



George Washington & Jefferson National Forests
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Forest Service Promotes Flash Flood Awareness

Roanoke, Va - National forest officials are promoting flash flood awareness for neighboring communities and people who camp outdoors. A flash flood is a serious weather event for forest visitors because rising flood water is extremely dangerous—a sudden surge can claim victims in less than one minute.

Any intense, heavy rain that falls in a short amount of time can create flash flood conditions in a low-lying area, according to the National Weather Service, and it can happen at a moment's notice any time of the year.

“Many of our neighbors like to camp overnight in the forest,” explains Tom Speaks, Forest Supervisor of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. “Sometimes visitors camp in low-lying areas because they spent the day along the river. But a sudden rush of water toward their camp site would put them in immediate danger.”

During a flash flood in mountainous terrain, rapidly rising water can quickly reach dangerously high levels. The velocity of a flood surge can easily roll boulders and vehicles, tear out trees, destroy bridges and undermine roads. A low-lying area can become a death trap in a matter of minutes.

“There is very little time to react,” says Speaks. “Forest visitors need to be more conscious about sudden storms. Families should discuss how they would alert each other and climb to safety if rushing water arrives.”

Forest Service employees posted flash flood warning signs in recreation areas with a history of flooding. Visitors to the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests that see these signs at recreation entrances and at information kiosks need to be aware that the recreation area could experience a flash flood during heavy or prolonged rain events.

Weather experts say the best defense is to be weather-ready before a storm hits.

Forest officials are asking neighbors to check the [National Weather Service](#) forecast before they leave home, and to be alert for changing weather conditions while visiting the forest. Devices like a weather radio, a terrestrial radio, a smart-phone app or a cell phone mobile alert can help visitors stay tuned-in before and during their outdoor activities.

The mission of the USDA Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

Statistics show that most flash floods in the U.S. occur after dark, when campers are asleep. “When a flash flood strikes at night, it's nearly impossible to know how deep and fast the water is,” Speaks explained. “It’s noisy. It’s dark. And it’s disorienting to wake up suddenly during a storm. You have to act quickly.”

The National Weather Service is our nation’s exclusive and trusted source for weather forecasts and warnings. Their meteorologists use the most advanced flood warning and forecast system in the world to protect lives and property.

Whenever severe weather is forecasted, forest visitors need to go home early. While outdoors, always be alert for sudden storms and the sound of rushing water. As with all remote and rural locations in the United States, city sirens and reverse 911 calling does not exist in nature. This means [outdoor safety](#) is each person’s own responsibility every time they leave home and head outdoors.

For more additional information on flash flooding, please contact Michael Williams at: 540-265-5173, or mrwilliams04@fs.fed.us.

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