



USDA Forest Service-Savannah River Fiscal Year 2023 Environmental Report



USDA Forest Service – Savannah River (USFS-SR) manages the natural resources at Savannah River Site (SRS) in support of the environmental Stewardship mission of the Department of Energy (DOE-SRS).

Operating under an Interagency Agreement with the SRS Operations Office, USFS-SR works with the Department of Energy SRS to implement their Natural Resources Management Plan for Savannah River Site.

The following initiatives and accomplishments reflect the various ways in which Savannah River worked to implement the plan in fiscal year 2023.

Habitat, Population and Invasive Species, and TES Species Management Programs

USDA Forest Service Savannah River provides active natural resource management practices on approximately 170,000 acres of forested areas on Savannah River Site. The purpose of these management actions falls within three main activity areas. To restore and maintain suitable vegetative habitats for native plant and tree species. Wildlife population management activities to ensure continued employee safety and to control both plant and animal species on SRS. Provide necessary management actions to reestablish when appropriate, as well as support and protect, federally listed plant and animal threatened, endangered, or sensitive species.

Specific actions and accomplishments to this program include:

- Apply prescribed fire to remove non-native/invasive plant species across specific management areas.
- Site area preparation to support the reintroduction and continued growth of pollinators on SRS.
- Provides necessary TES management and support to over 600 Red-cockaded Woodpeckers on site.
- Responded to over 150 calls for nuisance animal control.
- Continued to monitor and improve, when possible, pond berry and purple smooth coneflower populations.

Forest Products Harvesting and Silviculture Management

Forest products harvesting and silviculture management are conducted to provide a variety of forest conditions to meet security needs, encourage habitat development for native as well as TES species, promote forest health, and generate revenue from the sale of forest products. Harvesting activities include a wide range of removal methods: thinning; partial cutting; and clear cutting. They may also include salvage and sanitation operations that are needed because of damage from fire, wind, weather, or insect damage.

Specific actions and accomplishments to this program include:

- Treated 82 acres for non-native plant species and monitor/treat areas as needed to support TES plant species.
- Surveyed over 5000 acres for TES and non-native invasive species plants (NNISP) in advance of proposed timber harvesting prescriptions,
- Conducted site prep and seedling planting to over 2,500 acres of previously harvested areas.
- Sold over 46,000 CCF of timber and marked an additional 38,000 CCF for future sales.



Secondary Roads, Wellness trails, and Boundary Management

USDA Forest Service - Savannah River constructs secondary roads as needed to perform natural resource management activities or as requested by the DOE. Maintenance of secondary roads to keep them in a safe driving condition also lies with the USFS. DOE-SRS employee wellness trails across the site are constructed and maintained by the Forest Service. The Forest Service is also responsible for constructing and maintaining the DOE-SRS perimeter boundary system that consists of approximately 120 miles of fencing and signage.

Specific actions and accomplishments to this program include:

- Completed over 1000 miles of secondary road maintenance to include surface grading, roadside mowing, brushing, culvert replacement, and dust abatement.
- Reconstructed access to monitoring well areas. (1000 LF)
- Performed annual clearing and maintenance on 21.6 miles of wellness trails on the site. Oversaw the removal of two hazard trees.
- Completed over 50 miles of perimeter boundary maintenance and replaced 14 signs along adjacent waterways.

Watershed Management and Environmental Restoration

The Forest Service is responsible to control actively eroding areas that potentially pollute streams, watersheds, and other open waters as well as implementing federally mandated regulatory requirements for remediated and or closed portions of a watershed.

Specific actions and accomplishments to this program include:

- Completed vegetation management activities to over 2700 acres of Area Completion Project (ACP) area.
- Completed vegetation management activities to over 4,700 groundwater monitoring wells across the site.
- Irrigated 28.7 million gallons of Tritium contaminated groundwater through the phytoremediation project.

Fire Management

The Fire Management Program is designed to prevent and suppress all wildland fires inside the SRS boundary. A prescribed fire program is implemented to reduce fuels, to provide habitats for a variety of plant and animal species, to conduct research and silvicultural projects, and to support construction and operational activities on board Savannah River Site.

Specific actions and accomplishments to this program include:

- Provided full suppression activities to five fires originating on SRS for a total size of 5.94 acres.
- Using a combination of both aerial and hand ignitions, successfully applied prescribed fire to over 23,000 acres on River Site.

Research

Through partnerships and collaborations with universities and other federal research agencies, USFS-SR conducts natural resource research on subjects that include but is not limited to, endangered species, biodiversity, wetland restoration and mitigation, forest sustainability and operations, productivity, bioenergy, fate and transport of contaminant in the environment and restoration technology.

Specific actions and accomplishments to this program include:

- Conducting a cooperative study with North Carolina State University and Southern Research Station to study cluster occupancy dynamics of the Red Cockaded Woodpecker.
- Cooperative study initiated by FS-SR Natural Resources and Southern Research Station on the rapid recovery of wild pig populations following intensive control activities.
- Cooperative study with multiple universities and federal organizations on the reproductive ecology of wild turkeys.
- Conducting a cooperative study with multiple universities funded by the National Science Foundation researching the effect of corridors on plant biodiversity.

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