



Allegheny Brambles

An informational article about the Allegheny National Forest

United States
Department of Agriculture

Forest Service
P. O. Box 847
Warren, PA 16365-0847

Contact: Stephen Miller
Telephone: 814/723-5150

July ??, 2004
DRAFT

ITS ONLY BEEN A YEAR?

What the Forest Service has been doing since the July 21, 2003 storm

For the past year, life at the Allegheny National Forest has been hectic. A flurry of activity surrounded the Forest in the days following the July 21st storm last year. And over the past year the amount of activity has only increased, as scoping letters and decision memos are completed.

Of the over one half million acres that make up the Forest, scattered patches within an area of almost 100,000 acres were affected by the storm. In the first few hours after the storm, making sure visitors and employees were safe was the priority. While some people were definitely a little soggy, no one was seriously injured or trapped in a remote area of the Forest. After ensuring that people were safe, it was time to start clearing high use roads and trails. When that was done, Forest Service employees began the task of determining where the damage was.

Trails

Roughly 579 miles of trail and road were damaged by the storm. In the past 12 months, 521 miles of trail and road have been cleared and re-opened thanks to the efforts of many volunteers, special interest groups and Forest employees. Most of the trails affected were cleared within the first two months, and the Allegheny Snowmobile Loop was cleared and opened in time for the 2003-2004 riding season. Of the 19 trails affected by the storm, only a few remain closed. Within the next few weeks, portions of the Mill Creek trail will be cleared as part of chainsaw training completed by Forest Service employees.

Groups such as the North Country Trail Association, Allegheny National Forest Chapter, have contributed a great deal of time and assistance in clearing the hiking trails. The North Country Trail Association received a grant from their National Chapter, which was used to hire a professional sawyer (chainsaw operator) who cleared the sections of the North Country trail affected by the storm.

Timber Salvage

Bradford Deputy District Ranger Nancy Larson says, "by September of 2003 the Forest Service had a good idea of where the impacts were". The original estimate showed 9,500 acres were damaged by the storm. With aerial observation, geographical information systems (GIS) data, and many, many hours of on the ground human effort, it was determined that the actual damage comprised approximately 9,333 acres.

Of the 9,333 acres damaged in the storm, an estimated 4,500 are scattered across areas normally managed for timber. These 4,500 acres provide an opportunity for salvage harvest projects. However, not all of this acreage is being salvaged. Approximately 200 acres were easily added to existing timber sale projects, including blowdown on the Timberline ATV trail. The remaining 4,300 acres needed more extensive planning and analysis to determine where salvage activities would occur. To date, 19 projects have been developed using a more streamlined documentation tool called the Limited Timber Harvest

Categorical Exclusion. This allows for a more timely and efficient response to the salvage task. Three sales using this method have already been awarded, with more sale advertisements scheduled in the coming weeks.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) worked with the Forest Service to address possible negative effects for threatened or endangered species living on the Forest. This survey was one of many conducted during the past year. Additional surveys looked at plants, soil conditions and road needs, to name just a few.

The USFWS, public volunteers and groups are not the only assistance the Forest has received over the past year. Thirty-five Forest Service employees from 12 other forests around the country and one Regional Office employee have come to the Allegheny to help salvage trees that fell during the storm. By the time their work is completed, they will have provided over 90 weeks of service to the Allegheny. This is in addition to the efforts of the many ANF staff working on salvage projects since last September.

Considerable acreage, totaling over 4,800 acres, will not receive any salvage harvesting. Some of this acreage is located in project areas while the majority of the acreage is in management areas or zones that do not emphasize timber management. These acres contribute to the overall health of the forest.

Riparian areas are being left to protect and restore streamside areas, a desired future condition in the current Forest Plan. Other areas are being left as they are because salvage is not a necessary function for these areas. In these areas, the fallen trees will provide habitat for animals such as ruffed grouse, and contribute to the future life of the Forest through the decaying process.

Research Opportunities

Parts of the damage that occurred on the Forest were located in the Tionesta Scenic Area and Research Natural Area. Overall, this old-growth area received almost 994 acres of damage, which will now become areas of new growth once seedlings establish themselves. This will allow the public and scientists to see and study the interactions of the storm disturbances and beech bark disease in an old-growth forest.

There was also the loss of two long-term studies as a result of the storm. One project, begun in 1936, was located on the Kane Experimental Forest (KEF) and examined the effects of managing for certain species. The second long-term study, also on the KEF, studied crop-tree management.

However, despite the losses suffered by the Northeastern Research Station Buckaloons Lab, some good has come from the damage. According to Dr. Susan Stout, of the Northeastern Research Station, “as part of the public involvement process associated with the possibility of salvaging the timber ... we asked the public to help us identify high-priority research questions stimulated by the storm”. With the public’s help three new studies have been launched and two new studies are being designed. The three studies that have been implemented are a comprehensive GIS database analysis of the storms patch size and distribution impact, looking at impacts from the peach bark beetle in areas that will and won’t be salvaged, and studying the patterns of value loss in wood left in the forest for different periods of time.

The first of the two studies being designed will look at the recovery processes in windthrow patterns of different sizes. The second would involve re-starting the long-term study that looks at controlling species composition. Dr. Stout states that “good forestry research has been conducted in this area for more than 70 years, [but] we’re just nearing the end of the first generation of trees that we’ve studied. It would be very exciting to continue the study”.

Forest Supervisor Kevin Elliott expresses his pleasure that “one year later we are beginning to salvage the timber from the storm while maintaining public involvement and following the guidelines and standards to protect our other natural resources”. He sums up the year by saying “none of the accomplishments of the past year would have been possible without assistance from so many people who have given their time and energy to help the Forest in so many ways. The help given to us is appreciated and will not soon be forgotten”.



damage

Aerial photo of damage, taken during initial assessment of the



but has since been repaired.

The Twin Lakes Trail Bridge was damaged during the storm,



Forest.

Area of blowdown located within the Kane Experimental