

### Background

Between August 13 and September 25, 2004 Florida was hit by four successive hurricanes. Juniper Prairie Wilderness was particularly hard hit as hurricanes Charley, Frances and Jeanne overlapped each other geographically and damaged or further damaged the popular recreational resources of the wilderness. Juniper Canoe Run (Juniper Run) and the Florida National Scenic Trail (Florida Trail) were impassable by the end of the hurricane season and were closed to the public. The National Forests in Florida came under great pressure from concessionaires, partners, and the general public to reopen both the seven-mile Juniper Run and 9-mile Florida Trail as soon as possible. Many did not believe that the areas could be reopened safely or efficiently using traditional tools. The Juniper Prairie Wilderness recovery team was led by Ian Barlow (training, fieldwork, crew supervision and quality control), Harold Shenk (safety, logistics, local/district liaison), and Michelle Mitchell (partnership, outreach, staffing and procurement coordination).

### Uniqueness...without the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport

The mantras of the Juniper Prairie Wilderness project were “use your mind, not your muscle” and “always compare tools in the context of the job.” The work to be done was overwhelming even for the seasoned crews handpicked by Ian Barlow, Bob Beckley (Missoula Technology and Development Center) and Deborah Caffin (R8 Wilderness Coordinator). On the Florida Trail as many as 150 trees were down per mile in some areas. In Juniper Run, waterlogged trees were jackstrawed above, beneath and at the water’s surface creating a tangled wall of heavy, slippery debris. Cutting through the mess proved arduous (especially given that along Juniper Run much of the cutting was done under water), but the most difficult task was in relocating the dense water-logged material. Helicopter lifts or motorize pulls of material may have been less labor intensive, but would have damaged the character and natural resources of the wilderness. In lieu of motorized equipment, traditional skyline logging techniques were used to move the hundreds of tons of debris. A plan was devised to use spar trees as cranes to lift heavy materials above and over the sensitive waterlogged banks of Juniper Run and to deposit them in the floodplain out of site of the visitors. On the Florida Trail, trees were cut in such a way as safely use the tension and bind in the hurricane twisted trunks to deposit material off the trail. Crews then used direct pull rigging techniques to move the material out of the hiker’s field of vision.

### Resurrection or relearning of skills or tools...

The **Florida Trail Association** (FTA) is a nonprofit partner of the National Forests in Florida. FTA volunteers expressed great interest in strengthening their wilderness stewardship skills and responsibilities by assisting the Forest Service in the reopening of the Florida Trail and Juniper Run after the hurricanes. The three team leaders therefore decided to use the challenging Juniper Prairie Wilderness project as a training opportunity for both volunteers and less experienced Forest Service employees. The project became a springboard for building and strengthening partnerships, wilderness values (inside and outside of the agency) and public awareness of wilderness management issues. All the accomplishments detailed in this nomination and in the attached video, local publications, and **International Journal of Wilderness** article were completed by a cadre of novice Forest Service employees and volunteers working and training alongside seasoned Wilderness Rangers.

As a result of the Juniper Wilderness Project, **7 Region 8 Forest Service employees and 15 Florida Trail Association/Forest Service volunteers** who had wilderness responsibilities but limited traditional tools training received formal classroom/field training and informal (yet invaluable) on-the-job training. Additionally, the Forest Service employees

and volunteers received the benefit of working side-by-side in the field, developing team camaraderie and a deeper understanding of the importance of partnership in wilderness management. The project's documentary video produced via a **Challenge Cost Share agreement with Siedler Productions** has been used by Forest Service Region 2 (Ralph Swain) in a Wilderness volunteer training course as well as by local advocacy groups to increase support for Forest Service wilderness efforts.

The team of employees and volunteers using traditional skills and tools on a scale not seen in Florida since the early 1900s inspired other partners to join in the efforts. The **Florida State Archives** provided historic photographs of workers clearing Juniper Run with crosscuts after a hurricane, and using spar trees to construct bridges and transportation ways near the Ocala National Forest. With the help of **Susan Jenkins** and other interpretive experts at the **Missoula Technology and Development Center**, these photos were juxtaposed on posters with photos of the Juniper Prairie Wilderness hurricane recovery team for use in demonstrations and displays at the **Florida Park Service's Florida Folk Festival**. It was at this festival that the team of Forest Service employees and FTA volunteers got together once more to demonstrate the traditional tools and skills that were used in the Juniper Prairie Wilderness project to an **audience of over 25,000** during Memorial Day weekend in 2005. The historic and present-day photos were also used in articles that were published in the **Florida Trail Association's bimonthly *Footprint***, in the private **Florida land manager's magazine, *Landviews***, and at the **Smithsonian Folk Festival** demonstrations celebrating the Forest Service centennial. Members of the public who became interested in traditional tools and skills as a result of these outreach efforts were able to sign up for crosscut saw and rigging classes sponsored by the National Forests in Florida and the Florida Trail Association. Newly certified crosscut sawyers were then put to work (and currently are working) on wilderness and non-wilderness sections of the Florida Trail throughout Florida. As a result, crosscut and rigging work has become an effective and popular part of the Florida Trail maintenance program.

#### *Approval for motorized equipment could probably have been obtained*

Throughout the country storm recovery projects in wilderness often receive motorized equipment waivers due to the volume and complexity of the project. The Juniper Prairie Wilderness project did receive a waiver to use a helicopter for emergency extraction in the case of worker injury, but project managers did not seek permission to use motorboats, power saws or other motorized devices. There were no reportable accidents; therefore the helicopter waiver was not needed or utilized. At project initiation, many Forest Service employees and storm recovery experts did not feel that the project would be successful or safe without the use of motorized equipment. By the end of the project attitudes had been changed. The project was completed earlier than predicted and within budget using with traditional tools.

#### *Difficulty or challenging nature of the task*

The technical difficulty of the project work was and is unmatched. Ian Barlow has experience working in a wide variety of storm recovery situations including the 1999 recovery project in Minnesota Boundary Waters Canoe Area. Ian repeatedly emphasized that the Florida project was far more complicated and intense than any he had previously encountered (most of which were granted permission to use motorized equipment). In addition to the technical work, a challenging aspect of the project was the intimidating native flora and fauna. Alligators, water moccasins, poison ivy, devils walking stick and saw palmetto are prolific and protected in Juniper Prairie Wilderness. Crews developed working techniques that allowed them to avoid these hazards without disturbing or damaging them.