

Dear Smokey, How Can We Help Manage Our National Forests?

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Everywhere, USA

Smokey Bear
USDA Forest Service
PO Box 96090
Washington, DC 20090-6090

Dear Smokey,

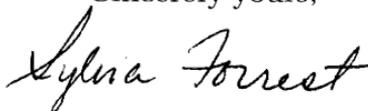
We are a typical American family. We eat at the local “burger palace”—now that it doesn’t use Styrofoam anymore! We have a 17-year-old athletic daughter, a 14-year-old computer whiz Girl Scout, and a 10-year-old soccer-playing Boy Scout. My husbands’s mother lives at home with us.

We live in the suburbs of a large city. Once a year, we escape the noise, rules, and crowds of urban life by going on a week-long camping trip on a national forest. Our family loves to drive through forests on weekends to enjoy the scenery. I like to watch birds on our family outings.

But we don’t want to just camp or drive around on our forests any more—we want to do something for our national forests. We want to give something back for all that we have received from our forests. We care about our future.

How can we be involved in helping to manage our national forests?

Sincerely yours,



Sylvia Forrest

Sylvia Forrest
Everywhere, USA

Dear Sylvia,

Thank you for writing. The Forest Service needs people like you! Did you know there are 175 national forests and grasslands, covering 191 million acres, in 44 States, plus Puerto Rico? All these lands belong to all of us, but the Forest Service is the steward. Here are some ways to get involved in managing your national forests. We are glad to have your help!

- **Adopt a forest.** Choose a national forest that you enjoy visiting and adopt it as your own. Call the Forest Service and talk with us about what you want to do. Check your local telephone book under "Government Agencies." You will find us listed under United States Government, Department of Agriculture, Forest Service; there you should find the name of your adopted national forest and its ranger districts. If you can't, then just call the nearest Forest Service office.

When you call us, ask to have your name put on the mailing list. Every national forest has a newsletter or occasional mailing to let the public know when there are meetings, field trips, volunteer projects, or environmental speakers. They send out information about what's going on now and what is planned for the future.

- **Volunteer.** Volunteers are the heartbeat of the Forest Service. Although there are 36,000 employees in the Forest Service, over 97,000 volunteers gave something back to their national forests in 1990. Without volunteers, the Forest Service could not do its work. Over 70 percent of volunteers like to work on recreation projects. Some of the most popular projects are building trails, conducting tours, caring for campgrounds, greeting visitors, and planting trees. The Touch America project is a special, national volunteer program for young people. Scout troops are major participants.

Did you know that the Forest Service supplies more outdoor recreation than any other Federal agency? There are 100,000 miles of trails, 6,000 picnic areas and campgrounds, 320 swimming sites,

1,100 boat sites, and 300 winter sports sites. So many people use their forests for recreation that it averages out to 12 hours a year for every person in America.

Why do people volunteer on their national forests? There are many reasons people give us: the opportunities for fun, learning, physical activity, meeting people, and sharing knowledge; love of the outdoors; the beautiful scenery; adding variety to life; and the challenge of it!

One of the most popular volunteer activities is that of campground host. In exchange for doing minor campground cleanup and providing information to campers, for an entire summer, the campground host is given a camping site, free of charge.

- **Learn and tell others.** Learn more about the outdoors. How can you use and enjoy your national forest wisely? As you learn, share your knowledge with others.

Attend an environmental camp for adults. The Forest Service sponsors several camps. There are also environmental camps for children. Invite Forest Service employees to speak with students. Sign up for Forest Service field trips. Experience learning first-hand.



This Cardinals fan is helping another kind of bird by volunteering in a USDA Forest Service program to install nesting boxes for wood ducks on the Long Cane Ranger District of the Francis Marion National Forest in South Carolina.

Mary Lynn Cagle/USDA 90BW2047-26

Almost every national forest has a nonprofit group or interpretive association of citizens like yourselves that works closely with the national forest. Often this group designs and sells books, maps, and other educational materials about the national forest. Contact one of these groups for information, and consider joining yourselves! The Forest Service itself also publishes maps and other information.

Becoming informed is probably one of the most challenging, fun, and rewarding things you can do for yourself and your national forest.

Join or start a club. What about your interests and hobbies? You said you care about camping and bird watching. You can investigate hundreds of national organizations for people who enjoy nature and the out-of-doors in general or share your particular interests of camping and bird watching. Your library or your adopted national forest will usually have a list of local organizations. These groups are involved in a variety of ways in the management of the local national forests and you can choose the one that is right for you.

Girl and Boy Scouts, as well as 4-H Clubs, are the leading organizations outside the schools that teach young people how to use and enjoy their environment wisely. You are helping your national forests when you help organizations such as these.

Call, write, or visit. Call, write, or visit Forest Service people, especially managers who work with planning. Talking to campground attendants may not solve your concern and sometimes that person may not know the answers to your questions. Although any Forest Service employee is glad to share information, when you have project or planning questions, the District Ranger and his or her immediate staff are the key people to contact. They usually manage the field projects, conduct meetings, and work with volunteers. The Forest Service is a decentralized agency, meaning that many important decisions are made at the local district level, not at the national level.

Opportunities exist for being involved in forest, regional, and national planning efforts as well. Your adopted national forest and environmental organizations can put you in contact with the people who handle those programs. Two important documents that will most affect your adopted forest are the forest plan and the Resource Planning Act. Ask for copies, read them, and let us know what you think.

By the way, when you call, write, or visit, we'd like to hear about what you like that we are doing as well as what you don't like. The things that we are doing well need support, so that we can continue to provide those services.

- **Come to meetings.** When Forest Service personnel host public meetings, they want to hear what you have to say, as well as inform you about what they are doing.

Meetings often deal with planning: How much timber and firewood should be removed? What trails need fixing? Where should a parking lot be built? Should cattle be allowed to graze in an area where recreation use has increased? How can the national forest convince people to stop throwing trash out their windows while the agency's dollars are decreasing for trash pickup?



Scout troops are major participants in USDA Forest Service volunteer programs. These Boys Scouts are learning about plant life in the George Washington National Forest in Virginia.
USDA 88BW0262-20A

You mention that you care about the future. Going to a meeting and telling us your ideas will help us determine the future of the environment together.

- **Do a wildlife project.** Give something back to wildlife. Seeding, fencing, or protecting the bank of a stream from erosion are important wildlife and fisheries projects that can help restore habitat after we have used the land.

With your interest in birding, you could help the district biologist compile a bird list for the national forest or help with a study of nesting habitats of a particular species. Just ask, and the opportunity will be there.

- **Get a part-time job with us.** Your eldest daughter, your mother-in-law, even you yourself may qualify for part-time work with the Forest Service. Although we have 36,000 permanent employees, many additional jobs are seasonal. The Forest Service hires adults for fire fighting, tree nursery work, tree planting, marking timber for cutting, campground maintenance, and other outdoor jobs.

Don't forget that your children can also consider careers with the Forest Service. We need research scientists, such as entomologists, biologists, botanists, and archeologists, as well as technical experts in such disciplines as computer science, management, accounting, recreation planning, economics, forestry, and range conservation, to name just a few. If you want your family to have a big say in the future, encourage your children to major in one of the natural resource sciences!

You may know members of your family or people in your community who would benefit from several worthwhile Forest Service programs for youths and older Americans that provide job training and actual jobs. These include the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), which provides summer employment as well as training and environmental education for 15- to 18-year-olds; the Job Corps, which provides a full program of training, housing, and wages for 17- to 22-year-olds; and the Senior Community Service Employment Program, which provides part-time employment and training for senior citizens with low incomes.

Who knows, you or members of your family or community may qualify for a program such as college work-study, vocational work study, vocational rehabilitation, community work experience, and student conservation association programs—all of which provide training and jobs for conservation work.

- **Become a partner.** The Forest Service is glad to establish partnerships, cooperative grants, and agreements with individuals, community organizations, and other agencies that have similar objectives for the environment. The Forest Service often matches or partially matches funds from private organizations.

Partnerships are a good way for you and your club or organization to stretch funding and tight human resources budgets! The Forest Service has entered into many new partnership programs in the last decade. They include partnerships with volunteer environmental organizations, private corporations, prisons, chambers of commerce, and other organizations. Hundreds of partnerships are established at State, national forest, and ranger district levels; they don't have to be nationwide. Interested? Just ask!

In addition to all the things you can do to help your adopted national forest and the Forest Service, there are many things you can do that help promote a healthy environment. The first two suggestions involve two of the Forest Service's friends—me and Woodsy Owl.

- **Prevent forest fires.** Your letter was addressed to Smokey Bear. In the United States, I (Smokey) am the second most widely recognized symbol after Santa Claus, and I represent the caring spirit of the Forest Service. However, I am a fire prevention bear. Though I care about the environment, I focus on stopping unplanned, unwanted fires. I realize that some fires benefit the environment because certain trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses require fire cycles to help them grow. But I also realize that more fires occur than nature intended, and that we must avoid undesirable fires started by humans.

You can help us by knowing how, where, and when to build a fire properly—and how to put out a fire properly.

- **Give a hoot, don't pollute.** Any help you can give to Woodsy Owl is gratefully appreciated. If you will pick up someone else's trash, Woodsy thanks you. If you can organize others to help pick up trash, Woodsy is exceptionally grateful. Your national forest usually has beautification days for scenic roadsides and campgrounds, when everyone pitches in to pick up litter. Sometimes the national forest can provide volunteer groups with plastic bags, gloves, and/or transportation. The biggest trash problem today on the forests is the nonbiodegradable materials, especially disposable diapers.

- **Recycle.** The more we recycle, the fewer products we need to remove from our forests today and the more products and options we will have for tomorrow. Recycling 1 ton of paper can save as many as 17 trees. Recycling 115 pounds of paper can save one very large, mature tree. Forty percent of what is in the average person's trash can is recyclable paper.
- **Celebrate Earth Day.** Show you care for the environment by setting aside Earth Day, the third Sunday of every April, to do something special for your adopted national forest.
- **Plant a tree.** President George Bush recently instituted a massive national tree planting initiative called "America the Beautiful." His goal is for Americans to plant 1 billion trees every year. By planting a tree, whether in your own backyard or in a forest, you will be giving a lot back to the environment.

Have I overwhelmed you in responding to your simple question? I hope not. Just start, and the rest of the steps will fall into place!

I was very glad to receive your letter. You can see from my letter that yes, the Forest Service needs you. You will make a difference. Let me know how it all works out.

Sincerely,



Smokey Bear
USDA Forest Service
Washington, DC

P.S.: Ann Matejko, Public Affairs Specialist in the Forest Service, USDA, Washington, DC, helped me write this letter.

S.B.