jason Guidry
- Assistant Forest Supervisor – Bruce MacDonald
- Management Forester- Michael Sweat
- Facility Maintenance Supervisor- Vacant
- Education Ranger- Eric Folk
- Education Ranger- Jeremy Waldrop
- Equipment Operator- Robert Pace
- Maintenance Mechanic (Temporary) - Buck Jones
- General Utility Worker (Temporary) - Chad Battle
- Visitor Center Manager (Temporary) - Bob Twomey
- Public Information Assistant (Temporary) - Denver Beddingfield

The DSRF Forest Supervisor also oversees the operations of Holmes Educational State Forest, which has two employees. The DSRF Forest Supervisor reports to Regional Forester, Greg Yates, who is based in the NCFS' Regional Office, Asheville.

The DSRF coordinates its operations with the DSRF Advisory Committee, which is a group of stakeholders representing a variety of forest user groups and local governments. Committee members are appointed by the Assistant Commissioner Scott Bissette and typically serve three-year terms. In FY 2013-14, the Friends of DuPont Forest (FODF) were appointed a position on the Advisory Committee to improve efficiency and communication with operation of the forest.

Building On Accomplishments From 2013

Visitors to the DSRF continued to benefit from the improvements made possible by N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler and DSRF's many important partners.

Aleen Steinberg Visitor Center

Commissioner Troxler was instrumental in the development and support for the newly completed Aleen Steinberg Visitor's Center (ASC). Tennessee Valley Authority settlement funds and private donations were used to complete the visitor center, which opened to the public on July 1, 2013. The center is named in honor of Aleen Steinberg, a conservationist and long time supporter of the forest. The ASC has become one of the most important visitor stops at the DSRF, where trail maps, directions to waterfalls, permits for vehicles for disabled visitors, and picnic shelter reservations can be obtained. Approximately 55,000 visitors have utilized the center since its grand opening. The ASC's classroom has become a convenient and important meeting space for classes and meetings by various groups. In FY 2013-14, approximately 900 people have utilized the classroom for an estimated 200 hours of use. The welcome center manager has recruited and trained a core group of 53 volunteers to greet visitors and provide information.

Pedestrian Bridge over the Little River

Commissioner Troxler worked with the Governor's Office, Senate Protempore, and the Speaker of the N.C. House of Representatives to identify \$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. The DSRF estimates that approximately 200,000 people have crossed the bridge since July 2013, significantly improving visitor safety by providing an alternative to crossing Staton Road. Along with the new pedestrian bridge, the Hooker Falls parking lot was expanded to accommodate 60 more vehicles, thereby moving visitor traffic further away from the hazards of Staton Road.

DSRF Master Plan

The DSRF Master Plan, made possible by Commissioner Troxler's office, continued to develop over the year. Stage III of the plan weighed several options for DSRF future infrastructure and management strategies. Options will be integrated with the objectives of the DSRF stakeholders (including the Friends of DuPont Forest). As the DSRF's popularity reaches new levels, the Master Plan will become more and more vital to sustaining the user experience.

Forest Visitation

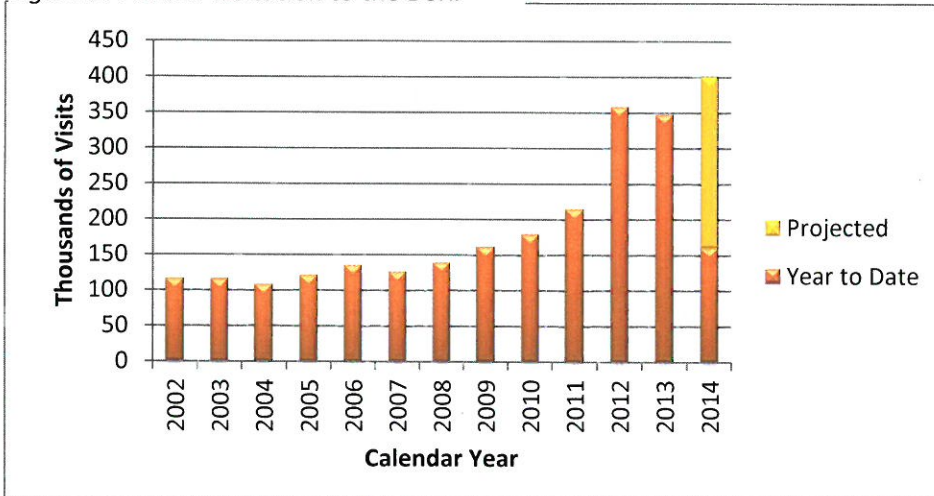
Visitation increased dramatically in late 2013 and into 2014, continuing a 3-year trend of visits well above historical averages (See Figure 1 below). A number of factors may be attributed to the growth:

- World-wide exposure of the DSRF through films such as 'The Hunger Games', produced on the forest in 2011.
- Local and regional tourism development agencies touting the DSRF as a Western North Carolina destination.

- The emergence of social media and blogging networks that can spread and cultivate information well beyond North Carolina and the Southeastern U.S.
- The mountain biking communities' and Transylvania County's promotion of the DSRF trail system as 'word-class'.

The waterfalls of the DSRF continue to be the main attraction, accounting for an estimated 70 percent of the visitors' reason for coming to the forest.

Figure 1: Annual Visitation to the DSRF



The increased use of the forest is a benefit to local economies, as well as offering a healthy social benefit to North Carolina's citizens. As with any growing endeavor, the responsibility to maintain a safe and clean environment at the forest and protect the natural resources has increased proportionally to the forest visitation. Some challenges the DSRF Staff encounters on a daily basis include:

- Littering (trash dumping and pervasive micro-litter)
- Vandalism (at shelters, trail signs, etc.)
- Alcohol use on forest
- Restroom facilities beyond capacity
- Parking in unsafe areas (along Staton Road)
- Gridlock or illegal parking that affects emergency vehicle access.
- Social trails created by users that destroy vegetation and accelerate erosion.
- Increased forest rule violations (rock climbing, swimming above waterfalls, etc.)

DSRF Volunteers

The DSRF relies on volunteer contributions to many aspects of forest operations; ranging from trail maintenance, facility maintenance, staffing the information desk at the visitor center, and various administrative functions. Over 5,100 hours of volunteer service were contributed to the forest in FY 2013-14. Leading volunteer organizations are Friends of DuPont Forest (FODF), DSRF regular volunteers, Southern Off-Road Bikers, Western Piedmont Community College (WPCC), and the Pisgah Trail Blazers (an

equestrian group). The DSRF staff works closely with many individuals and volunteer groups to increase accomplishments and save the state thousands of dollars each year.

DSRF Events

The DSRF and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services hosted several significant events on the forest in FY 2013-14. The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) held their annual meeting at the WNC Agricultural Center in September of 2013. Approximately 250 guests from the meeting attended a picnic at the High Falls Shelter. The DSRF and NCFS staff coordinated the parking, security, and hosting of the event, along with Commissioner Troxler and NCDA&CS leadership.

In February of 2014, the N.C. Agriculture and Forestry Awareness Commission held a meeting at the DSRF headquarters at Lake Julia. Approximately 60 people, including commission members, guests, and the public attended the meeting. The DSRF and NCFS staff supported the logistical needs of the meeting such as catering, information/technology setup, and transporting meeting attendees within the forest.

Permits and Reservation Accommodations

The DSRF permit program exists to accommodate certain uses that are typically excluded by the DSRF Administrative Rules (02 NCAC 60B .1001-.1032). Each permit request is evaluated by the DSRF staff to determine impacts to the forest's natural resources, road and trail system, and fellow users. Some permits, such as Commercial Use, have fees associated with levels of use, while the physically disabled visitors may obtain a vehicle pass upon request.

- Commercial Use - 51
 - Permits for camps and business for commercial use of the forest
- Special Use - 48
 - Disabled hunters, disabled anglers, equestrian facility rental, research permits.
- Disabled Visitor Passes - 71
 - Access to High Falls, Triple Falls, and the Covered Bridge.
- Picnic Shelter Reservations - 50
 - Picnic shelters at High Falls, Triple Falls, Lake Dense, and Guion Farm.
- Supervisor Level Permits - 6
 - Film production, training by military (U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Marine Corps), the DuPont Search and Rescue Experience.

In the Commercial Use category of permits, the forest was the site of a movie production during the first week of June, 2014. The DSRF staff worked closely with the film production to minimize visitor conflicts, public safety, and resource protection. The movie, entitled "Max", a MGM production and an adaptation of a true story about a "military working dog who returns from active service in Afghanistan traumatized by his handler's death. Its release is set for January 30, 2015. For a more complete story on the film see the online story at the Hendersonville Times' BlueRidgeNow website:

<http://www.blueridgenow.com/article/20140611/ARTICLES/140619991>

Also in June the DSRF issued a Commercial Permit for Trek Bicycle Company to host their international roll-out of a new line of mountain bikes on the forest. Journalists and editors came to test ride the new bikes throughout the forest. An article on the roll-out can be found at this link: <http://www.ashvegas.com/trek-bicycle-launches-new-high-tech-mountain-bike-on-transylvania-county-trails>

Forest Management

Per the DSRF Land Resource Management Plan, reviewed and approved by the DSRF Advisory Committee, management of multiple resources for the benefit of our citizens remains a high management priority for the NCFS and the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Wildlife Habitat Improvement and Timber Production

A timber harvest was completed in December, 2013. It encompassed 45 acres; within which, 20 acres was a clear-cut harvest, 5 acres a commercial thinning, 13 acres a white pine shelter-wood harvest, and 7 acres as a single-tree selection. The majority of the area was a mature white pine plantation. The logging operator was very conscientious of site conditions and visitor safety. The DSRF staff performed daily inspections with regards to contract administration, and the NCFS conducted inspections to ensure compliance with N.C. Forest Practice Guidelines related to Water Quality. Overall, the DSRF staff received almost no negative feedback on the harvest operations.

Approximately 10 acres of recently harvested hardwood forest were planted with shortleaf pine. The shortleaf pine was planted on a wide spacing and in irregular patterns to mimic a natural community. The overall objective of the harvest was to improve wildlife habitat and forest health by developing an early-stage successional forest community type.

Wildlife Resources

In cooperation with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission's (NCWRC) Game Lands Program, the DSRF staff helps to maintain wildlife food plots, assist with wildlife law enforcement, and encourages wildlife education programming. The DSRF issues seasonal hunting permits, which also provide access for disabled hunters and anglers. The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) maintains nine wildlife food plots throughout the forest by planting high-quality forage and maintaining edge habitat for game species. The NCWRC also hosted forty-three fishing programs at Lake Julia and the Little River, providing education for five hundred and eighteen participants.

Prescribed Burning

The DSRF Staff conducted four prescribed burns from late-February through March. All of the burn units were located along the Joanna Road corridor and totaled 152 acres. The Vista Trail burn (26 acres), Oak Tree Trail burn (20 acres), Briery Fork Trail burn (51 acres) and Pitch Pine Trail burn (45 acres) met the objectives of wildlife habitat enhancement, reducing fuel buildup, and breaking up occlusive patches of mountain laurel and rhododendron.

The Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) Control Program has been treating eastern and Carolina hemlocks in DSRF and Holmes Educational State Forest (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 B.R.I.D.G.E. crews have cut many dead and dying hemlocks along roads and trails in high use areas.

DSRF Infrastructure

Trail System

Hickory Mountain Loop, Shoal Creek, and Cedar Rock trails are being re-routed along more sustainable gradients and positions away from stream systems. The reroute designs were collectively determined by a group of trail designers, including FODF member, the Pisgah Area Southern Off-Road Bikers, and the NCFS. The entire project resulted in 9,200 feet of rerouted trails. The NCFS has provided matching labor for the project in trail closeout work. Funding for the construction is provided by the Friends of DuPont Forest, providing a total of \$21,400 for these improvements.

Current DSRF Facilities

The Girls Dining Hall, approved for demolition by the N.C. Council of State, was burned down as part of joint training exercise with Cedar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department. Two more buildings are approved for demolition and will be part of fiscal year 2014-15 facility plans.

- 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

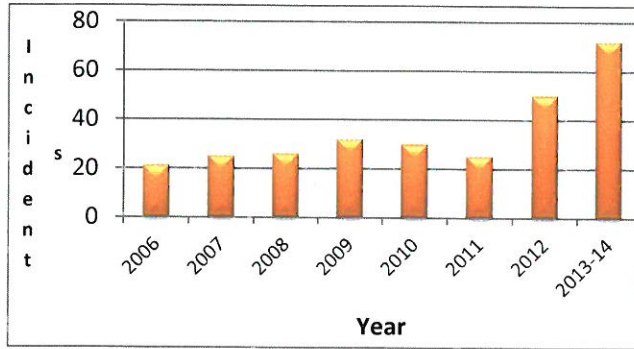
Incident Report

Forest staff and local emergency personnel respond to incidents in the forest. Incidents may involve trauma, illness, search and rescue, theft, Forest Rule violations, and assists with visitors that extend beyond routine actions by a Forest Ranger. The number of incidents has increased as visitation has increased (See Figure 2). The DSRF Staff believes that the public's access to the new Visitor Center has improved the ability of **visitor's** to quickly report incidents on the forest, thereby increasing the number of incidents reported. A summary of incident types:

- Medical Response- 13
- Forest Rule Enforcement- 15
- Search and/or Rescue- 9
- Trauma/Severe Injury- 13
- Assists (e.g., transport of elderly, vehicle trouble, disabled visitors, etc.) -22

To ensure public safety and adequate emergency response the DSRF staff Rangers seven days per week, as well as having Rangers assume on-call schedules after normal working hours.

Figure 2- DSRF Incidents by Year



Holmes Educational State Forest (HESF)

The HESF is managed as part of the DSRF, carrying out the education and promotion of forest resources as part of the NCFS mission. The HESF has historically been the 3rd most visited Educational State Forest in North Carolina. The HESF is staffed by two NCFS Rangers, who provide educational programs to schools and other groups March through November. The HESF staff maintains the facilities and trails at the forest with assistance from the DSRF maintenance staff. They also maintain a picnic area and group campground. Below are the statistics for HESF for July 2013 through June 2014, which are similar to the accomplishments from previous years, even though the HESF had a position vacant through the peak months of class offerings.

• Students in organized groups	2,379
• Individual visitors	30,679
• Campers using group camp	3,186
Total attendance	36,244
• Correlated classes	97
• Other classes	176
Total classes	273
• On-site students taught	2,164
• Off-site students taught	215
• Teaching hours off and on-site	128

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Plans for Fiscal Year 2014-15

Wildlife Habitat Improvement

The DSRF will continue to implement the Land Resource Management Plan by conducting shelter-wood harvests and thinning approximately 180 acres of white pine plantation and mixed hardwoods stands. As with most white pine plantations on the DSRF, the objective is to create a multi-age stand of various species of trees to create more habitat complexity for woodland animal and invertebrate species. Treatments in hardwood stands are designed to stimulate natural regeneration of important mast-producing species (*e.g.*, oaks and hickory) in the understory and mid-story of these locations.

Master Plan

It is anticipated that the DSRF Master Plan will be completed in 2014 and that DSRF staff will begin the implementation of new programs and projects associated with the planning. One particular aspect of the planning is the need to explore revenue programs on the forest that could supplement operating and personnel budgets.

Facilities: Repair and Renovation

The DSRF will be conducting repair and renovation on five different buildings using funds allotted in the 2013-14 R&R Funding Cycle. The projects will focus on older buildings to maintain structural integrity from weather, as well as improving energy efficiency.

Facilities: Demolishment

Two structures on the DSRF approved for demolition by the N.C. Council of State will be burned down and leveled by the DSRF and in a coordination of training with the Cedar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department. The structures known as the Cart House and the Boys' Dining Hall are remnants of the Summit Camp operations in the 1980's. The buildings were to the point of disrepair prior to being acquired by the State of North Carolina in the early 2000's.

Trails

With increased use and widespread popularity of the DSRF trail system, the staff will continue to address trail maintenance and sustainability issues with the support of the FODF and local stakeholders. Several trails will be candidates for re-location away from high-quality streams to reduce sedimentation into the forest's watersheds. Other trails will be receiving tune-ups on their current alignments to address water drainage, rider safety, and erosion.

Mobile Website for Visitor Information

The DSRF is planning to update the forest's website to be more interactive and enhance the visitor experience at DuPont. Features will include interactive maps, portals for reservations, forest information, safety alerts, and the ability to apply for permits on-line. The responsive website will be designed for compatibility with mobile devices, with the intent to be used for both planning trips and used while on the forest.

Contact Information

For further information, please contact:

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