



USDA Forest Service Fiscal Year 2024 Environmental Report



The USDA Forest Service (USFS) 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 works with the DOE-SRS to implement its Natural Resources Management Plan for the Savannah River Site. The following initiatives and accomplishments reflect the various ways in which the USFS worked to implement the plan in FY 2024.

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

The USFS provides active natural resource management practices on approximately 170,000 acres of forests across SRS, promoting native plant and wildlife species. Wildlife population management activities to ensure continued employee safety and to control both plant and animal species on SRS. The purpose of these management actions falls within three main activity areas. To restore and manage actions to reestablish when appropriate, as well as support and protect, federally listed plant and animal species that are threatened, endangered, or sensitive. Specific actions and accomplishments of this program include:

- Treated 145 Acres of non-native invasive plant species (NNIPS) ahead of timber activity and in support of TES habitat enhancement.
- Eradicated over 1,500 invasive feral hogs from the Savannah River Site.
- Created 684 acres of roosting habitat for cavity nesting birds while also enhancing pollinator habitat using prescribed fire. In addition, our unit enhanced and improved threatened, endangered, and sensitive species (TES) habitat (Longleaf Pine Ecosystem) and saw growth within the federally endangered RCW population.
- Continued to monitor and improve, when possible, pond berry and purple smooth coneflower populations.

Forest Products Harvesting and Silviculture Management

Forest product harvesting and silviculture management are conducted to provide a variety of forest conditions to meet site 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 regenerative harvesting. 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 of this program include:

- Surveyed over 4,000 acres for TES and (NNIPS) in advance of proposed timber harvesting prescriptions,
- Conducted site prep, seedling planting, and survival surveys on approximately 3,000 acres on SRS.
- Sold over 47,000 CCF of timber and marked 42,000 CCF for future sales.

Secondary Roads, Wellness Trails, and Boundary Management

The USFS constructs secondary roads as needed to perform natural resource management activities or as requested by the DOE. Maintenance of these secondary roads is also conducted to keep them in a safe

driving condition. The DOE-SRS employee wellness trails across the site are constructed and maintained by the USFS. The USFS is also responsible for construction and maintenance of the DOE-SRS perimeter boundary system that consists of approximately 120 miles of fencing and signage. Specific actions and accomplishments of this program include:

- Completed over 1,700 miles of secondary road maintenance to include surface grading, roadside mowing, brushing, culvert replacement, and dust abatement.
- Removed hazard trees and completed trail maintenance on 11 miles of employee wellness trails.
- Completed over 50 miles of perimeter boundary maintenance to include fence repair, tree diskings along boundary fence, and SRS boundary sign survey and maintenance.

Watershed Management and Environmental Restoration

The USFS is responsible for actively controlling eroding areas that potentially pollute streams, watersheds, and other open waters, as well as implementing federally mandated regulatory requirements for remediated and closed portions of a watershed. Specific actions and accomplishments of this program include:

- Completed vegetation management activities on over 1,500 acres within the Area Completion Project .
- Completed vegetation management activities to over 4,800 groundwater monitoring wells across the SRS.
- Irrigated 6.6 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 to support construction and operational activities on the SRS.

Specific actions and accomplishments of this program include:

- Provided complete suppression activities to eight fires totaling over 43 acres on SRS.
- Using a combination of both aerial and hand ignitions, successfully applied prescribed fire to over 37,000 acres on SRS.

Research

Through partnerships and collaborations with universities and other federal research agencies, the USFS conducts natural resource research on subjects that include but are not limited to endangered species, biodiversity, wetland restoration and mitigation, forest sustainability and operations, productivity, bioenergy, fate and transport of contaminants in the environment, and restoration technology. Specific actions and accomplishments of this program include:

- Partnered with other USFS units and external organizations to continue development of the 35-year forest estate model to help develop and implement future sustainable harvesting activities.
- Completed the final year of the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) survival response to various woodpecker cluster density conditions. Data collected will aid in future RCW habitat management plans.
- Selected study sites and received compliance approval from SRS to develop an artificial intelligence (AI) based system that can accurately identify coyotes from other animals in designated study areas.

USDA Forest Service – Savannah River
P.O. Box 700, New Ellenton, S.C. 29809
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/r08/savannah-river>