



**Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service, Southern Region
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Forest Service Working to Reduce Wildfire Threat by Implementing State-wide Prescribed Burns

(Columbia, SC) March 2, 2009—Forest Service fire personnel are hoping to carry out some prescribed burning on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests this week. Depending on weather conditions, burning traditionally starts on the Francis Marion at the beginning of February and finishes at the end of May; burning on the Sumter (Long Cane, Enoree and Andrew Pickens ranger districts) usually starts at the beginning of March and finishes at the end of April

“Prescribed fire is an important tool we use to manage the forest ecosystem and improve forest health,” said Sumter National Forest Zone Fire Management Officer Kyle Smith. “Prescribed burns help prevent future uncontrolled wildfires and enhance habitat for many important species. During these burns, we try to duplicate what happens in nature, except our fires are carried out under very specific and controlled conditions.”

The Forest Service conducts prescribed burns when weather conditions are most likely to reduce the risk of escaped fire and smoky conditions. These fires help prevent uncontrolled wildfires by eliminating dead or downed trees and other vegetation that wildland fires use for fuel. They also eliminate shrubs and competing undergrowth which enhances the habitat that native species such as the wild turkey and many songbirds need.

“We are asking the public to be patient when we’re burning,” said Smith. Although Forest Service employees will work to avoid any inconveniences, motorists or residents near the national forests may see smoke columns or encounter reduced visibility in low-lying areas and additional traffic along Forest Service

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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.

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roads. Motorists who encounter smoke on any road should reduce their speed and heed any warning signs or directions from road patrol officers.

Fire personnel walk a line with a drip torch to start the prescribed fires. To burn more acres in a short period of time, the Forest Service also uses aerial ignition. Helicopters drop “ping pong” sized balls on selected forested areas which ignite once they land on the forest floor. Personnel on the ground ensure the fire stays in the targeted area.

“By using aerial ignition, we can burn a lot more acres in a shorter period of time. This minimizes the impacts of smoke, which disperses quickly,” said Smith.

If you have questions about a burn or smoke near the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, please call the following offices:

District Office	Phone Number	Hours
Enoree Ranger District Office	(864) 427-9858 (803) 276-4810	8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Long Cane Ranger District Office	(803) 637-5396	8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Andrew Pickens Ranger District Office	(864) 638-9568	8 a.m. – 12 p.m. and 12:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Francis Marion Ranger District Office	(843) 336-3248 (843) 887-3257	8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

After 4:30 p.m., please call the South Carolina Forestry Commission dispatch office at 1-800-777-FIRE.

.For more information on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, please visit

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms>.

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