

# Media Advisory

## USDA Forest Service National Forests in Mississippi

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## Safe Hunting on the De Soto National Forest

**Laurel and Hattiesburg, Mississippi** – Robert Lee and Ron Smith, District Rangers on the De Soto National Forest are urging hunters to take special care when hunting within the forest this year. When Hurricane Katrina hit forested areas with winds in excess of 140 miles per hour, more than 300,000 acres of timber was moderately to heavily damaged within the National Forests in Mississippi. The most extensive damage was on the Chickasawhay and DeSoto Ranger Districts; where damaged trees have caused roads, designated recreation sites and trails to be closed.

Along with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, Rangers Smith and Lee want hunters to know this year's hunt is not "business as usual". There are on-going operations within the forest that could displace hunters from their traditional hunting and camping sites. These operations include resource surveys, timber salvage operations to reduce hazardous fuels, and wildland fire suppression. There will be heavy traffic on roads and many crews in the woods.

District Ranger, Ron Smith states, "On the De Soto Ranger District, there will be no camping in traditionally designated 'hunter camps' within the Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) of Red Creek WMA, Little Biloxi WMA, and Leaf River WMA. During this hunting season, camping will be allowed on the De Soto WMAs, but it will be the responsibility of hunters to choose areas free from snags, broken-top trees, and leaning trees for their own protection. When the Forest Service encourages

concentrated recreational use in designated areas, these areas are managed to a higher standard than dispersed areas and we have a responsibility to provide the public with as safe a recreational experience as possible. The Forest Service has not had the necessary resources to remove broken and hanging limbs, root-sprung trees or leaning snags from designated camping areas in the De Soto's WMAs." Hunting is considered a dispersed recreational activity; therefore hunters have the option to engage in this activity within large areas of forest; with the responsibility to avoid hazards and unsafe conditions as well as to protect resources and cause no damage s.

On the Chickasawhay WMA, safety hazards have been addressed within the designated area for camping – this area is open for camping.. According to Ranger Robert Lee, "Hunters should follow all current regulations regarding hunting and camping on the Chickasawhay Wildlife Management Area. Although there was less damaged timber here, there are still safety hazards out there, including heavy traffic on the roads. I urge all forest visitors to remain heads-up."

All hunters should visit check-in stations throughout the season for the most up-to-date hunting and safety information.

There are emergency closure orders in place (signed on September 30, 2005 and until further notice) that prohibit "building, maintaining, attending, or using a fire, campfire, or stove fire" on the De Soto National Forest; which encompasses both the Chickasawhay and De Soto Ranger Districts.

Updated information will be posted to the National Forests in Mississippi website @ <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/mississippi>; media advisories will be prepared as necessary.