

NEWS

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FOREST ENGINEERS RESPOND TO HURRICANE RELIEF REQUEST

Spearfish, SD- With another hurricane season approaching, the USDA Forest Service is still cleaning up from last year's devastating season. Last September, three hurricanes left the National Forests in western North Carolina with an estimated \$47 million in damages.

Black Hills National Forest engineers and many others from forests across the country have answered the call to help North Carolina restore its National Forest facilities, trails, and roads in the Appalachian Mountains.

Returning engineers carry vivid memories of the experience.

Greg Bohls, a Northern Hills Ranger District engineering technician, said, "Houses in the drainages got washed down and piled on top of each other. Cars were smashed."

The storm series severely impacted residents and homeowners, but the forest also got its share of damage.

"In the forest, many trees were down. There was a lot of damage. Culverts were washed out; I saw damages to bridges and trails and things like that," commented Bohls.

The hurricanes ruined an estimated \$27 million worth of roads alone. Some who have returned from the incident are still working remotely on road projects begun in North Carolina.

In fact, Michael Cody a Northern Hills Ranger District civil engineer spends much of his time in front of his computer in Spearfish designing road structures that others will build on the North Carolina forests.

“You have to consider this is on very, very steep ground. So the repairs are very complex to get it stabilized,” Cody said.

Cody, who has spent a lot of time in North Carolina this year, doesn’t see repairs being completed for a few years in some places.

“Their timeframe is to have all of this out into contracting by this fall, realizing that most of this is going to take a year to probably two to three years in some places to get all this repaired,” said Cody.

Forest Service staff travel out in the forest canvassing the area to document the damage and assess what it will take to return roads, trails, and facilities to their pre-storm condition.

“Those sort of things included photographs, measurements, and sketches,” said engineering technician Kelly Koistinen, also of the Northern Hills Ranger District.

The Black Hills North Carolina volunteers enjoyed the challenge and new experience working on an incident such as this one.

Bohls said, “I really enjoyed it. I was nervous before I went because I didn’t know what to expect, but once we got there and got started, we felt like we were doing something productive and helping them as a part of the team.”

“It was a good experience for me to get off the forest and learn about how things work in remote areas like western North Carolina,” said Koistinen.

Sound bites:

Greg Bohls, Northern Hills Ranger District, Engineering Technician

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B-roll:

- 1) Greg Bohls and Kelly Koistinen point on the map where they were in North Carolina.**
- 2) Misc. footage of map.**
- 3) Misc. still images of hurricane damage**
- 4) Misc. Michael Cody working in Spearfish, SD on his computer designing road structures.**

Videographer/Reporter Gary C. Chancey Black Hills National Forest