



## USDA Forest Service-Savannah River Fiscal Year 2020 Savannah River Site Environmental Report

In support of the environmental stewardship mission, the USDA Forest Service – Savannah River (USFS-SR) manages natural resources at the U.S. Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site (DOE-SRS). Operating under an Interagency Agreement with the SRS Operations Office, the USFS-SR follows SRS’ Strategic Plan goals and objectives to implement the United States Department of Energy’s Natural Resources Management Plan for the SRS.

The following initiatives and accomplishments reflect the various ways in which USFS-SR worked to implement the plan in fiscal year 2020.

### **Maintained and improved habitat to meet recovery population objectives for threatened, endangered and sensitive species.**

USFS-SR continued to improve habitat conditions for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker by thinning over 897 acres of forest through timber sales, removing brush and smallhardwood vegetation from over 155 acres in woodpecker habitat. This is a reduction in brush removal acres relative to previous years and is a result of the effective use of timber sales to treat a considerable portion of understory. Prescribed fire also was used extensively to reduce hazardous fuels and to improve habitat on a larger scale. Successful habitat restoration increased the number of active red-cockaded woodpecker clusters from 3 in 1985 to 140 in fiscal year 2020.

Additionally, 10 golden eagles were observed scavenging at SRS. This reclusive species was previously thought to come down only to the Appalachian Mountains during its winter migration. Continued monitoring pond berry and smooth coneflower populations, habitat, and improvement work started in previous fiscal year. This included reducing the understory around the populations and increase the amount of light for the plants.

### **Managed natural resources and harvested forest products**

The USFS-SR sold roughly 90 million cubic feet of forest products through active forest management. Forest products were sold to meet security needs; encourage habitat development for threatened, endangered and sensitive species; promote forest health; and generate revenue. Management activities were and continue to be implemented in support of the Site’s nuclear mission and in compliance with best management practices.

### **Evaluated the effects of management on the environment**

Relative... Through partnerships and collaborations with a number of universities as well as with USDA Forest Service Research Stations, the USFS-SR added applied knowledge and understanding in support of the Interagency Agreement, including:

- Providing precision, sitewide mapping and vegetation information through analysis of Light Detecting and Ranging (LiDAR) data.
- Cooperating with South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and universities to evaluate the breeding ecology of a wild turkey population that is not hunted.
- Publishing a deer management alternative to successfully reduce deer vehicle collisions in some rural areas.
- Publishing treatment effects in early forest stand development relative to forest production and carbon.

## **Excelled in environmental and occupational safety and health performance**

The USFS-SR had six Occupational Safety and Health Administration 300 Log recordable injuries resulting in zero days away and 33 restricted days. Employees and contractors reported 234,000 total hours worked. USFS-SR employees drove 310,500 with zero animal vehicle collisions.

The USFS-SR continued its partnership with other site tenants to ensure effective implementation of environmental safety and health by actively participating in the DOE Integrated Safety Management System (ISMS).

## **Continued environmental restoration**

The Mixed Waste Management Facility Phytoremediation Project, one of SRS's Area Closure Projects which is operated and maintained by USFS-SR, treated approximately 9 million gallons of tritiated water. This project employs a natural remedy (phytoremediation), using vegetative processes to reduce risk to the environment.

Additionally, USFS-SR managed 5,530 acres of vegetation caps and 5,467 monitoring well sites through mowing; pesticide and herbicide application; prescribed fire; and seeding. This allows SRS personnel to continue the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) mandated water and groundwater monitoring.

## **Safely maintained infrastructure in an environmentally sound state of operational readiness**

USFS-SR completed maintenance on 980 miles of SRS secondary roads and 35 miles of exterior boundary fence. Normal maintenance activities performed include blading and calcium chloride application for dust abatement for roads and fence repair and trespass warning sign replacements for the exterior boundary.

USFS-SR constructed 0.18 miles of secondary roads in support of site activities and maintained 11 miles of multipurpose trails used primarily by SRS wellness programs. Thirty miles of Site boundary along the Savannah River was inspected and maintained, including replacement of trespass warning signs.

## **Reduced risk of catastrophic wildland fires through systematic and safe application of prescribed fire**

USFS-SR, fire management burned 40 prescribed burns for 23,886 acres of hazardous fuel reduction and suppressed nine wildfires totaling 4.7 acres.

Smokey Bear went to 20 local elementary schools and programs visiting roughly 4,820 children and adults.

## **Communicated SRS stewardship**

USFS-SR community outreach efforts were curtailed by the COVID-19 national pandemic. The forest service withdrew in-person participation from community events effective March of 2020 due to the risk of exposure to the disease. Both internal and external communication meetings such as the SRS Citizens Advisory Board meeting, Site wide, local unit, and regional forest service calls continued virtually.

## **USDA Forest Service–Savannah River**

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