SUCCESS STORIES
REPORTING EXAMPLES OF OUR PROGRESS IN CARING FOR THE LAND AND SERVING PEOPLE

A Paintbrush Dipped in Forest Hues

By Gwyn Ingram on Oct 10, 2009

Why be bland?

The artist at her canvas.

Color and style revitalize a neglected USDA Forest Service icon - the information board.

Perhaps it's because we're an agency rooted in science and research that we tend to be somewhat understated in terms of blowing our own horns. We often don't take the time to applaud accomplshments amongst our own ranks. Yet, as the public face of the agency changes, creative folks will always be working behind the scenes, quietly applying the brushstrokes necessary to include the public in our progress.

One such expressive spirit on the Francis Marion National Forest in South Carolina did that quite literally, infusing colorful new life into the agency's last-functional-seemingly-indispensable-wood-and-glue-citadel to public knowledge in a digital age: the information board. Often the final point of contact with the public, the information board remains the on-site communication mainstay around which visitors gather to learn about the national forests they explore.

Jannah DuPre, Deputy Director of Sewee Visitor and Environmental Center and forest recreation program manager, was quick to point out that it was a regional information board team that came up with a new exciting and informative look for boards across Region 8, but certainly DuPre's painting and design skills are prominently featured in them. She painted jazzy, colorful, watercolor images of people engaged in every facet of recreation, of forest animals, plants, landscapes and symbols.

"The synergy of the team just came together under the leadership of Anne Christensen in the Southern Regional Office," said DuPre. "She formed a team of people to look critically at boards across the Region because she recognized the need for eye-catching graphics and a consistency of messages to recapture the public's interest in our posted information. And she obviously wasn't alone. It just clicked from the beginning; we had writers and editors and people volunteering in all different ways to pull it together."

The team won a Regional Forester's award for its development of attractively illustrated information posters made available on the intranet for use across the Region, or for that matter, across the nation, as DuPre hopes.

"We're really proud of the site. It kind of walks you through as if you had a shopping cart. If you need a safety message, here's two poster sizes you can choose between, here are the images you can draw from, here's the existing verbiage and you can add your own if you like." Indeed the site is structured to supply appealing ingredients and allow the land manager to arrange and tailor them. Please check out the direct link to the information board web page at http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/boone/boards/.

But DuPre's interpretive talents shine closer to home as well. She created an interactive 'backyard' butterfly garden at the Sewee Center to demonstrate how easily people can create beneficial habitat for creatures in their own backyards. She converted parking medians to native plant habitat, and organizes programs to introduce the public to local sweet grass basket makers of lowcountry South Carolina's historic Gullah community, emphasizing the connectedness of the land and its people.

Her design skills enhance interpretive signs along certain forest trails, trails that might otherwise be mistaken for any other pleasant walk in the woods. Gently guiding the steps of an inquisitive visitor back in history along the Sewee Shell Ring Interpretive Trail, the signs highlight native plants used by

Child with flowers.

American Indians for medicinal and practical purposes. Then suddenly the marsh landscape opens to reveal a 4,000 year-old shell ring thought possibly to have been a year-round village site for ancient hunter-gatherers.

DuPre's wide ranging skills recently won her the Gifford Pinchot Regional Interpeter of the Year Award, and put her firmly in the running for the national Gifford Pinchot Excellence in Interpretation Award to be announced in November of 2009.

Originally a landscape architect and later a recreation officer on the San Bernardino National Forest in southern California, DuPre managed to weave her personal passion for art and interpreting nature into her career duties regardless of her on-paper role. For instance, while she juggled a demanding recreation program, she created a desert native plants garden to introduce visitors to the natural landscape of the desert southwest environment.

"I was thinking about my first connections to nature," remembered DuPre. "I grew up on farms in Indiana and North Carolina. Our biggest entertainment was going on walks in the woods with my dad. As we passed trees and flowers he would point them out, no matter how small, and tell us their names."

"I guess at the age of about 10 I was amazed that anybody knew so much. My dad was a city boy and my mom a city girl. I have no idea how he knew all that, maybe he made it up as he went along." she joked, "but each time it was like going on a treasure hunt, looking for wildflowers and trying to figure out what they were."

Asked for a comment on the honor of being nominated for, and ultimately named, regional interpreter of the year, DuPre blushed, averted her eyes, then responded in classic agency fashion.

"I was thinking I don't do anything that special. I really didn't think I did, but it's kinda cool that the Region thinks I do. Honestly, I've always taken these things on just because I love them."

The winner of the national interpretive award will be announced in an awards ceremony in Hartford, Connecticut on November 19, 2009