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Local Volunteers Get Rifle Range Back on Target on the Francis Marion

By [Michelle Burnett](#) on Nov 11, 2009



Volunteers spend their Halloween cleaning up the Twin Ponds Rifle Range on the Francis Marion National Forest.

More than 80 volunteers work with Forest Service to open vandalized rifle range

On a chilly, overcast Halloween morning, most people would rather hide from ghouls under their bedcovers than leap out of bed to revitalize a Forest Service rifle range. Not the case for more than 80 residents of Charleston and Berkeley counties in South Carolina who came out on Halloween to breathe life back into the Twin Ponds Rifle Range on the Francis Marion National Forest.

District Ranger Orlando Sutton closed Twin Ponds in September because he was concerned for visitor safety. For the third time in 12 months, vandals had destroyed a public information board and trash cans at the range. These same individuals also had been discharging their weapons outside the target area which places other users at the range or on nearby trails and roads in danger.

"A lot of local folks weren't happy when we closed down Twin Ponds," said Francis Marion District Ranger Orlando Sutton. "Unfortunately, it's always the irresponsible actions of a few that force us to close the ranges and the valiant efforts of many that enable us to open them back up."

The public information board is especially important at recreation sites because that's where the Forest Service posts rules, safety, and emergency information. Without a public information board, forest personnel cannot post vital emergency contact information that could save someone's life. And replacing the information boards simply isn't cheap.

"Each time vandals destroy the information boards and we replace them, it costs us another \$1,000 from our already strained budgets," said Francis Marion and Sumter National Forest Recreation Program Manager Jannah DuPre. "This latest information board was built solely by volunteers, many of whom use the two Francis Marion rifle ranges daily. I don't know what we'd do without them."

More than 80 individuals committed their time on Halloween to clean up Twin Ponds. They showed up at 8 a.m. and cleaned up trash, removed debris, replaced the information board and restored a sense of value to the rifle range. In fact, volunteers proved so zealous that the Forest hopes to continue the volunteer effort at both the Twin Ponds and the Boggy Head rifle ranges on a monthly basis.

"I hope we never have to close either of our rifle ranges again," said Sutton. "We'll sure work with these local folks to keep it open. I just hope the public understands we have to put their safety and the safety of our employees first."

Individuals interested in volunteering at either rifle range on the Francis Marion National Forest may call Jannah DuPre at (843) 887-3257.



Recreation Technician Willie Irving takes a brief break from picking up trash at the rifle range.