News Release

National Forests in Alabama – Public Affairs
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U.S. Forest Service Encourages the Public to Get Moving in Alabama's National Forests

(Montgomery, Al) March 30, 2009 ------Exercising does not have to be in a gym. Stepping outdoors can improve your overall health. The U.S. Forest Service is encouraging people to get moving in the National Forests in Alabama by exercising in the Bankhead, Talladega, Tuskegee and Conecuh National Forests. A drive to one of Alabama's national forests provides opportunities for hiking, running, walking, bicycling, and swimming, and canoeing. Exercising in the great outdoors can burn just as many calories as jogging on a treadmill, and an additional benefit includes watching nature.

"Exercising outdoors is one of the best things nature has to offer," said Miera C. Nagy, forest supervisor for the National Forests in Alabama. "Rather than staring at the same wall daily, you can witness changes in nature every minute while you're getting your heart rate up." Alabama's four national forests have more than 342 miles of various types of trails located in northwest, northeast, west central, east central, and south Alabama. The trails are easy to moderate in terms of difficulty. "Our trails are beautiful and peaceful landscapes that can be used for walking, running, or bicycling," Nagy said. "A short 30-minute workout in the national forest can reduce stress and be a form of cardiovascular exercise." In addition to trails, the Forest Service manages 27 recreation sites that include some beaches for those who enjoy swimming. There are also places for canoeing and other water sports.

A good rule of thumb when choosing an outdoor exercising activity in the national forest is to be prepared before you leave. According to Mike Cook, safety officer for the National Forests in Alabama, there are some things you should know before deciding to hit the trail for the first time to ensure a safe and pleasurable experience.

For example, visitors should contact a district office to obtain maps that highlight trails or discuss

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exercise plans with a recreation specialist. Cook said, "You should be familiar with the type of recreation activity the trail is designed for and be aware of the terrain, distance and elevation before using the trail."

Maps can provide detailed description about the trail and help in deciding which workout is right for you. In terms of outer wear, a good pair of trail hiking shoes can provide a harder sole for stepping on rocks and terrain changes will protect feet. Of primary importance is to be equipped with the following 10 essentials on all hiking trips: map, compass, whistle (3 blasts for help), flashlight, sharp knife, fire starter, water, first-aid kit, extra food and clothing suitable for the season.

For those who enjoy cycling as a form of exercising, mountain bicycles are the appropriate choice for designated mountain bike trails. There are also beach areas in the Bankhead, Conecuh, and Talladega National Forest (Shoal Creek and Oakmulgee Districts). Visitors interested in swimming should be aware that lifeguards are not present. If you're exercising in the national forest, it is always smart to bring items such as water to prevent dehydration, sunscreen to protect your skin, comfortable clothing appropriate for the season, and sunglasses for eye protection. "We want our visitors to be safe while they enjoy the national forests and improve their health," Cook said.

Developed recreation sites throughout the National Forests in Alabama are open for the 2009 recreation season. Visitors can enjoy additional outdoor activities such as fishing, boating, picnicking, bird-watching, camping, horse-back riding, and all-terrain vehicle riding on designated trails. Visit the Forest Service website at www.southernregion.fs.fed.us/alabama for maps, fees, site closures, restrictions and rules for visitors.

For more information about National Forests in Alabama recreational activities, please contact a district office nearest you or contact the Supervisor's Office in Montgomery at (334) 832-4470. Bankhead District in Double Springs - (205) 489-5111, Conecuh District in Andalusia - (334) 222-2555, Shoal Creek District in Heflin - (256) 463-2272; Talladega District in Talladega - (256) 362-2909; Oakmulgee District in Centreville - (205) 926-9765, and the Tuskegee District in Tuskegee - (334) 727-2652.

- ("Get Moving in Your National Forest" Exercising Opportunities chart included)-