

Storm Recovery/Wilderness and National Scenic Trails

Due to an exceptionally severe hurricane season in 2004 the Region 8 Wilderness/Dispersed Recreation Specialist, Debbie Caffin, and staff from the Lake George Ranger district requested an assessment team to look at trail openings in some of the more heavily impacted Wilderness areas within the Ocala National Forest.

On November 1, 2004 Dick Patton, Dennis Helton, James Beale, David Kuykendall and Ian Barlow met with District and Regional personnel to discuss goals and possibilities in approaching a trails opening strategy. The overriding concern being - how can we lay out the job within legal constraints outlined in the Wilderness Act while performing work under safety standards that we need to fulfill as part of a federal workforce?

In addition we divided the project into three sections of concern, including opportunities presented and tried to lay the project out as a means of addressing the thoughts we had.

*Maintain a safe environment with adequate communications and evacuation plans outlined in the event of an accident.

*Figure out logistics in a manner to allow maximum production while working in the field and create as little impact as possible on forest personnel while support is being provided.

*Build relationships and stronger partnerships where desired and view part of the storm recovery process as an opportunity to promote skill building within this agency and volunteer groups that provide support to these areas of consideration.

Dennis, David, Jim and Ian provided much of the safety information and production probabilities regarding hand or traditional tool use for the project. We compared this information to the possibility of requests for waivers and permission to go up the minimum tool ladder for using chain saws and power equipment for this work in wilderness. Overall, this team provided decades of experience in safety, and the use of both power and hand tools with considerable expertise in other projects involving large storm and fire/flood recovery projects.

In addition, Dick Patton provided an expertise in hydrology necessary to avoid any adverse results to stream bank conditions or water quality that may result from proposed actions in this recovery process.

During the week of November 1 and under the logistical guidance of Harold Shenk TMA for the Lake George Ranger District we spent most of the time in the field looking at conditions along the trails. We discussed what we believe to be safe and efficient ways to approach the work during the winter in early 2005.

We canoed upstream from the Highway 19 bridge below the wilderness boundary for the first three miles of the lower section of the Juniper Springs Canoe Run. After crossing over and below heavy downfall for a couple hours we turned around about a quarter mile

below the old dock where the rescue trail comes in at the approximate halfway point along the trail. Throughout the rest of the week we divided up the work. We waded about three quarters of a mile down from the upstream beginning of the Juniper Springs Canoe Run.

Then we hiked a couple miles of the north and south ends of the wilderness sections of the Florida National Scenic Trail. In this assessment we also hiked part of the rescue trail coming in to the halfway point along the Juniper Springs Canoe run and canoed the lower three miles of the Alexander Springs Canoe Run.

CONDITIONS and RECCOMENDATIONS

Juniper Springs Canoe Run

We canoed upstream from the bridge at the bottom of the run. The water was about a foot higher than normal, however, the higher flows didn't make upstream paddling exceptionally difficult. In the lower reaches there were a few minor debris jams that had floated downstream and lodged along and across the run. Once we reached areas a mile and a half upstream from the bridge we began to run into heavy blow down that lies in and over the run. Much of this is blocking any reasonable passage for canoes and people trying to travel downstream along this trail. The trees are mostly oak, maple, palm and possibly some cypress that are lying across the run and are situated both above and below the surface of the stream.

After looking at and discussing the situation along the water we believe that the work can be done safely with traditional/primitive tools. **However the majority of the workload does not involve cutting the material.** (Therefore crosscut saws may not take much longer than power saws to accomplish this work.) Because of the lay of the canoe run and the low water volume we will need to remove most of the material from the channel. A majority of the work will be in lifting heavy wood up onto the banks and out of site of the run.

This will involve using simple rigging and climbing. Trees will be rigged as spars and material too heavy to carry or throw will be lifted from the channel and deposited away from and out of easy sight of the creek.

Logistics;

An efficient approach to logging out Juniper Springs Run may be to detail two –five person crews composed of two certified climbers and riggers per crew. The remainder of the crew should be composed of experienced crosscut sawyers. All crewmembers should be comfortable with water and good swimmers as some of the hazards encountered are the possibility of falling when wading along the edges of the logjams.

One crew should canoe upstream from the bottom of the run. Two or three days work should allow them to reach the dock at the mid point of the run and allow them to camp for the remainder of the working hitch. From there they can continue working around the middle of the run until it is completely cleared to the standards set by the forest or region.

The second crew should begin below Juniper Springs and return to town each night. After a few days they may have cut enough to move down to the mid point to camp. From there they can work along the run until we have removed the remainder of the debris from the trail.

Since this work will be performed during the winter it may be a good idea to use any days with below normal temperatures to allow these crews to shift over to the rescue trail and clear it. There is heavy downfall all along this trail. It is mostly small and mid diameter pine with a low degree of complexity as far as doing safe cutting and clearing. This option would allow the crews to stay dry and keep working in the event of a cold front passing through.

Identify crew choice to get trained 1st responders or Emergency Medical Technicians on each crew and develop a good safety and evacuation plan for each working group and work site.

Due to aesthetics and the difficulty of achieving a clean looking run that still falls within wilderness guidelines, all of us were involved in discussion regarding an adequate approach to Juniper Springs Canoe Run (trail and cutting standards):

*Cutting and removal of material. After reviewing the situation it seems that a logical approach is to make as few cuts as possible.

*Remove material from the water and place out of easy sight away from the bank.

*Cut longer trees and debris so that the ends of the cuts are away from the banks or so that they tip downward into the mud and sand along the bottom of the run.

*Cut back previously sawn jillpokes and stobs that are sticking out into the run.

*Leave all live overhanging trees situated overhead along the run provided they have a predetermined amount of headroom for canoes and passengers to pass beneath during high water.

(One consideration may be to take overhanging maples and similar fast decaying trees that are dead from the hurricanes. These trees, unlike cypress will rot quickly and fall into the water within a year or so thereby recreating the same problems of limited passage.) This would only include trees that are tipped over and are lying in the air from bank to bank within a few feet over top of the creek.

Due to the amount of sand that seems to be in the bark of the logs lying underwater we should try to peel the bark from cuts before proceeding with the sawing. This may not always be possible. As a result we may dull saws more quickly than normal. We should have several sharp saws for the project or bring a filer along for project work.

Equipment to be purchased

2-3 griphoists or Habegggers (1 ton and 2 ton hoists) with 20 meters mainline rope
2-3 (100 foot sections of ¼ or 3/8 inch wire rope) swaged thimble eye each end
2-3 (300 or 400 foot sections ¼ or 3/8 wire rope depending on diameter) thimble eyes
XIP Korean Rope
2-3 wire rope Klein type cable grips
16 3/8 and ½ inch anchor shackles

3 (6' 4000lb SWL nylon rigging straps)
4 (12' 4000lb SWL nylon rigging straps)
4 (16' 4-8000lb SWL nylon straps)
6-9 good quality snatch blocks to match rigging equipment (Speak with Dennis , Dave and Debbie to match needs to a possible regional cache of this and check with military surplus sites.)
6 helicopter swivel hooks Match to rigging equipment for SWL and nominal strength
4 3/8x5' bell, button and eye chokers
4 3/8x6' bell, button and eye chokers
2 double sheave block and tackle sets with static lines
*Wet suits for each crewmember working on Juniper Run
*1-2 dry bags per person who will be hauling equipment and camping along the run
*Water displacement oil or lubricant for keeping tools free of rust.

Crosscut saws - Talk with region 8 to figure long term as well as storm recovery needs. Coordinate with MTDC to distribute available saws that we purchased in 2003 for national use.

Work with Don Jastad to locate more saws, handles and axes that meet local needs. Figure out purchasing regulations and coordinate to work between Region 8 and Region

1. Figure out simplest way to purchase needed equipment so that it arrives in a timely manner.

2 high quality sheathed hand- saws per crew
1 high quality pole saw per crew (silky or similar brands)
Other equipment... probably no need to purchase

Axes

Falling wedges

Peaveys

Radios

Cell or Satellite phones

First aid kits

Vehicles and canoes

Camping gear will be brought with us except for stoves

Water filter

Canoes, life vests and paddles

Climbing ropes harness and helmets

Spurs

Crews will bring their own crosscuts in case newly purchased saws can't be sharpened in time.

Hiking trails/ Florida National Scenic Trail

After hiking parts of the scenic trail and the rescue trail into Juniper Springs run it seems like the worst blow down has occurred in the sand pine areas where the larger trees have twisted off. Even in the heavily impacted areas the work appears to be of low complexity. It is just labor intensive in areas of heavy windfall. One concern is that complexity increases and safety concerns rise quickly as we get into A-frame trees that may be in the trail corridor. I believe these are not a normal occurrence along these trails. But they should be handled by a crosscut c-faller if they are encountered.

We talked about using Region 8 crews for this work and perhaps involving some experienced crosscut personnel with these crews (only if the skills are lacking in the crew composition). It seems like this is a good idea and an excellent opportunity to share skills and learn from each other.

If volunteers and inexperienced crews are used then we also have a decent chance of doing some in depth trainings at the same time. There is a good opportunity of building both a tool cache and raising skill levels within the region. Trainings can involve the use of traditional tools for wilderness and restoration work. Crosscut filing may be available on a limited basis and training in rigging would be pretty easy to provide if the interest is there.

Alexander Springs Canoe Run

On Friday, Jim Beale and Ian Barlow canoed up the lower half of Alexander Springs Run. The lower section had been sawed out several weeks ago. Now that the water is dropping much of the debris is showing up near the surface. It is getting to the point where canoe travel may become more difficult and somewhat restrictive to individuals who would have difficulty pulling or pushing their craft over logs.

This material should either be removed from the channel or cut and hauled to the banks along either side of the channel. This should be work of medium complexity and would take only a few days for a competent crew of four or five people to complete.

Ongoing Considerations

Before beginning work we need good safety briefings that include;

Water safety and travel

Tool handling and layout of work

Falling and Bucking on dry ground and water. **When to back off and seek help**

Climbing and rigging safety including staying out of the bite and fly-zone

Maintain adequate communications including after dispatch hours. A satellite phone for crews that camp out may be a good idea and we can probably provide from Region 1 if cell phone coverage is lacking in some of these areas.

For work along Juniper Springs run we should identify alternate methods of evacuation including Out Of Ground effect Helispots that are approachable along the run

Vehicles, travel and housing

In Review

We are in concurrence that this work can be accomplished safely and fall within wilderness intent by performing all work in a non-motorized format. If there are regional goals identified for this project we can adjust project work planning and logistics to help achieve those goals.

We can perform all aspects of tree removal with minimal or no impacts to water quality. Bank disturbance will be kept at a minimum through the utilization of skids that allow heavy materials to be moved out of the channel without causing ruts on the banks.

In all aspects, this storm recovery process provides an opportunity for training and the building of strong partnerships with volunteers and advocacy groups interested in the outcome of this working program. As traditional tool skills and heritage restoration are closely aligned, these skills may be looked upon favorably by a large segment of the public that shows a strong interest in our living history.

We also have the ability to build a stronger cadre of support and skills for this type of work within the region. Skill building is a component of strong problem solving exercises that enhance an attitude toward “ thinking and acting safely”

We can build a supply of tools at the district, forest and regional level that may be commensurate with anticipated future needs for normal field- work as well as for recovery projects that arise in the future.