



NATIONAL FORESTS IN NORTH • CAROLINA

USDA FOREST SERVICE, 160A ZILICOA STREET, ASHEVILLE, NC 28801

NEWS • RELEASE

Contact: Alice Cohen, 828-257-4258

1/19/2010

For Immediate Release

Roan Mountain Recreation Area Revamped in 2010

ASHEVILLE, NCRoan Mountain Recreation Area will be open only June 6th thru July 7th in 2010. Over \$700 thousand from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) will fund renovations to the facilities and roads at the site.

The dilapidated 1960s restroom facility near the Cloudland parking lot will be replaced with a new 8-unit accessible restroom facility in the same location. The existing trail system servicing the observation deck in the Rhododendron Garden will be rehabilitated and resurfaced, increasing the trail's safety. The observation deck itself is unsafe and will be replaced. Additionally, the main paved road leading to the Cloudland parking lot will be resurfaced to increase rideability and visitor safety. Before June 6 and after July 7, the area will be closed to motor and walk-in traffic due to public safety considerations surrounding the use of heavy equipment and construction equipment traffic. The nearby Appalachian Trail (AT) will not be affected. However, the access trail from the AT to the Cloudland parking lot will be closed.

This work is to be accomplished through contracts creating jobs in the area. Prospective contractors can find out which ARRA contracts are available by visiting www.FedBizOpps.gov. To locate contracts specific to the National Forests in North Carolina click on the "Search Recovery Opportunities" tab and using the "refine results" tab specify "Department of Agriculture, Forest Service" for agency and "EROC east" for location.

The 2010 open season for the area will include the annual Rhododendron Festival

=more=

held in June. The festival was started 60 years ago and celebrates the blooming of the rhododendron on Roan Mountain with related events in the nearby town of Bakersville, NC. Though the area will be closed for the later part of the season, visitors to the area can enjoy the blankets of pink rhododendron blossoms when they peak generally in mid-June. “We understand it will be an inconvenience for the public to not access the area later in the season, but hope the improvements will create a safer and more enjoyable visit next year”, stated Appalachian District Ranger, Tina Tilley. The normal \$3 per vehicle user fee will be dropped from June 6 thru July 7, 2010. The site is scheduled to reopen in time for the 2011 rhododendron season. Alternative nearby recreation sites, all in Tennessee include Carver’s Gap trailhead, Twin Springs Picnic Area, and Roan Mountain State Park.

In addition to the facility work, there will be ARRA-funded vegetation restoration work on the grassy balds at Roan Mountain. The work will involve mowing, weed-eating, and the use of chainsaws to control trees, shrubs and blackberries from encroaching on the sensitive species native to the area. High-elevation grassy balds represent a very rare plant community and Roan Mountain contains some of the most extensive and pristine grassy balds in the Southern Appalachians. The native, sensitive vegetation now inhabits only a small fraction of its former area. The scope of this project includes national forest lands in North Carolina and Tennessee. This project is a partnership with the National Forests in North Carolina, Cherokee National Forest, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, and the N.C. Natural Heritage Program.

For more information on these projects, contact Tina Tilley, District Ranger, at 828-682-6146.

###