



**Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service, Southern Region
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September 4, 2008 (FMS 0810)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Storm Threat Prompts Closure of Francis Marion National Forest

The U.S. Forest Service today announced that as of 12 p.m. the entire Francis Marion National Forest is closed to the public due to the approach of Tropical Storm Hanna. Francis Marion and Sumter National Forest Supervisor Jerome Thomas issued an order prohibiting all persons to go into or be upon the lands of the Francis Marion National Forest, effective through 6 a.m. Monday, September 8 unless terminated earlier.

“We just can’t take the chance with public and employee safety,” said Forest Supervisor Thomas, who cited, in addition to the obvious threat of flooding, the often unanticipated danger to visitors of falling snags and airborne forest debris during high wind events. “Even seasoned veterans to the outdoors can’t be prepared for all eventualities in a forest environment.”

The closure order, issued in the interest of visitor and employee safety, includes all forest lands and recreation sites. Travel on open national forest system roads, however, is unaffected by the closure. The Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center will also be closed Friday and Saturday.

As of 11 a.m. Thursday, a hurricane watch was in effect for coastal South Carolina north of Edisto Beach. Maximum sustained winds are 65 miles per hour, with predicted coastal storm surge flooding of one to three feet.

Once the immediate danger of Hanna has passed, forest personnel will assess the storm’s effects and evaluate whether it is safe to reopen the national forest. Once that determination has been made the forest will issue bulletins to inform the public as popular recreation areas across the Francis Marion reopen.

For more information on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, visit our Web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/index.shtml>

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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.