



## **USDA Forest Service-Savannah River Fiscal Year 2021 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 2021.

### **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 3,076 acres of forest through timber sales, removing brush and smallhardwood vegetation from over 105 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 150 in fiscal year 2021.

Additionally, 2 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 73,000 ccf of forest products through active forest management and recovered 15,850 ton of fuel chips from the tornado salvage sale. Forest products were sold to meet security needs; encourage habitat development for threatened, endangered and sensitive species; promote forest health; reduce wildfire fuel loads 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**

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:

- Publishing long term forest restoration is a priority and influenced by persistent prior land use effects.
- 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 wild pig territoriality and implications for control.
- Publishing nitrogen dynamics in early forest stand development relative to forest production and carbon.

## **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 9.5 million gallons of tritiated water. This project employs a natural remedy (phytoremediation / transpoevaporation), using vegetative processes to reduce risk to the environment.

Additionally, USFS-SR managed 5,001 acres of vegetation caps and 5,674 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 0.12 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 the risk of catastrophic wildland fires through systematic and safe application of prescribed fire**

USFS-SR, fire management conducted 48 prescribed burns resulting in 23,989 acres of hazardous fuel reduction. Firefighters responded to and suppressed six wildfires totaling 17.07 acres.

As result of the pandemic all fire prevention classroom outreach activities were cancelled for FY-21. Smokey Bear did participate in the Aiken Memorial Day parade.

## **Communicated SRS stewardship**

USFS-SR community outreach efforts continued to be curtailed by the COVID-19 national pandemic. In accordance with CDC and USDA guidelines, the forest service did not participate in person to person community events in FY-21. Two video projects were produced in partnership with Savannah River National laboratory to help employees on site and concerned residents learn more about forest management practices on site. 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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