

News Release

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National Forest Surveys Underway on Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests

(Columbia, SC, September 26, 2007) The Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests officially kicks off its National Use Visitor Monitoring program today. Visitors may see Forest Service and contract employees conducting surveys in developed and dispersed recreation sites and along Forest Service roads. They will be wearing bright orange vests near signs that read "Traffic Survey Ahead."

"These well-trained interviewers are conducting surveys to find out about our visitors' experiences when they visit the national forests," said Joe Robles, Recreation Program Manager for the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests. "The surveys, which are voluntary and confidential, help us with forest planning and help local communities with tourism. We are asking anyone who sees an interviewer to pull over and tell them about their experiences, good or bad, in our forests."

Each national forest in the country has conducted at least one survey. Surveyors are returning to South Carolina five years after the original surveys were conducted to update previously gathered information and look at recreation trends over time.

"These important surveys provide us with an estimate of how many people recreate on federal lands, the activities they engage in and how satisfied they are with their visit," said Robles. "In addition, many small towns throughout the state are struggling and tourism may help strengthen their communities. The surveys help us better understand the economic impact the forest are having on these areas."

The basic interview lasts approximately eight minutes. Questions include: where visitors recreated on the forest, how many people they traveled with, how long they were on the forest, which other recreation sites they visited while on the forest, and how satisfied they were with the facilities and services provided.

Local, state and national forest planners, as well as the U.S. Congress, will use the information collected in this study to help the forests meet the public's needs and desires.

For more information about this program, visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum> or call Robbin Cooper at (803) 561-4077.

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