

Recreation Resources

Introduction

The Monongahela National Forest (MNF) offers a wide variety of recreation settings and opportunities. The Forest manages 38 Recreation sites. These sites are comprised of 20 developed camp areas (594 individual sites); 44 managed river sites; 9 picnic areas; 3 observation towers; 1 National Scenic Highway, 2 Civil War sites, 2 visitor centers, 4 developed lake sites, 1 cabin rental; an estimated 60 concentrated use areas (areas of high general dispersed recreation activities); numerous dispersed sites across the Forest; the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area (57,000 acres); 260 miles of eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers; and 862 miles of trail. Many recreation special uses for outfitter/guides, organization camps, and recreation events are also permitted on the Forest. In March 2009, the Public Lands Management Act was passed by Congress. Due to this Act and the subsequent land management changes, Administrative Correction #10 was completed on the Forest in September 2010. With this Administrative Correction, the Forest now manages 8 Wildernesses (116,000 acres) and 13 Semi-primitive Non-motorized recreation areas (96,000 acres).

Monitoring occurs to ensure that forest plan and agency direction are followed, health and safety standards are met, facilities are designed appropriately, resources are protected, public demand is met, operations/systems are efficient, laws and regulations are followed, and the public is educated about our recreation opportunities and resources.

2010 Program Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2010 Recreation, Trails, and Wilderness Program activities are summarized below.

RECREATION

The Forest managed developed sites, concentrated use areas, and developed dispersed camping areas to meet critical health and safety standards during the operating season.

Recreation fee sites on the Forest were managed either through concessionaire or Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA). REA revenues supplemented the Forest Recreation allocation to complete critical deferred maintenance projects.

The Gauley Ranger District Youth Conservation Corps program accomplished 912 hours of work and the Marlinton Ranger District accomplished 1,014 hours of work. Basic operation and maintenance projects in recreation and trails were completed.

An estimated 15,209 hours of volunteer work were completed on the Marlinton/White Sulphur Springs Ranger District, 1,979 hours on the Cheat-Potomac District, 4,082 hours on the Gauley District, and 14 hours on the Greenbrier RD, for a total of 21,284 hours.

The Roy Moose interpretive program provided 63 programs, serving approximately 7,600 people in the state of West Virginia, through a participating agreement between the Forest Service and Eastern National Forests Interpretive Association (ENFIA).

The Cranberry Mountain Shindig had approximately 1,800 people participate. The Cranberry Mountain Nature Center (CMNC) Kids Night included about 600 people.

The Gauley Ranger District partnered with Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau on CMNC staffing.

Interpretative programs were provided at CMNC on demand, including videos in the auditorium and Cranberry Glades tours, to approximately 500 people.

Sales in the ENFIA outlet at CMNC exceeded \$52,000. The Gauley District share of the profit allowed CMNC to provide programs at Kids Night and entertainment and port-a-potties at the Cranberry Mountain Shindig and also Roy Moose's interpretive programs.

Paving for the gate/entrance station was completed at Lake Sherwood.

A new shower building and playground were installed at Blue Bend Campground.

New gates were installed at Tea Creek Campground.

Bear resistant garbage facilities were improved and/or installed at Lake Sherwood, Bishop Knob, and Red Creek Campgrounds.

Old toilet facilities were removed and new CXT toilets buildings were installed at Cranberry Campground, Woodbine Picnic Area, Spruce Knob Lake, Spruce Knob Campground, and Spruce Knob Observation Tower parking area.

Over 8,600 hours of Hosted Program work was completed on the Marlinton/White Sulphur Springs Ranger District by the Anthony Correctional Center and AmeriCorps. This work included maintenance of recreation sites, trails, and wilderness.

Over 1,200 hours of Hosted Program work was completed on the Potomac RD by AmeriCorps. This work included special use permit compliance and operation of the Seneca Rocks Discovery Center (SRDC).

Sales in the ENFIA outlet at the Seneca Rocks Discovery Center exceeded \$92,000. The Cheat-Potomac District share of the profit was used for operation of Sites Homestead and various artists to demonstrate hand-crafted items. Sites Homestead provided a wide range of interpretive programs and interactive events for visitors.

An interpretive sign, benches, and gathering area were constructed in Thomas, WV.

Job Corps students removed flagstone at Lake Sherwood beach house and replaced it with concrete. Over 150 picnic tables, 150 fire rings, and 7 shelter grills were constructed and replaced throughout the Forest. All new features meet accessibility guidelines.

Bird Run Campground was closed. Island Campground was closed to motor vehicle use due to bridges in campground failing inspection. The campground remained open to walk-in traffic.

Accessibility training was provided by the National Accessibility Program Manager. Over 50 Recreation staff, Engineering staff, and visitor center employees participated.

A pollinator garden was constructed at Stuart Recreation Area.

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

The Forest revised the Motor Vehicle Use Map. The map was divided into north and south portions of the Forest, and it designated roads available for highway legal vehicles, both year-round and seasonally. No trails or areas were designated for off-highway vehicles.

WILDERNESS

All wilderness areas on the Forest were managed to standard in accordance to the 10 Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge. Air Quality monitoring plans were completed for all wilderness areas.

AmeriCorps focused on completing campsite surveys in all wilderness areas. Sites were monitored, rehabilitated when appropriate, and photo documentation was completed.

Soil sampling occurred in the Dolly Sods Wilderness in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers, to determine if there are any potential concerns related to chemicals in the soil from unexploded ordinance blast in place program.

Seven miles of road in the Cranberry Expansion, Big Draft, and Spice Run Wildernesses were completed. Roads were shaped to match topography, culverts removed, and area seeded. Reassurance markers were removed in newly designated wilderness areas. New bulletin board signs were created and installed for the Big Draft Wilderness.

Six individuals were trained in Leave No Trace, and educational material was purchased and used for programs at developed recreation sites.

In partnership with the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area, a brochure was completed identifying all the wilderness areas on the Forest and the importance of wilderness.

TRAILS

The Forest completed over 225 miles of trail maintenance and approximately 300 miles of trail clearing. Both the North Zone and South Zone had a dedicated trail crew.

Two grants were received for trail projects on the Forest, Gauley Mountain Trail and the Allegheny Trail (North Zone).

The Forest partnered with West Virginia University to develop an interactive website for visitors to comment at managed and designed uses of trails throughout the Forest.

Major trail construction projects were completed on the West Fork Trail and Spruce Knob Lake Trail. Construction started on the West Side Trail.

New trail junction signs were installed in the Dolly Sods Wilderness.

Trail Assessment and Condition Surveys were completed on 2.1 miles of trail.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring items and questions came from the Land and Resource Management Plan (2006) and Administrative Correction #8 (2008).

Item 5 - To what extent is the Forest providing Recreation Motor Vehicle (RMV) opportunities; what are the effects of RMVs on the physical and social environment; and how effective are Forest management practices in managing RMV use?

Item 23 - Are Forest facilities and recreation sites safe for employee and public use and enjoyment?

Item 24 - To what extent does the Forest provide a range of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities that incorporate diverse public interests yet achieve applicable Management Prescription goals?

Item 25 - To what extent are Forest management activities within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Objectives (ROS)?

Item 26 - To what extent do Forest recreation facilities and opportunities meet accessibility, cost, and maintenance needs to achieve resource and social objectives?

Item 27 – Are Forest management activities providing scenic quality as defined by the Scenic Integrity Objectives?

Item 28 - Does management of recreation/wilderness and other special use permits meet Forest Plan and Agency direction?

Monitoring results for these questions are reported below.

Monitoring Question 5. To what extent is the Forest providing Recreation Motor Vehicle (RMV) opportunities; what are the effects of RMVs on the physical and social environment; and how effective are Forest management practices in managing RMV use?

Recreation Motor Vehicles are allowed on designated routes. The MNF Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) is the tool used to designate roads, trails or areas for motor vehicle use, and it also determines the types of vehicle use allowed. In 2010, the Forest revised the MVUM and only designated existing open and seasonally open roads for motorized use for licensed and highway legal vehicles. No Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use is currently allowed on the MNF.

Monitoring Question 5. Evaluation, Conclusions and Recommendations

Driving for pleasure continues to be one of the top reasons people visit the MNF and is one of the main forms of motorized recreation that occurs on many open and seasonally open roads. Maintenance issues result from road use during wet/snowy weather, mainly in the form of surface rutting. Seasonal closures of roads like Forest Road 75 next to Dolly Sods Wilderness are needed to protect resources and public safety. Signs identifying major routes in which snow removal does not occur need to be checked regularly to ensure they are not vandalized or stolen.

Illegal motor vehicle use, mainly in the form of Off Highway Vehicles (OHVs), occurs in areas close to private land or on Forest roads that are mistaken for State roads where OHV use is allowed. Better signs with restrictions are needed where the public leaves State Roads and enters Forest Service roads. Additional law enforcement is also needed to address illegal OHV use.

Over-snow vehicles are permitted on the Highland Scenic Highway, which is not plowed during the winter months. Few issues have resulted from snow vehicle travel on the Highland Scenic Highway. This highway is closed to all other licensed motorized vehicles during winter months.

Monitoring Question 23 - Are Forest facilities and recreation sites safe for employee and public use and enjoyment?

Identification of site deterioration and maintenance needs is now an accepted and fully integrated management practice on the Forest. Site monitoring and condition surveys for buildings, water systems, waste water systems, and constructed features (e.g., tables, grills, fire rings) provide much needed information to prioritize and implement site maintenance or improvements.

A Recreation Facility Analysis (RFA) was completed in July 2008. The RFA helps the Forest prioritize funding toward deferred maintenance and adjust operations toward high quality sites that meet the recreation niche for the Forest.

Forest personnel regularly patrol recreation sites to enforce rules as well as identify hazards.

Gaudineer Scenic Area is signed for caution during wind events due to the potential for blow down in the old growth forest through which the recreation trail meanders.

Potential hazards resulting from construction operations are dealt with through contract clauses, site closures, seasonal restrictions on construction, and field identification of hazards.

The Forest Service has taken a more active role in identifying hazards at recreation sites, specifically flooding. The following actions occurred in 2010 regarding recreation site safety.

- Flooding:
 - Most developed recreation sites which have experienced flooding are posted with warning information. Signs are posted at each site informing visitors of the potential for flooding from local heavy rains or upstream rains.
 - New signs have been ordered to post at developed recreation sites which currently were not adequately signed.
 - Forest/Concession personnel close the gate at Stuart Day Use Recreation Area during flooding events until the site is safe for public use.
 - Forest personnel monitor regularly flooded recreation sites during and after flood events.
- Hazard Trees:
 - Hazard tree identification and removal occur regularly. As dying trees or limbs are identified, they are removed.
 - Treatment of trees with the risk of insect infestation are treated to prevent mortality and treated when signs of infestation occur. This identification and treatment program is to prevent tree mortality, thus becoming a hazard tree. Both Gypsy moth and Hemlock woolly adelgid are actively treated in developed recreation sites.
 - The Forest is working with State and Private Forestry entomologists to improve public awareness about transporting insects with notices in campgrounds.
- Wildlife:
 - The Forest is within black bear habitat. The Forest has been installing bear proof garbage cans, as funding allows, for several years. Bear proof garbage cans or fenced garbage drop off locations are installed at several developed recreation sites and along heavily used dispersed recreation corridors.
 - A food storage order is in effect at one developed recreation site (requires food and garbage to be properly stored) and the order will be expanded to all developed recreation sites on the southern end of the Forest by 2011.
 - Forest staff provides handouts at developed recreation sites in which bear encounters are a concern. The Forest is also working on improving public outreach on camping in bear country.
- Wildfire/Extreme Fire Danger:
 - In the rare occasion the Forest/State are in extreme fire danger, a fire ban is implemented.
 - Forest staff, campground hosts, and Law Enforcement inform public of bans or fire danger.
- Winter Travel:
 - Warnings signs and caution lights are posted on the Highland Scenic Highway, SR 150, to alert travelers that the Highway is not maintained for winter travel.
- Swimming Areas:
 - No Lifeguard On Duty signs are posted at swimming areas

- Visitor Safety:
 - Forest/Concession personnel close gates at all campground at 10:00 pm to keep non-campers from entering the area.

Monitoring Question 23. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations

There were no major public health and safety issues reported in FY 2010.

Recommendations: Condition surveys of water, waste water, building, and recreation facilities are valuable and should continue. Procedures for hazardous weather situations at recreation sites should be written and posted at recreation sites. New signs and improved monitoring for hazardous weather will be implemented for 2011. Since Island Campground needs significant improvement and funding to re-open the site, moving the campground from the 100-year floodplain needs to be closely considered. Procedures for hazard tree removal, mitigating daily hazards, mitigating construction hazards, and monitoring of other resource activities are sufficient at this time.

Implement the RFA 5-year program of work. This program of work identifies where to focus funds based on use, efficiency, and sustainability.

Monitoring Question 24. To what extent does the Forest provide a range of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities that incorporate diverse public interests yet achieve applicable Management Prescription goals?

The distribution of recreation opportunities on the Forest was analyzed and reported in the 2006 Final EIS for Forest Plan Revision (pages 3-403 through 3-405). To summarize this analysis, Management Prescription changes in plan revision shifted the amount of Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized areas from 21 percent of the Forest to 41 percent, while Roaded Natural areas shifted from 44 percent to 41 percent. Thus, the amounts of primarily motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunity areas are virtually the same. Most of the remaining area of the Forest (18 percent) is now classified as Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM). Although SPM areas can allow motorized recreation, in most cases these areas on the Forest have roads that are currently closed to public motorized access, although development activities such as timber harvest may occur. Therefore, SPM areas offer a mix of recreation opportunities and settings. Administrative Correction #10 did not affect the overall distribution of within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS).

The ROS distribution on the Forest reflects current uses and demands from the public. Motorized use on the Forest focuses on driving for pleasure, riding trails for pleasure, viewing scenery, and visiting historic sites, developed recreation sites, and dispersed areas. There are no motorized trails or motorized areas designated on the Forest.

Non-motorized use is a major emphasis on the Forest, including activities such as viewing natural features, fishing, hiking, downhill skiing, hunting, relaxing, backpacking, viewing wildlife, gathering forest products, and mountain biking.

According to the National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) data from 2004 and 2009, horseback riding, motorized water activities, off-highway (OHV) use, resort use, and snowmobiling do not play a major role on the Forest.

Activity trends within the market zone for the Forest show demand for the following activities, all of which are provided (National Survey on the Recreation and Environment): Developed Camping, Fishing, Non-motorized Water, Hiking, Backpacking, Hunting, Downhill Skiing, Picnicking, Primitive Camping, and Nature Center activities.

Monitoring Question 24. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations

People visiting the Forest find a wide spectrum of recreational opportunities. Diverse landscapes offer a variety of settings for recreational activities, ranging from semi-primitive non-motorized to more roaded and rural settings. Administrative Correction #10 did not change the balance of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities on the Forest. Even though there were changes between MP 5.0, 5.1, and 6.2, all of these areas were managed as semi-primitive non-motorized areas. The Administrative Correction did not affect the ROS distribution.

NVUM took place on the Forest in FY 2009. Data from this monitoring was available in 2010 but user preferences showed very little change between 2004 and 2009.

Monitoring Question 25. To what extent are Forest management activities within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Objectives (ROS)?

Forest management activities are screened during project planning efforts. When projects are proposed, a recreation specialist looks at the management prescription and ROS category they fall under. The physical, social and managerial settings, desired conditions, and standards and guidelines help determine which management activities are appropriate for the ROS, or whether a Forest Plan amendment is needed to allow an activity to temporarily change the ROS setting.

Monitoring Question 25. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In FY 2010 there were no Forest activities that required a change in ROS settings or objectives.

User (satisfaction) data from the NVUM surveys were helpful to evaluate how well the public accepts management activities, facilities, and services in meeting Forest Plan objectives.

Monitoring Question 26. To what extent do Forest recreation facilities and opportunities meet accessibility, cost, and maintenance needs to achieve resource and social objectives?

Accomplishments for accessibility were listed in the accomplishment section of this monitoring report. A significant number of the projects within developed recreation areas in 2010 were targeted at improving accessibility. Forest staff participated in training that will greatly improve the ability of field level technicians to identify issues and make improvements for accessibility.

Accessibility for people with disabilities is considered during all maintenance and improvement activities. All newly constructed or altered facilities meet accessibility requirements.

In 2008 the Forest completed a Recreation Facility Analysis (RFA) process that had the primary goals of:

- Provide recreation opportunities consistent with the Forest's recreation niche and focus resources on sites that best fit the recreation niche.
- Operate and maintain financially sustainable recreation sites to national and regional quality standards with available revenue stream.
- Reduce deferred maintenance backlog by 20% by 2010, 70% by 2015, and 90% by 2020.
- Improve customer satisfaction.

Monitoring Question 26. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Recreation sites and picnic areas should have some units with accessible furnishings such as tables, grills, lantern posts, and fire rings. As these items deteriorate, they should be replaced with accessible features. Replacement of these features has been slow, and a significant improvement on increased accessible elements needs to occur.

Trail users have not complained of trail overcrowding. No new Forest trails were constructed in FY 2010 (a couple existing trails were reconstructed), and little if any new trail construction has occurred since 2001. The trails program has focused on maintaining the 860+ miles of existing trails to standard.

In 2010, the Forest partnered with West Virginia University to create an interactive website so trail users could provide feedback on appropriate trail uses to provide background data for the Forest to develop a Trail Plan. This plan will help managers determine trail management objectives and trail maintenance priorities for the next several years. The Forest started working on a trails planning process several years ago, including a 2-day workshop with a number of trail users. With the passage of the Public Lands Management Act of 2009, the MNF was directed by Congress to develop a plan for nonmotorized trail opportunities on the Forest (Public Law 111-11, Section 1004). The main concern is to maintain trails for the uses they receive. Currently, all trails on the Forest have a Designed Use and Managed Use of Hiker/Pedestrian (except the West Fork Rail Trail has a Designed Use and Managed Use of Bicycle). All other uses (Pack/Saddle and Bicycle) are considered Allowed Uses. The problem is, uses that require higher design requirements (Pack/Saddle and Bicycle) are not being managed, only the user group with the lowest design requirements (Hiker/Pedestrian) is being managed. Another concern is some trails are not properly located due to soils types and slope, based on the Allowed Uses that are occurring. The Forest will finalize the Trail Plan in 2011.

Although the RFA effort was only completed in late 2008, the result is that costs for developed recreation sites should be sustainable within the next 5 years.

Recommendations: Continue to monitor trail maintenance needs and public trail concerns through work planning, site-specific trail use monitoring, Forest trail management planning efforts, and other Forest project comments. Trail maintenance Objective RC04 in the Forest Plan

for within (75 miles) and outside (350 miles) wilderness areas far exceeds targets and accomplishments (220 miles). If budgets remain stable or decline, this objective should be reduced to reflect more realistic numbers. The trails plan has been in limbo for a year and needs to be revitalized.

Maintenance and improvements at sites should continue to incorporate accessibility needs.

Adverse effects from dispersed recreation, especially dispersed camping near rivers and streams, need to be monitored and controlled. Specifically, the Gandy Creek and Lower Glady areas need to have management plans developed to determine long-term management of the areas.

Monitoring Question 27. Are forest management activities providing scenic quality as defined by the Scenic Integrity Objectives?

Scenic Integrity Objectives were assigned and mapped for the Forest during Forest Plan revision and are now used at the project level. How Forest management activities affect these Objectives is considered during the planning stages of activities that have the potential to alter scenic quality. As a result, management activities are designed to provide appropriate scenic quality.

Monitoring Question 27. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The Forest worked with the National Park Service to analyze the effects of the Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline Viewsheds were mapped, photo points collected, and concerns regarding visual impacts were noted as part of the analysis. Scenic Integrity Objectives were considered in several other projects, but no negative effects were identified.

Monitoring Question 28. Does management of recreation/wilderness and other special use permits meet Forest Plan and Agency direction?

Recreation/wilderness special use permits usually meet Forest Plan and Agency direction because all special use requests are pre-screened with applicants to ensure they follow Forest Plan direction. In total, 15 recreation special use permits were monitored, including recreation events for ultra runs and triathlon, outfitter/guides for a variety of outdoor activities, concessionaire services, and organization camps.

The Forest also routinely conducted pre-award compliance reviews to ensure equal opportunity for all Forest visitors and to prevent program discrimination complaints for all outfitter/guide and recreation event requests.

Monitoring Question 28. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Monitoring of recreation events showed that most permits stayed within the requirements of their permits and operating plans. Minor infractions were noted on some evaluations.