

El Bosque Pluvial

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A Unique Coalition = A Public Service Winner!



March 15 marked the inauguration of an innovative public service project – the new Rio Sabana Recreation Area on El Yunque National Forest land in the Municipality of Naguabo. Under construction since 2007 at a cost of over 1 million dollars, this soon to be opened recreation area on El Yunque's southern border includes 10 brand-new picnic shelters, paved parking for 25 vehicles, durable, paved walkways and new sanitary restroom facilities. Construction activities also included restoration of the 2.5 mile (4 kilometer) Rio Sabana Nature Trail and reopening of a 0.8 mile (1.3 kilometer) section of PR road 191 leading to the new area.

The northernmost sector of the Naguabo Municipality lies within the El Yunque National Forest's Luquillo Mountain range – the spectacular peaks and rushing rivers in this area are among the northeast corridor's most prominent landmarks.

Some of the rivers feature dams that capture a portion of their waters for use in surrounding communities— one of them feeds a small hydroelectric power plant that supplies electrical energy to Naguabo homes and businesses – these rivers provide potable water, a vital resource for surrounding barrios. With the rapidly approaching threat of global climate change and its effect on water availability, the water collection and production capability of these rivers is of immense consequence to the area's future

This unique venture marks the first time that the US Forest Service, and the Naquabo Municipality, augmented by an alliance with the Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority (PRASA) and the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA), have pooled their efforts to coordinate and manage a mutually beneficial public service project.



Commonwealth, federal and municipal executives who took part in the inauguration ceremony included **Governor Luis Fortuño**, El Yunque National Forest Supervisor **Pablo Cruz**, Naguabo municipality Mayor **Maritza Melendez Nazario** and **Eng. Jose Ortiz**, Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority Director.

Governor Fortuño sponsored the original funding request for this project in 2007, while he was serving as Puerto Rico's Resident Commissioner to the US Congress.

During his welcoming address, Forest Supervisor **Pablo Cruz** commented: "Construction of the Rio Sabana Recreation Area was completed in 2010 – it was built to enhance recreational opportunities in the southern sector of the Forest. Today's inauguration ceremony celebrates the impending opening of a highly anticipated cultural and historic venue – of equal significance, it marks a distinct, first-ever partnering of federal, commonwealth and municipal organizations to develop an essential municipal public service project – a unique template that can be straightforwardly replicated whenever federal and commonwealth agencies and municipal partners again consider the advantages of joint public service projects."

The new Rio Sabana Recreation Area located at PR road 191, Km 2.0 in Naguabo, will be opened to the public soon – The area will be open daily from June 1 until August 15. It will be closed during September — it will be open on weekends only from Oct.1 to May 31.

The Forest Supervisor's Message

Greetings! We are making significant progress as we continue to tackle problems and questions affecting El Yunque's future. Our determined efforts to enhance the value of the Forest are beginning to show signs of success. However, this complex endeavor requires everyone's collaboration if we are to prevail. As you read the descriptions of some of our current projects, programs and planned activities in the pages of this newsletter, I ask you all to do some serious thinking about how you can apply your skills and talents to help us achieve the tasks essential to our mission. El Yunque has a host of opportunities ready and waiting for you! For example, you can learn about El Yunque's wild animals by helping biologists work to recover endangered species, or work with Forest engineers, repairing and re-constructing nature trails – if you are a 'people-person' our Visitor Information Service has opportunities for guides and greeters at our renowned El Portal Rain Forest Center – we urgently need your help – together, we can carry-on our vital conservation and recreation missions at their present level of excellence! Contact Volunteer Coordinator, Delia Gomez, at 787 888 5657 and volunteer your services today!

I am extremely pleased to report that after twelve years of development, the Rio Sabana Recreation Area became a reality when Governor Luis Fortuño formally inaugurated the newly refurbished venue on March 15, 2011. The intricate development process was tricky – first, the planning procedure had to be accomplished within a rigid framework of federal and commonwealth regulations. Next, a mutually agreeable level of understanding had to be established between US Forest Service, Commonwealth and Municipal agencies and public utility companies. While all this was taking place, design and construction activities progressed steadily until final completion.

All who participated in this unique achievement emerged as winners! After forty years, communities adjacent to the Forest's southern border will once again have access to this culturally historic and ecologically matchless area – Public utility companies will continue

to benefit from inexhaustible water resources – a robust flow that powers a hydroelectric plant and provides fresh, clean water to surrounding communities. We expressly applaud the municipality of Naguabo for its determined and well disposed resolution to operate and maintain the new Rio Grande facility – a fine example of practical and functional partnership!

We were also terrifically impressed with the 'Gateway' community of Cubuy – they have shown a tremendous capacity for tenacity and resilience while working to define proper solutions for a lengthy list of security and access challenges. Adjacent island municipalities should carefully study Cubuy's exemplary small-community empowerment formula – independent of external government assistance!

We persist in our collaborative efforts to designate PR road 186 as a Scenic Byway. Led by the Canovanas and Rio Grande municipalities, the first phase of this key plan – a formal request for consideration by the Federal Highway Administration – is close to completion. PR road 186, locally identified as the El Verde-Cubuy highway, is endowed with numerous cultural, natural, and scenic attributes. Aside from its role as an essential connection between two thriving communities, it accesses the island's sole Girl Scout camp; the University of Puerto Rico's Ecological Research Station; the Quebrada Grande Picnic Grounds and the entrance to the El Toro National Wilderness Area's nature Trails. Presently, the El Verde-Cubuy highway is poorly maintained – garbage is regularly dumped along the road and facilities are often vandalized. Our mutual intent is to re-establish this precious setting as a safe and enjoyable environment for tourists and island families to enjoy!

During the past decade the country and this Forest have experienced mutually debilitating fiscal uncertainties – We are toiling vigorously to move El Yunque along the road to becoming a more aggressive and viable public-service organization. We unceasingly seek-out and test innovative efficiencies and improvements. Our well considered and carefully crafted reorganization plan has been approved by the Forest Service and will be implemented shortly. This fresh, stream-

lined administrative structure will help to reduce unnecessary costs, while enhancing our ability to provide services to the public and stewardship for El Yunque!

In closing, I want to reaffirm our commitment to safety. Our Forest's skilled and highly motivated staff members continually review personal and visitor safety measures and doctrines – modifying and adjusting them as necessary. This ingrained 'safety first' strategem ensures that your future day-trips will always be secure, relaxing, trouble-free and enjoyable! If you have any suggestions about how we might improve our safety measures, please e-mail them to Forest Safety Officer, Edgardo Martinez (emartinez@fs.fed.us).

If you find the stories and features contained in our quarterly Forest newsletter both useful and enjoyable – let us know – if you have any thoughts on how we can do our job better, or ideas for stories or features you'd like to see in future issues -- e-mail them directly to: El Bosque Pluvial Newsletter Editor, Alan Mowbray (amowbray@fs.fed.us), or call him at 789 888 5654.

Finally, a reminder – if you haven't done so already, please begin making your contingency plans for the upcoming 2011 hurricane season – it's less than two months away!

Thanks for your continued participation and support – please strongly consider volunteering a small portion of your time and your valuable skills and talents to El Yunque – the US National Forest System's only tropical rain forest!

See you soon!



Notable Notes/Quotable Quotes!

⇒ **El Yunque Quarter update** -- El Yunque's official twenty-five cent coin will be the first of its type to be released by the US Mint next year – **Edward Moy**, Director of the US Mint, plans to attend the inaugural ceremony at the El Portal Rain Forest Center, tentatively scheduled for January 2012.



⇒ **During National Volunteer Week** (April 10 - April 16, 2011) we note with awe the outstanding contributions of the **913 volunteers** who selflessly donated a whopping **10,000 + labor hours** to the El Yunque National Forest – saving the US Forest Service an incredible **\$213, 597** over the last fiscal year – Thanks Volunteers – We would be lost without your vital contributions!



⇒ **Forest Supervisor Pablo Cruz** and Ecosystem Team Leader **Pedro Rios** express their sincere appreciation to the seventeen dedicated attendees who participated in the March 31, 2011 **'Forest Planning Rule and Proposed Environmental Impact Statement Forum'** at El Yunque's Catalina Service Center – attendees comprised a diverse and enthusiastic group from **UPR Mayaguez, The Sierra Club, The US Fish & Wildlife Service**, and the **Municipality of Naguabo**, as well as several FS staff and – a vitally important 'volunteer' – our revered former Forest Supervisor and retired IITF Director, **Dr. Frank Wadsworth** – thanks to all for contributing to this worthwhile and mutually instructive forum!



⇒ **Volunteers from the Washington Montessori School** in Connecticut worked alongside Forest Biological Science Technicians **Ben Fuentes** and **Anastacio 'Baby' Gomez**, on an important re-forestation project along PR road 966 – during a break, the students were given an educational lecture on tropical plant life by El Yunque Tropical Vegetation Specialist **Luis Rivera** – at the end of the day, the students were tired but thrilled at what they had learned and had helped to accomplish!



⇒ **Amigos del Yunque** and **American Airlines** joined Forest Supervisor **Pablo Cruz** in a press conference called to launch an all-out effort to educate the public about the **island-wide littering problem**. During the press conference all public and civic organizations were encouraged to engage in an educational campaign designed to bring to a halt the intolerable littering habits seen in many sectors of our society.



⇒ **On March 16, 2011 the El Portal Rain Forest Center** broke all previous records for single-day attendance – a whopping 1,006 persons! El Portal becomes a more-and-more popular eco-tourism venue every year!

More Kids in *OUR* Woods!



Evidence suggests that today's children are shifting away from outdoor activities to a 'virtual' indoor reality. This disconnect from nature has serious long-term implications for the health and well-being of our country's youth and the future of our public lands. Young people who grow up without a connection to nature may lack a vital understanding of the environmental processes and the role human behavior plays in them, or an equally important awareness of the value of public lands.

Richard Louv, author of the seminal study *'Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder'*, is passionate about the potential repercussions of today's youth losing a personal connection to the outdoors. According to Louv, 'We care for what we know and love, if today's children don't have transformational experiences in the outdoors during their youth, they are unlikely, as adults, to be engaged in public policy deliberations about our forests or about environmental issues such as global warming and climate change.'

The concept of "More Kids in the Woods" originated during the Forest Service's Centennial in 2005. At the Centennial Congress, participants noted the value of conservation education and the power of recreation in forging connections to the land. They called on the Forest Service to enhance its youth programs in order to build a strong future generation of natural resource stewards and leaders, and to provide meaningful, hands-on experience with public lands to children, especially elementary and middle school students.



El Yunque's **Visitor Information Service Team** responded to the call – Nature Interpreters **Cynthia Manfred, Francisco Torres, Edwin Velazquez** and **Aurea Moragon**, under the able direction of Conservation Education Director **Blanca Ruiz** and VIS Leader **Victor Cuevas**, convey the More Kids in the Woods program and message to elementary and middle schools and 'Head Start' programs in the surrounding communities of Luquillo, Fajardo and Naguabo – Nature Interpreters use graphics and environmentally themed 'games' to attract the young students interest. Before leaving each site, they provide teachers with pre-programmed conservation education materials, and describe how best to use them – school visits are swiftly followed-up by teacher supervised 'field trip' visits to El Yunque, where the students apply their new conservation know-how, performing programmed 'hands-on' conservation activities.



In 2010 El Yunque's More Kids in the Woods Team members visited six local schools, reaching out to over 150 students, most of whom later experienced their first-ever exciting "Forest Field-Trip" experience – in 2011, the number had soared to almost 400 students – and had expanded to include schools and Head-Start programs in Rio Grande, and as far away as Humacao and the San Juan suburb of Rio Piedras!

Bottom line? The young folks were enthralled with their new-found knowledge and the never-before experienced opportunity to 'touch and feel' the amazingly biodiverse and beautiful tropical forest in their 'backyard'!

Well done El Yunque VIS Team!

The Weeks Act — a Century of Conservation Progress!



This year marks the centennial of the ‘Weeks Act – a landmark forest watershed protection and land acquisition measure passed by the US Congress in 1911. The act designated funds to the Secretary of Agriculture for the “protection of forested watersheds from fires” and “coordination of such efforts with any state or private holdings that hold these resources.” Most importantly, the Weeks Act authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to “accept on behalf of the United States, the title of any lands within the exterior boundaries of national forests at a fair market price” and that “lands so acquired shall be permanently reserved as national forest lands.”

In the final decades of the 19th century, environmental conditions in the eastern part of the nation were dismal, and becoming worse – as new railroads were opened, new settlements sprang-up – intense farming and logging activities thrived – all with little or no watershed management – ecosystems that had taken countless centuries to develop were shattered in a matter of years.

In 1864, when George Perkins Marsh wrote and published his eye-opening essay ‘Man and Nature’ the public suddenly became aware of the havoc taking place in the country’s forests. Private organizations began lobbying Congress to protect existing forests and create new ones. In 1891, Congress passed the Forest Reserve Act – The president could now independently set-aside lands as federal reserves.

In 1906, US Representative John W. Weeks was unsuccessful in an attempt to pass legislation which would have enabled the purchase of private lands for forest reserves – after the ‘Big Burn’ consumed three million acres of forest in Idaho, Montana and Washington in 1910 with the loss of 87 lives, public sentiment about forest protection was re-energized—in 1911, Weeks was able to successfully pass a new conservation law that focused on land acquisition within navigable watersheds to be preserved as national forests – when combined with the earlier Forest Reserve Act and the later Clark-McNary act of 1924, the necessary tools for forest conservation were finally in place!

Full realization of the Weeks Act’s mandates didn’t take place in Puerto Rico’s Luquillo National Forest (today’s El Yunque National Forest) until the mid-1930’s – although this lush tropical forest in the Luquillo mountains had been managed as a watershed, soil and timber reserve since the mid-19th century by the Spanish Crown.

By 1911, the forest’s twelve thousand acres were surrounded by various agricultural ventures (mainly sugar and fruit plantations) which took a massive toll on ‘natural’ ground cover much as it had in 19th century America – between 1934 and 1945, over forty private and state land lots were purchased by the Forest Service – with a government investment of 150 thousand dollars, the forest was almost doubled in size – the agency incorporated lands containing the headwaters of seven rivers – a vital conservation of watersheds for the islands future. Regrettably, some 250 families within the area were suddenly dislocated and jobless – the Forest Service swiftly implemented a community relocation program – providing the families with new homes and agriculturally suitable land at no cost – in less than 18 months, 248 families had been successfully and peacefully relocated!

Once the land had been incorporated, Civilian Conservation Corps recruits began the reforestation process, planting thousands of tropically adapted and native tree species – sixty-five years later it is difficult to tell the ‘new’ trees from those of the primeval forest!

The watershed and rehabilitation resources provided through the Weeks Act have guaranteed a stable water supply to over a quarter of a million island residents up to the present day – and, equally significant, it furnished the necessary firm foundation for the subsequent 1964 Wilderness Act, the 1970 Clean Air Act, the 1972 Clean Water Act and the 1973 Endangered Species Act – it is one of the most significant and far-reaching conservation measures of the twentieth century!

Forest Clean-up Days – ‘Cool’ Fun – Great Results!



By *Edgardo Martinez, El Yunque National Forest Safety Officer*

El Yunque’s famed Clean-up Day events just keep getting better and better! This year marked the 21st anniversary of this annual activity – early Saturday morning, April 9th, volunteers assembled as usual at the El Portal Rain Forest Center’s upper parking lot, where they signed in – they were quickly formed into teams and dispatched to locations throughout the Forest.

On the previous Friday, April 8th, a related Clean-up activity took place at the recently inaugurated Rio Sabana Recreation Area on the Forest’s southern edge in the municipality of Naguabo.

Activities held at both locations were enormously successful!

A quick check of the sign-up record revealed that 652 volunteers, mostly from the surrounding municipalities of **Rio Grande, Naguabo, Fajardo and Luquillo**, augmented by a number of eager helpers such as **Boy Scout** and **Girl Scout** troops from various island locations, had joined with Forest Service staff and our long-time partner and enthusiastic sponsor, **American Airlines** to pick-up and bag an astonishing total of just over **three tons** of trash and scrap-metal from El Yunque and Rio Sabana roads and trails!

The amount of trash collected was **two tons less** than that of 2010’s El Yunque clean-up event – a hopeful signal that the Forest’s ‘**Pack-it-in/Pack-it-out**’ program, which encourages visitors to responsibly remove their trash when they depart the Forest, is finally beginning to pay dividends!

El Yunque Administrative staff members, **Elba Garcia, Lucy Cruz** and **Sharitza Pomales**, among others ensured the overall success of the two events – El Yunque Website Manager **Aurea Moragon’s** tall and talented son **Sebastian**, as family conservation idol ‘**Woodsy Owl**’, enchanted the many children attending the event with their parents – Information Specialist **Myrna Tirado’s** husband **Raul Santiago** was as fascinating as ever in his role as Forest Service icon ‘**Smokey Bear**’!

In the early afternoon, as the tired but happy crews returned from their labors, **Maria and Gianne de Jesus** – Cidra’s celebrated ‘**Los Niños Trovadores**’ provided exciting entertainment, along with Coamo’s **Jose Delgado**, and his legendary singing improvisation performance, and Rio Grande’s talented ‘**DJ Teo Santos**, who supplied the event’s exciting musical accompaniment.

And ‘yummy’ victuals and soft-drinks were available all day long – a perfect compensation for the hard working clean-up crews and their excited kids!

At day’s end, Forest Supervisor **Pablo Cruz** commented; ‘As in previous years, this vital Forest conservation event was a great success – in both the El Yunque and Rio Sabana locations, it offered volunteers the solid satisfaction of combining a desired public service project, with the matchless pleasures of making new community contacts at the same time as they worked alongside family and friends – though, none of this would have been possible without the dedicated sponsorship of our long-time collaborator, **American Airlines** and the participation of other noteworthy partners such as **Huertas College, the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture, the Puerto Rico Department of Health**, and a long list of others!’.

As the day’s activities wound down, local entertainer **Trotamundos** stole the show with his beguiling and exciting performance for the kids – after that, everyone departed for home with great memories and full stomachs!



Jesse's Haiky — a Wátery Delight!



Jesse Cheyenne Nolan is a bright, effervescent thirteen year old who lives in Lehigh Acres, Florida where she is an eighth grade student at **Veterans Park Academy for the Arts** – she is a high achiever – among other accomplishments, she is a member of her school's elite 'Brain Bowl' Team – this exceptional group has won both district and regional competitions, and will soon be competing at the state level! If they win the state competition, each member of the team will earn a four-year scholarship to the Florida public college of their choice! Jesse also participates in her school's science club, and is a member of the Junior National Honor Society. She loves animals (especially dogs and horses) and enjoys spending time with friends and family. She is also heavily involved as a volunteer in her local church, and 'dabbles' in poetry writing! All things considered, Jesse is a very well-rounded and accomplished young lady! We became aware of Jesse through her poetry -- when her mother Ana sent us a Haiku poem that Jesse had written about El Yunque. Haiku is a traditional Japanese poetry form that

generally depicts nature themes – it typically consists of three phrases, with a set number of syllables (5-7-5) in each phrase. Here is Jesse's poem – she has helpfully included a Spanish translation – however, she was quick to note that her Spanish translation may not be exact, and that it no longer 'technically' qualifies as Haiku:

'The green rain forest

Waterfalls make rocky ponds

With depths cold and sweet'

El bosque tropical verde

Cascades producen estanques rocosas

Con profundidades frias y dulce'

Jesse's parents James and Ana are extremely proud of their talented and charming teen-age daughter – Ana was born on the island, in the lovely San Juan suburb of Rio Piedras – Jesse grew-up hearing tales about Puerto Rico's compelling culture and beautiful surroundings – she longed to travel to the island and experience the exciting 'Borinquen' traditions for herself! Last summer her wish came true when she traveled there with her beloved abuela and abuelo to visit with her 'tio' Alex and other relatives – during her two-week adventure, her most memorable experience was her trip to El Yunque's matchless rainforest, where Jesse quickly fell in love with the lush tropical surroundings, and was motivated to compose her lovely and gripping Haiku water poem!



Gracias mil Jesse! We eagerly anticipate welcoming you, your parents and your 'local' family when you next visit El Yunque!

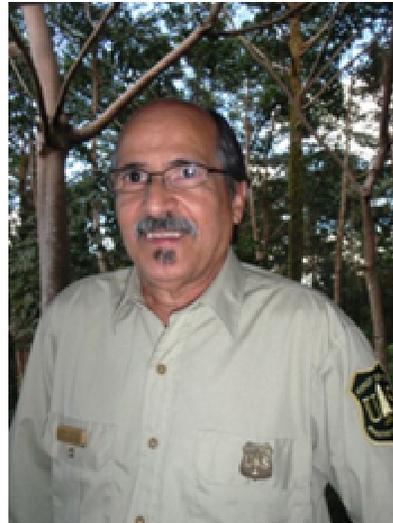


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In this issue, El Bosque Pluvial shines its SPOTLIGHT on El Yunque's multi-talented El Portal Rain Forest Center Director and Recreation Program Manager **Jose R. "Pepe" Ortega**. He was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Because his father was a career military soldier, the family was constantly on the move. As a result, Pepe got his pre-college education at military base and embassy schools in an assortment of exotic

locations around the world – among them, Stuttgart, Germany; Lima, Peru; Monterey, California and Manhattan, Kansas!

Upon graduating from High School, Pepe obtained an associate degree in data processing at a business college in Salina, Kansas and then briefly followed in his father's footsteps with a two-year enlistment in the Army that took him from Ft. Sill, Oklahoma to Giessen, Germany. Following his Army stint, Pepe enrolled at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas where he earned a Bachelor degree in Landscape Architecture in 1980. Pepe served in various Landscape Architecture positions with both Puerto Rico Commonwealth and non-government entities before becoming a key member of the Caribbean National Forest's El Portal Rain Forest Center design and development team between 1989 and the Center's opening in 1996. He served as the Forest's Landscape Architect from 1996 until in 2001, when he was appointed to the twin positions of El Portal Rain Forest Center Director and Forest Recreational Program Manager.

Pepe served as President of Puerto Rico's Examining Board of Architects and Landscape Architects from 2007 to 2009 and between 1991 and 1995 was President of the Association of Puerto Rican Landscape Architects. He also served three terms as President of the El Yunque NF's Employee Association.

Over the years, El Yunque has gained immense benefit from Sr. Ortega's expertise – we are indeed fortunate to have such an experienced and multi-faceted individual on our staff.



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