

Report from the Forest Supervisor

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January 15, 2004

Two thousand three was a busy year at DuPont State Forest, and 2004 promises to be just as busy. This year began with a beautiful holiday weekend (Jan. 1-4) that brought several hundred people out to enjoy the forest. This report will cover highlights at the forest for 2003 and discuss coming events for 2004.

Forest Staff and Operating Hours – During 2003 the paid staff increased from two to seven. Paperwork has been submitted to fill our eighth position, a maintenance mechanic. This position should be filled by February. Names and pictures of our current staff members are displayed on the FODF web site.

Our office hours are Monday-Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. We try and keep someone in the office, but if you don't get a live person, leave a voice mail messages, and we will return your call. We always have rangers on duty on weekends and holidays, but they do not stay in the office.

We have received several calls asking what hours we are open. The forest is open seven days a week, year-round. All six parking areas are accessible from state DOT maintained roads. All forest roads maintained by DuPont staff are gated, but visitors are welcome to park in one of the six access areas and walk in any time. Overnight stays are not allowed in the forest or the parking areas.

Environmental Assessment - Dr. Gary Blank and NCSU graduate students under his direction have completed the fieldwork for the environmental assessment addressing impacts of recreation on the forest. The four recreational alternatives being considered are described on the FODF web site. A draft assessment document will be completed by the end of February. It will be reviewed by the Division of Forest Resources and will be available for public comment this spring.

Road and Trail Projects – Improvements to forest roads and trails are continuing, but at a slower pace due to winter weather conditions. Trail Dynamics, a local contractor specializing in trail work, completed re-routing portions of the Laurel Ridge and Corn Mill Shoals Trails last fall. Improvements to the Reasonover Creek Trail between Conservation Road and Reasonover Creek will be completed early this year. This is joint project, involving forest staff, volunteers and Trail Dynamics. A portion of the Buckhorn Creek Road was improved by cutting back brush, filling in gullies and sowing grass to control erosion. BSA Troop 701 is working on the Cannon Creek Trail, a new trail that will connect Buckhorn Creek Road to Rich Mountain Road. It is scheduled for completion this spring. Airstrip Trail has been extended north along the runway, and ties in to the Barn Trail. Volunteers associated with the International Mountain Bicycling Association constructed this new segment. It is currently closed to all users to allow the soil to settle and dry out. It will be open for use in March. DuPont State Forest staff has made improvements to Lake Imaging and Lake Dense Trails.

We have a new trail brochure out that has changes to some of the trails. A couple of trails have new names, and others have been combined with existing trails. We have adopted two new trails into the system, Bridal Overlook Trail and Hill Top Trail. We are working to get signs changed and new maps in the Kiosks. This will be completed by spring. Some but not all these changes are in the waterproof map produced by FODF.

Shelters - A new roof was constructed for the Dense Lake picnic shelter. We plan to put a new roof on the High Falls shelter this year. Volunteers helped construct four new picnic tables to replace worn ones. Shelter reservations were frequent during the summer and fall. High Falls and Triple Falls shelters were the most requested shelters. Eleven hundred and forty-six people enjoyed picnics at DuPont by reserving shelters during 2003. Hundreds more used the shelters on a first come, first served basis.

FODF volunteers constructed a small rain shelter near the Buck Forest access area. An additional shelter is planned for the Hooker Falls access area this year.

Vehicle Permits for Disabled Persons – Two hundred and fifty-four people enjoyed seeing the waterfalls at DuPont State Forest by obtaining a special permit allowing disabled persons to drive to High Falls and Triple Falls. These permits are available Wednesday through Sunday, but must be requested through the Forest Supervisor's office in advance. Vehicle permits were also issued to a few disabled hunters that were selected for hunts through the Game Lands Program.

Special Events and Activities– We had a group hike, a trail run, a 4-H Club work day, a Sierra Club picnic, helicopter rescue training, Project Learning Tree training and numerous other activities in 2003. Friends of DuPont Forest hosted a canoe outing for their members at Lake Julia in May. FODF arranged van tours to the waterfalls the last weekend in October. The Tobacco Free for Life Challenge bike event on September 27 was a big success. There was also a good turnout for the first ever YMCA Trail Marathon on Sunday October 19. About 250 participants and twice that many spectators enjoyed the event. Other groups that used the forest for events and meetings in 2003 were: Transylvania Art Guild, BSA-Terrora District, Eljapa Media Group, Pisgah Trail Blazers, N.C. National Parks, Parkway and Forest Development Council, and the DuPont Advisory Committee.

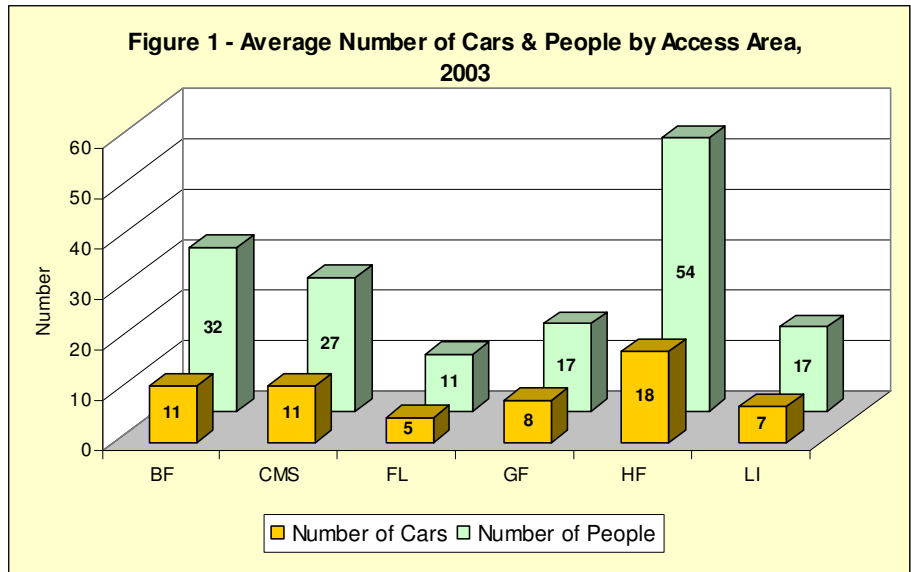
Field Training – Haywood Community College brought a recreation class out in February to tour and build some trail. The NC Justice Academy Trained at the Guion Farm. Practical training for chainsaw operators was conducted near the Guion Farm in October. The NC Department of Corrections conducted manhunt training for their personnel in November. A US Army Reserve Unit, the US Navy and US Air Force used the forest for training exercises during 2003. We also had a group of plant pathologist come for a tour and training.

Hunting Season – DuPont State Forest is in the NC Wildlife Commission's Game Lands Program. Small game season (rabbits, squirrels and grouse) is currently under way and runs through February 28, 2004. Hunting is by special permit on Fridays and Saturdays

only. Turkey season will start in April (Thurs., Fri. and Sat. only) and runs through mid May.

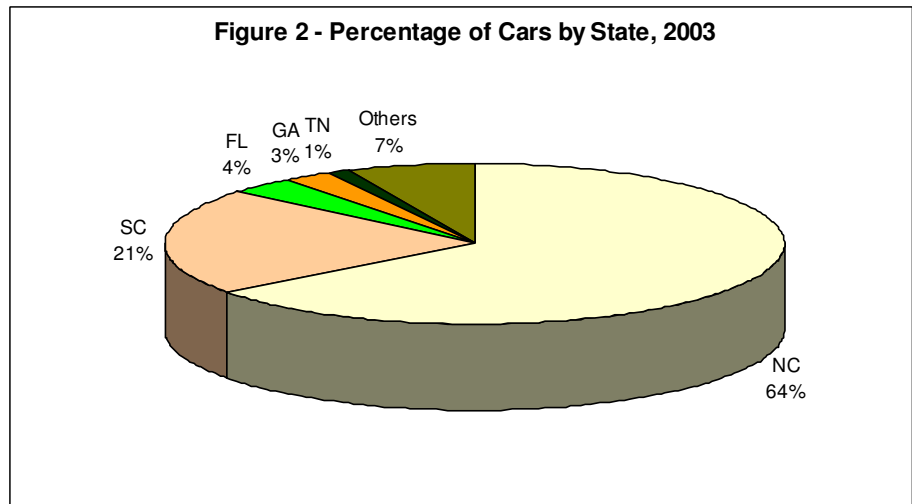
Visitor Center Update – New roof panels have been installed, and the roof will be completed by the end of January. The logs will then need to be power washed to remove mold and mildew. The next challenge is finding funds to complete the building, provide additional parking and construct public restrooms.

Forest Visitation for 2003 – Based on data collected from the six parking areas 116,000 visits were made to the forest last year. Hooker Falls access area was the busiest, averaging 18 vehicles and 54 people at any one time. See Figure 1. Buck Forest access area was the



second busiest averaging 11 vehicles and 32 people. Hooker Falls access area averages 3 persons per car and Buck Forest averages 2.9 persons per car. Over all the average is 2.5 persons per vehicle, and most visitors stay about ½ day.

Sixty four percent of the visitors in 2003 were from North Carolina, 21% from South Carolina and 4% from Florida, 3% from Georgia, 1% from Tennessee and the remaining 7% from 30 other states. See Figure 2.



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