



NATIONAL FORESTS IN NORTH • CAROLINA

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NEWS • RELEASE

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Crews move bridge and repair storm damaged forest trails

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — On a bright spring day, a 4,500-pound steel trail bridge dangles awkwardly over Norton Mill Creek on the Chattooga River Trail on the Highlands Ranger District of the Nantahala National Forest.

Hooked on a cable suspended between trees on either side of the roaring river, the bridge inches back to its concrete footings upstream.

The monumental task was completed in two days by three members of a trail crew from the Clearwater-Nez Perce National Forest based out of the Lochsa Ranger District office in Kooskia, Idaho, four members of a saw team from the Rexford Ranger District of the Kootenai National Forest in Eureka, Montana, and National Forests in North Carolina employees.

Forest officials believe the bridge was displaced by a mass of debris during flooding from last fall's hurricane season. It was ripped from the concrete footings, shearing off the steel bolts holding it in place, and swept several yards downstream before being caught on a rock.

“We were fortunate that the bridge stayed intact and was still structurally sound,” said Highlands District Ranger Erin Bronk.

However, a new challenge was presented to return the bridge to its place just upstream from the confluence of Norton Mill Creek and the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River.

The bridge was first installed in 1995 using a helicopter.

“We wanted to find a safe, economical, and efficient way to get the bridge back in place,” said Incident Commander Bobby Kitchens of the Forest Service storm recovery team. “The Clearwater trail crew was confident they could move it safely and we agreed.”

There was extensive planning and coordination before the project began.

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“It was so good to have the four from the Kootenai crew,” said James Beale, Clearwater trail crew leader, adding that he appreciated their help with the ladders and rigging for the project.

The crew used a skyline system, which is typically utilized for logging operations, to lift and move the bridge. The rigging gets its name from the elevated cable anchored at opposite ends. Pulleys are used to move objects along the line.

Beale said the crew used a larger system capable of supporting more weight for increased safety. They were also careful to make sure the cables weren’t overstressed, paying attention to how tight the cables were and checking to see if dirt was moved around the anchor trees.

“Making sure that the anchors and skyline were placed correctly was the biggest challenge,” Beale said.

“It was a fun project. It made you think a little bit,” said Jim West, a member of the Clearwater trail crew.

The project was a new experience for the Kootenai crew and presented new challenges.

“It was awesome and a lot of fun moving that bridge,” said Damian Lunetta, a member of the Kootenai crew. “It’s why we like the job. There is something different every day.”

“The creativity and commitment of these trail crews to complete projects safely and efficiently has been greatly appreciated, not only in moving the bridge, but through all of their hard work here in North Carolina,” Kitchens said.

Although the bridge is back on its footings and chained in place, there is additional work to be done.

“We plan to have the bridge jacked up in place and raise the concrete footings to provide more clearance between the bridge and the river,” Bronk said.

While the three Clearwater trail crew members were moving the bridge, the rest of the team focused their efforts on trail repair in Linville Gorge on the Grandfather Ranger District of the Pisgah National Forest.

Their work included carving a section of trail to make it safer and working on 8.5 miles of trail in steep and rugged terrain.

The National Forests in North Carolina have used a number of trail crews, particularly those with wilderness experience, to repair trails damaged as a result of last year’s hurricanes.

For updates on the National Forests in North Carolina storm damage recovery, please visit www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc.

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Photo Captions and Links :

[Bridge – 1: A Forest Service employee checks the Chattooga River Trail bridge](#) that was pushed downstream by flooding and debris during last fall's hurricane season.

[Bridge – 2: The Chattooga River Trail bridge dangles over Norton Mill Creek](#) as Forest Service crewmembers move it back towards concrete footings upstream.

[Bridge – 3: Nearly returned to its concrete footings, the Chattooga River Trail bridge hangs](#) at an angle from the skyline cable.

[Bridge – 4: Members of the Clearwater National Forest trail crew and the Kootenai National Forest saw team enjoy the view](#) of the confluence of Norton Mill Creek and the Chattooga River after moving the 4,500 pound trail bridge upstream and putting it back in place.