

## Recreation Resources

### Introduction

The Monongahela offers a wide variety of recreation settings and opportunities. The Forest manages 31 campgrounds, 16 picnic areas, 14 observation sites, 1 National Scenic Highway, 83 trailheads, 6 fishing sites, and 1 cabin rental. There are an estimated 60 concentrated use areas (areas of high general dispersed recreation activities) and 44 developed dispersed camping areas across the Forest. There are 5 Wildernesses (78,700 acres), 18 Semi-primitive Non-motorized recreation areas (134,400 acres), the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area (57,000 acres), and 260 miles of eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers. There are also over 250 known caves and well over 800 miles of trail on the Forest. Many recreation special uses for outfitter/guides, organization camps, and recreation events are also permitted on the Forest.

Monitoring occurs to ensure that forest plan and agency direction are followed, health and safety standards are met, facilities are designed appropriately, resources are protected, public demand is met, operations/systems are efficient, public laws are followed, and the public is educated about our recreation opportunities and resources.

### 2007 Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2007 Recreation, Trails, and Wilderness Program activities are summarized below.

#### Recreation

We managed developed sites, concentrated use areas, and developed dispersed camping areas to meet critical health and safety standards during the operating season.

Recreation fee sites on the Forest were managed either through concessionaire or Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA). REA revenues supplemented the Forest Recreation allocation by \$173,263 from campgrounds revenues and \$25,000 from recreation special uses.

Condition surveys were completed on developed recreation sites that had not had a survey within the last 5 years, or where improvements were planned.

We began the Recreation Facility Analysis process to look at the sustainability of our developed recreation program by validating our INFRA data and determining our recreation niche.

We continued partnering with West Virginia University (WVU) to complete a Management Plan for the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks NRA. The final plan is expected by 12/08.

We removed traffic barriers at Stuart Recreation Area to reduce deferred maintenance costs.

We replaced wooden traffic barriers at Horseshoe Recreation Area with rock barriers to reduce deferred maintenance costs.

Maps were created and posted for Otter Creek Wilderness, Stuart Recreation Area, Bear Heaven Campground, and the Allegheny Trail.

A sand filter was completed at Seneca Shadows Campground.

A volunteer naturalist provided kid's and amphitheater programs at Lake Sherwood.

The sewage treatment plant at Blue Bend Recreation Area was completed.

The use of the Anthony Correctional Center inmate crew at developed recreation sites and D6 trails was greatly increased, including over 4,000 hours of donated labor.

Visitation was recorded at 28,258 for the Cranberry Mountain Nature Center (CMNC), and 70,257 for the Seneca Rocks Discovery Center (SRDC).

The Roy Moose interpretive program served approximately 9,000 people.

The Cranberry Mountain Shindig had approximately 2,000 people participate. The CMNC Kids Night included about 400 people.

Between 700 and 1,000 people participated in the Starlab Planetarium, Sunlab solar telescope and the Subaru Leave No Trace Traveling trainers on Memorial Day weekend at CMNC.

We partnered with Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau on CMNC staffing.

An estimated 76 interpretative programs were provided at SRDC, serving 1,474 people.

The following projects were accomplished for people with disabilities:

- Maintained shower controls that are ADA approved at Lake Sherwood Beach,
- Added "handicapped" painted lines pavement at Summit Lake Trail,
- Compacted pathways at Lake Sherwood to keep them more accessible,
- Replaced flagstone beach and beach pathway at Blue Bend,
- Constructed 2 accessible pathways to 2 new accessible toilets at Lower Glady,
- Constructed 1 accessible pathway to 1 new accessible toilet at Bear Heaven CG,
- Installed 6 accessible bear resistant garbage can units at Bear Heaven CG,
- Added new accessible vault toilet at SRDC lower parking lot.

## **Travel Management**

The Forest's initial Motor Vehicle Use Map was completed. The map was divided into north and south portions of the Forest, and it designated roads available for highway legal vehicles, both year-round and seasonally. No trails or areas were designated for off-highway vehicles.

**Recreation Special Uses**

A new special use boat concessionaire at Lake Sherwood increased hours of operation and greatly expanded public services. The response from the public has been favorable.

**Wilderness**

Due to limited recreation funding, no wilderness areas were managed to standard. We were not able to hire enough seasonal employees to help meet monitoring and work force standards.

We conducted invasive plant monitoring and manual eradication in the Cranberry Wilderness.

We sponsored the Subaru Leave No Trace trainers who provided awareness and education to an estimated 950 people at the Seneca Rocks Discovery Center, 190 people at the Cranberry Mountain Nature Center, 90 people at trailheads, and 11 people at an awareness workshop.

**Education Plans**

We completed the Sites Homestead Interpretative Plan.

**Trails**

We improved 10 miles of trails, and maintained 220 miles.

We continued work with WVU on a Forest-wide trail plan.

We designed the Fork Mountain Trail extension.

We began the Fork Mountain Trail bridge work with funding from Recreational Trails Grants.

We partnered with Camp Cesar and Webster County Economic Development to construct a trail for the Cherry River Elementary School Partnership.

We completed the Honey Comb Rocks Interpretive Trail with National Scenic Byways money.

The trail reconstruction plan for the Seneca Rocks Trail was completed.

We implemented a recreational trails grant for the Dolly Sods area with matching funds from the WV Highlands Conservancy. Trail maintenance was completed on an estimated 55 miles.

We signed a partnership agreement with The Mountain Institute to conduct trail maintenance on the North Zone of the Forest. Over 120 miles of trails were maintained (logged out), tread-work was completed on four trails, and heavy brushing was done on nine miles of the Plantation Trail.

We installed a boardwalk on the Bear Rocks Trail and we installed 25 erosion control features on Big Run Trail with the assistance of the American Hiking Society.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

The Monongahela National Forest Land and Resource Plan (2006) outlines recreation-related monitoring items/questions on pages IV-6 and IV-9 of Chapter IV.

5. *To what extent is the Forest providing Recreation Motor Vehicle (RMV) opportunities; what are the effects of RMVs on the physical and social environment; and how effective are Forest management practices in managing RMV use?*
21. *Do Forest-provided drinking water sources meet standards to protect human health?*
22. *Are Forest facilities and recreation sites safe for employee and public use and enjoyment?*
23. *To what extent does the Forest provide a range of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities that incorporate diverse public interests yet achieve applicable Management Prescription goals?*
24. *To what extent are Forest management activities within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Objectives (ROS)?*
25. *To what extent do Forest recreation facilities and opportunities meet accessibility, health, safety, cost, and maintenance requirements and achieve resource and social objectives?*
27. *Are Forest management activities providing scenic quality as defined by the Scenic Integrity Objectives?*
30. *Does management of recreation/wilderness and other special use permits meet Forest Plan and Agency direction?*

Monitoring results for these questions are reported below.

**Monitoring Question 5. To what extent is the Forest providing Recreation Motor Vehicle (RMV) opportunities; what are the effects of RMVs on the physical and social environment; and how effective are Forest management practices in managing RMV use?**

Recreation Motor Vehicles are allowed on designated routes. The Monongahela National Forest Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) is the tool used to designate roads, trails or areas for motor vehicle use, and it also determines the types of vehicle use allowed. In 2007, the Forest created the first MVUM and only designated existing open and seasonally open roads for motorized use for licensed and highway legal vehicles. No Off-Highway Vehicle (OHVs) use is currently allowed on the Monongahela National Forest.

**Monitoring Question 5. Evaluation, Conclusions and Recommendations**

Driving for pleasure, one of the main forms of motorized recreation on the Monongahela National Forest occurs on many open and seasonally open roads. Maintenance issues result from road use during wet/snowy weather, mainly in the form of surface rutting. Seasonal closures of roads like Forest Road 75 to Dolly Sods are needed to protect resources and public safety.

Illegal motor vehicle use, mainly in the form of All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), occurs in areas close to private land or on Forest roads that are mistaken for State roads where ATV use is allowed. Better signs with restrictions are needed where the public leaves State Roads and enters Forest Service roads. Additional law enforcement is also needed to address illegal ATV use. See the Transportation System section of this report for more information on this topic.

The Motor Vehicle Use Map does not deal with over-snow vehicles; however, over-snow vehicles are permitted on the Highland Scenic Highway. Few issues have resulted from snow vehicle travel on the Highland Scenic Highway. This highway is closed to all other licensed motorized vehicles during winter months.

**Monitoring Question 21. Do Forest-provided drinking water sources meet standards to protect human health?**

Chlorinated water systems are monitored daily and hand-pump systems are monitored monthly by certified Class 1 operators, or under the direction of certified Class 1 operators. Coliform levels are monitored quarterly to meet state requirements and monthly to meet agency standards. Water systems are tested annually for nitrate. Water sampling is recorded in the INFRA water sampling module by a facilities technician, and paper copies are stored at local offices. Sanitary surveys of public water systems are conducted periodically by state and federal officials.

**Monitoring Question 21. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

Current concerns with water systems reflect more the failure of the Forest or the concessionaire/permittee to notify the state when systems are closed rather than actual violations of state and federal requirements.

**Recommendations:** Condition surveys of water systems are valuable and should continue. For example, based on past surveys, the Lake Sherwood water distribution system was improved in 2006, and plans were developed in 2007 for improving the water systems at Stuart Recreation Area and Seneca Shadows Campground. These facilities will be upgraded in FY 2008.

Monitoring Item 22 could be incorporated into Monitoring Item 23 in the future, as public drinking water is just one of many public safety and enjoyment concerns on the Forest.

**Monitoring Question 22 - Are Forest facilities and recreation sites safe for employee and public use and enjoyment?**

Identification of site deterioration and maintenance needs is now an accepted and fully integrated management practice on the Forest. Site monitoring and condition surveys for buildings, water

systems, waste water systems, and constructed features (e.g., tables, grills, fire rings) provide much needed information to prioritize and implement site maintenance or improvements. Surveys are conducted by recreation technicians, facility engineers, and engineering technicians.

Recreation site condition surveys in FY 2007 were conducted for Red Creek and Bear Heaven Campgrounds, Dolly Sods Picnic Area, and the Horseshoe Recreation Area.

Hazard trees are removed in the spring before developed recreation sites open and are also removed as needed throughout the year, especially following high wind events.

Forest personnel regularly patrol recreation sites to enforce rules as well as identify hazards.

Potential hazards resulting from construction operations are dealt with through contract clauses, site closures, seasonal restrictions on construction, and field identification of hazards.

Although no written procedures exist for hazardous weather conditions at recreation sites, several actions are taken during various events.

- Several sites are signed for potential flooding such as Horseshoe Recreation Area, Tea Creek Campground, Blue Bend Recreation Area, and Williams River Dispersed Area.
- Forest/Concession personnel close the gate at Stuart Day Use Recreation Area during flooding events until the site is safe for public use.
- Forest personnel monitor regularly flooded recreation sites during and after flood events.

Gaudineer Scenic Area is signed for caution during wind events due to the potential for blow down in the old growth forest through which the recreation trail meanders.

Monitoring and management of activities surrounding recreation sites/trails occurs through timber sale contract provisions that restrict timber hauling on the Highland Scenic Highway during high recreational use on weekends and during fall color season. Safety from surrounding helicopter logging on the Desert Branch Timber Sale was managed by temporarily closing the Fork Mountain Trail during March and April 2007.

### **Monitoring Question 22. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

There were no major public health and safety issues reported in FY 2007.

**Recommendations:** Condition surveys of water, waste water, building, and recreation facilities are valuable and should continue. Procedures for hazardous weather situations at recreation sites should be written and posted at recreation sites. Procedures for hazard tree removal, mitigating daily hazards, mitigating construction hazards, and monitoring of other resource activities are sufficient at this time.

**Monitoring Question 23. To what extent does the Forest provide a range of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities that incorporate diverse public interests yet achieve applicable Management Prescription goals?**

The distribution of recreation opportunities on the Forest was analyzed and reported in the 2006 Final EIS for Forest Plan Revision (pages 3-403 through 3-405). To summarize this analysis, Management Prescription changes in plan revision shifted the amount of Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized areas from 21 percent of the Forest to 41 percent, while Roaded Natural areas shifted from 44 percent to 41 percent. Thus, the amounts of primarily motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunity areas are virtually the same. Most of the remaining area of the Forest (18 percent) is now classified as Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM). Although SPM areas can allow motorized recreation, in most cases these areas on the Forest have roads that are currently closed to public motorized access, although development activities such as timber harvest may occur. Therefore, SPM areas offer a mix of recreation opportunities and settings.

The ROS distribution on the Forest reflects current uses and demands from the public. Motorized use on the Forest focuses on driving for pleasure, riding trains for pleasure, viewing scenery, and visiting historic sites, developed recreation sites, and dispersed areas. There are no motorized trails or motorized areas designated on the Forest.

Non-motorized use is a major emphasis on the Forest, including activities such as viewing natural features, fishing, hiking, downhill skiing, hunting, relaxing, backpacking, viewing wildlife, gathering forest products, and mountain biking.

According to the NVUM data, horseback riding, motorized water activities, off-highway (ATV) use, resort use, and snowmobiling represent primary activities within Region 9; however they do not play a major role here on the Monongahela National Forest.

Activity trends within the market zone for the Forest show demand for the following activities all of which are provided (National Survey on the Recreation and Environment): Developed Camping, Fishing, Non-motorized Water, Hiking, Backpacking, Hunting, Downhill Skiing, Picnicking, Primitive Camping, and Nature Center activities.

**Monitoring Question 23. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

People visiting the Forest find a wide spectrum of recreational opportunities. Diverse landscapes offer a variety of settings for recreational activities, ranging from semi-primitive non-motorized to more roaded and rural settings. No major changes in Management Prescription allocation occurred during FY 2007 that would change the current balance of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities.

**Recommendations:** National Visitor Use Monitoring should continue so that visitor use is monitored in the future. Satisfaction with our facilities/services should continue to be measured so that we can provide a range of opportunities and settings to meet public expectations.

**Monitoring Question 24. To what extent are Forest management activities within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Objectives (ROS)?**

Forest management activities are screened during project planning efforts. When projects are proposed, a recreation specialist looks at the management prescription and ROS category they fall under. The physical, social and managerial settings, desired conditions, and standards and guidelines help determine which management activities are appropriate for the ROS, or whether a Forest Plan amendment is needed to allow an activity to temporarily change the ROS setting.

**Monitoring Question 24. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

In FY 2007 there were no Forest activities that required a change in ROS settings or objectives.

User (satisfaction) data from the National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) satisfaction surveys are helpful to evaluate how well the public accepts management activities, facilities, and services in meeting Forest Plan objectives. NVUM did not occur in FY 2007, but will occur in FY 2009.

**Monitoring Question 25. To what extent do Forest recreation facilities and opportunities meet accessibility, health, safety, cost, and maintenance requirements and achieve resource and social objectives?**

Health, safety, and some maintenance requirements for recreation sites were covered under Monitoring Item 22, above. Accomplishments for accessibility were listed in the accomplishment section. Recreation site condition surveys in 2007 for Red Creek Campground, Dolly Sods Picnic Area, Horseshoe Campground and Picnic Area, and Bear Heaven Campground showed the following information about accessibility:

Recreation Site	No. of Accessible Units	Units with Accessible Furnishings	Comments
Bear Heaven CG	0	1	Non-accessible hand-pump. Does have accessible toilet and animal resistant garbage cans.
Horseshoe CG	0	0	Has accessible vault toilet. Flush toilets are not accessible.
Horseshoe Pic. Area	0	1	Some fire-rings/grill accessible
Dolly Sods Pic. Area	0	0	Non-accessible hand-pump/toilets. Site to be closed and relocated.
Red Creek CG	0	0	Non-accessible hand-pump

Accessibility to people with disabilities is considered during all maintenance and improvement activities.

In 2007 we completed Trail Condition surveys on the Lindy Run Trail (109) for 1.33 miles, the Barenshe Trail (256) for 4.5 miles, the Allegheny Trail (701\_d3\_b) for 18.4 miles, and the Bannock Shoals Trail (446) for 3.8 miles.

Forest Plan direction states that the Forest should provide an annual average of 75 miles of trail maintenance within wilderness and 350 miles outside of wilderness each year. In FY 2007, the



Forest completed 150.5 miles of wilderness trail maintenance and 69.5 of non-wilderness trail maintenance, for a total of 220 miles.

In 2007 we began a Recreation Facility Analysis (RFA) process that has the primary goals of:

- Provide recreation opportunities consistent with the Forest's recreation niche and focus resources on sites that best fit the recreation niche.
- Operate and maintain financially sustainable recreation sites to national and regional quality standards with available revenue stream.
- Reduce deferred maintenance backlog by 20% by 2010, 70% by 2015, and 90% by 2020.
- Improve customer satisfaction.

### **Monitoring Question 25. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

The five recreation sites listed above show no units that are fully accessible. The Dolly Sods Picnic Area will be decommissioned in the near future and will not receive upgrades as a result. Full accessibility is difficult to achieve because it requires that every aspect of a recreation site be accessible. Many of our smaller campgrounds/picnic areas will never be fully accessible because they have non-accessible hand-pumps. Accessible hand-pumps cannot be used because the wells are too deep. Another issue is that the pathways to restrooms and water sources must also be accessible, but due to topography they may never be.

Recreation sites and picnic areas should have some units with accessible furnishings such as tables, grills, lantern posts, and fire rings. As these items deteriorate, they should be replaced with accessible ones. Numbers for these sites are also low because when these surveys were done, 4 of the 5 surveys were conducted with the intention of upgrading furnishings at these sites. No development scales or settings were changed at any recreation site as a result of accessibility needs.

Trail users have not complained of trail overcrowding. No new Forest trails were constructed in FY 2007, and little if any new trail construction has occurred since 2001. The trails program has focused on maintaining the 800+ miles of existing trails to standard. We are interested in creating more loop trail opportunities in the future, but the overall trail system is expected to remain fairly constant over the short term, as some trails are added and others are removed, depending on use levels and our ability to adequately maintain the trails we have.

Although the RFA effort only started in 2007, the result is that costs for developed recreation sites should be sustainable within the next 5 years.

**Recommendations:** Continue to monitor trail maintenance needs and public trail concerns through work planning, site-specific trail use monitoring, Forest Plan revision comments, Forest trail management planning efforts, and other Forest project comments. Trail maintenance Objective RC04 in the Forest Plan for within (75 miles) and outside (350 miles) wilderness areas far exceeds targets and accomplishments (220 miles). If budgets remain stable or decline, this objective should be reduced to reflect more realistic numbers.

Maintenance and improvements at sites should continue to incorporate accessibility needs.

Adverse effects from dispersed recreation, especially dispersed camping near rivers and streams, need to be monitored and controlled. Dispersed recreation is often unplanned without considering environmental consequences.

Because health and safety concerns for recreation sites are already covered under Monitoring Item 22, it is recommended that we reword Monitoring Item 25 to focus on accessibility and maintenance issues: *To what extent do Forest recreation facilities and opportunities meet accessibility and maintenance needs to achieve resource and social objectives?*

**Monitoring Question 27. Are forest management activities providing scenic quality as defined by the Scenic Integrity Objectives?**

Scenic Integrity Objectives were assigned and mapped for the Forest during Forest Plan revision and are now used at the project level. How Forest management activities affect these Objectives is considered during the planning stages of activities that have the potential to alter scenic quality. As a result, management activities are designed to provide appropriate scenic quality.

**Monitoring Question 27. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

No specific projects were reviewed for potential effects to scenery in FY 2007, but implemented projects had been screened prior to implementation, and no changes in Scenic Integrity Objectives were predicted. Screening should and will continue for future projects.

**Monitoring Question 30. Does management of recreation/wilderness and other special use permits meet Forest Plan and Agency direction?**

Recreation/wilderness special use permits usually meet Forest Plan and Agency direction because all special use requests are pre-screened with applicants to ensure they follow Forest Plan direction. In total, 23 recreation special use permits were monitored, including recreation events for ultra runs and triathlon, outfitter/guides for a variety of outdoor activities, concessionaire services, and organization camps.

During routine monitoring of our wilderness areas, some illegal outfitting/guiding was found and reported to the special use coordinator. Letters were sent to inform violators of the need to acquire a legal permit for their activities. Only one violation citation had to be written.

The Forest also routinely conducted pre-award compliance reviews to ensure equal opportunity for all Forest visitors and to prevent program discrimination complaints for all outfitter/guide and recreation event requests.

**Monitoring Question 30. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

Monitoring of recreation events showed that most permits stayed within the requirements of their permits and operating plans. Minor infractions were noted on some evaluations. For instance, one outfitter/guide had camped on the Forest without permission, however they camped in an established campsite and no resources were damaged.