United States Department of Agriculture

Francis Marion National Forest Draft Forest Plan

The Francis Marion National Forest, located within an hour's drive of Charleston, is enjoyed by millions of people every year. Encompassing 259,000 acres along South Carolina's coast, this natural area provides a wide array of ecological, economic and social benefits including: clean air and water; recreational opportunities; wildlife and plant habitat; scenic vistas; solitude; forest products such as timber; and more.

Why is a Forest Plan Important?

The Forest Service has revised the 1996 Francis Marion National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, commonly known as the forest plan. The 1996 plan focused on managing the Francis Marion in the wake of Hurricane Hugo. Since that time, the communities surrounding the forest have grown and changed significantly. The new draft forest plan recognizes the challenges associated with these changes, and the need to work across boundaries to address them.

A forest plan does not prescribe site-specific actions or projects. Rather, it provides broad, long-term goals and priorities that guide local Forest Service managers. The forest supervisor will approve a final plan in 2016.

How is this Draft Forest Plan Different?

Restore Waterflow and Hydrologic Function

Maintaining and improving waterflow and hydrologic function are two major emphasis areas in this draft plan. More than half of the Francis Marion is in riparian areas (e.g., swamps, wetlands, floodplains, marsh etc.) where the soil near the surface is saturated or covered with water. These areas provide year-round habitat for unique plant communities as well as wintering and breeding habitat for many waterfowl species, osprey and wading birds. Riparian areas also are critical for flood control and groundwater recharge.

Francis Marion National Forest after Hurricane Hugo in 1989 (above)

Francis Marion National Forest today

Restore Native Ecological Systems and Adapt to Changing Climate Conditions

Restoring longleaf pine will increase foraging and nesting habitat for the bald eagle, the frosted flatwoods salamander and the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. Highly diverse functioning longleaf pine communities are resilient to high winds, drought and insect outbreaks. Actively managed forests sequester more carbon and provide timber products that create jobs.

The Forest Service worked closely with The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to identify native ecological systems and species needs. As a result, this plan will lead to enhanced species habitat and ecosystem diversity by focusing on protecting nine threatened and endangered species and 65 species of conservation concern.

Prescribed Fire

The plan establishes a long-term goal of increasing prescribed burning at a rate of 30,000-50,000 acres per year. This increase will not only restore historic fire regimes that support plant and animal habitat, but will also provide economic and social benefits by reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

Other Social and Economic Benefits

The Francis Marion provides numerous areas where visitors can get outdoors and learn about local history. This plan establishes four resource integration zones, each with its own desired conditions for sustainable recreation opportunities, ecological restoration, social/cultural components and ecosystem services, including multiple uses.

Many of the restoration goals outlined above will lead to a steady flow of timber products that support local communities. Also, aligning recreation facilities and services with user demands and our ability to maintain them will provide high-quality recreation experiences for forest visitors and lead to greater connections between state, county and national forest trails. In addition, the plan further emphasizes safety and maintenance of infrastructure, including roads, trails and facilities.

How do I Comment on the Plan?

A copy of the draft plan, the draft environmental impact statement and other information can be found on the Web at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/fmplan.

Throughout the 90-day comment period, comments may be submitted at http://bit.do/FMPlanComments. In addition, hard-copy comments may be mailed to:

Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests
Francis Marion Plan Revision
4931 Broad River Road
Columbia, SC 29212.

We are recognized as champions of excellence in caring for the land and serving present and future generations. We collaborate with the public, partners and tribal governments to excel in natural and cultural resource leadership and management. Our resilient, adaptive, multi-use agency cultivates robust, native, diverse ecosystems through active land management. We guide the sustainability of natural, cultural, ecological and social resources. Our national forests are healthy and thriving.

The American people can count on the Forest Service – it's an awesome responsibility, and the rewards are as endless as the views. Our national forests, located in urban and rural landscapes, foster an array of opportunities to communities. We provide dynamic services to our neighbors and visitors that are integral to their quality of life, ranging from clean water and recreation to timber and wildlife viewing.

We represent the public we serve. We are an inclusive, learning culture – a career with the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests challenges employees to manage and care for more than 630,000 acres of South Carolina's most magnificent lands. Our employees work in a compassionate and nurturing environment where they are respected, valued and appreciated. We care for the people who care for the land.

- Vision Statement, Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests' Strategic Framework 2014

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