



# NEWS RELEASE



## *National Forests in Alabama*

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **U.S. Forest Service Encourages the Public to “Get More Out of Life” By Spending Time in Alabama’s National Forest**

(Montgomery, Al) March 15, 2007---- The U.S. Forest Service is kicking-off their 2007 recreation season encouraging people to “Get More out of Life” by connecting to nature in one of Alabama’s National Forests. Visitors looking for something different when planning vacations, reunions, day trips, or places to exercise can visit recreation sites in the Bankhead, Conecuh, Talladega, and Tuskegee National Forests. Visitors of all ages can use group picnic shelters, developed campgrounds, fishing ponds, sandy-white beaches, and numerous trails designated for hiking, horse-back riding, mountain bikes, bird watching, and off-road vehicles.

Miera Crawford, forest supervisor of Alabama’s four national forests, said national forests are beautiful places that will allow you to enjoy the beauty of nature. “Many people visit the forest daily to exercise on our hiking trails, or they just take a break to eat lunch at our picnic shelters,” said Crawford. “Spending time in a national forest is wonderful if you’re looking for something more when it comes to an outdoor recreation experience.”

The Forest Service manages 27 recreation sites and more than 331 miles of trails throughout the National Forests in Alabama. The Bankhead, Talladega, and Conecuh National

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Forests have developed campgrounds where visitors enjoy electricity, warm showers, and other modern conveniences. Tuskegee National Forest has areas for primitive camping, picnicking, hiking, mountain biking, horse-back riding, and fishing.

“If you are looking for a site to have a reunion or group event where everyone can enjoy outdoor activities in one location, then the National Forests in Alabama is the ideal place”, said Joe Nicholson, recreation unit leader for the Bankhead, Talladega, Tuskegee, and Conecuh National Forests. A total of nine sites include group shelters where between 25 to 100 people can assemble. All shelters come with water and cooking grills nearby and some have electrical outlets. The cost ranges from a \$3 per vehicle recreation fee for first come shelters, to a \$30 reservation fee for the largest shelter.

According to Nicholson, forests have some group shelters that are on a first come-first serve basis, and some that require reservations. “Developed recreation sites like Corinth and Clear Creek in northwest Alabama and Open Pond in south Alabama, are one stop spots for numerous outdoor recreation activities,” added Nicholson. Many of the recreation sites with group shelters are surrounded by amenities like cooking grills, picnic tables, hiking and bicycle trails, playgrounds, beaches, fishing piers, boat ramps, and campgrounds that have trailer campsites with utilities hookups and warm showers.

“Thanks to the Forest Service Recreation Fee Demonstration program, the Forest Service can provide more conveniences and recreation options to the public,” said Nicholson. Last year the Forests collected \$230,658 in recreation user fees that will stay in Alabama to improve and maintain National Forest recreation areas. There were approximately 1.3 million recreation visitor days in 2006.

Additional family activities on the national forests include the annual youth fishing derbies, National Trails Day and Public Lands Day events. Visitors can exercise using a mountain bike, walk a trail, swim at the beach, or go horseback riding using designated trails. "Our goal is for everyone to have a pleasant experience during their stay in our national forest, said Nicholson."

If you are planning a trip to a national forest and need discounts, the Forest Service offers annual passes for day-use areas that entitle the holder to unlimited use in most day-use fee areas throughout the National Forests in Alabama. "If you're going to use the day-use areas regularly, purchasing an annual pass for \$30 will save money," said Nicholson. Annual passes are good through each calendar year. Other federal discount programs are Interagency Senior and Access Passes that allow a 50 percent discount for camping and day-use fees. The passes can also be used at other federal recreation sites.

The Forest Service launched a "Get More Out of Life" public relations campaign last year to encourage the public to make the switch and try something new by visiting one of Alabama's national forests. According to Forest Supervisor Crawford, posters, recreation directories, and information cards were distributed to numerous visitor centers, chambers of commerce, and convention and visitor bureaus throughout the state. Crawford said, "If you are interested in learning more about what we have to offer, just contact a Forest Service office in Alabama."

For more information about recreation sites or outdoor events, contact the nearest Forest Service district office or the central 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.

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(2007 Recreation Schedule attached)