

## Katerina's talk on UNF Recreation

### Outline:

History of rec in the UWH

Current rec uses

Impacts of rec uses

Conflicts and coordination amongst uses

Recommendations for the future

Good timeline of recreational events - Uwharrie land set aside in 1931; 1944, forests stocked with deer. 1954: park opened for carefully controlled hunting for first time. 1961: UNF proclaimed. Pattern of this history – initially, lots of the recreation was shaped by individual user groups, but now that the Forest Service has taken over, users are still very involved in trail suggestions.

Trends and facts – Mountain biking didn't exist in 1986; peaked in 90's, has since leveled off. OHVs were already established use in 1986. OHV use really increasing along entire eastern US. UNF only one of 2 forests in the area (not sure what area) that permits OHV use. Eldorado Outpost alone sold 1,300 annual passes and 27,000 day passes. OHV trail system isn't a hunting area, so it's not people going in to get deer. In the same period of time, SUV sales have increased, so there has been increased interest in off-road use.

Horseback riding increasing amongst retirees, canoeing has decreased and kayaking has increased. Most people using the forest are daytrippers; only 5% of users are from the local counties and of those, 80% use the forest for fishing (very popular) and hunting (deer in the fall).

50 miles of hiking-only trails. Uwharrie Trail is 21 miles long, and is the longest in the region. OHV riding – 17-mile OHV trail in the UNF. Trail system closed from Dec 15-April 1 annually to prevent stream erosion and stream sedimentation.

Hunting and fishing – forest reported to have the highest use per acre of any NC Wildlife Resources Commission game land. Also had the highest recorded deer kill a few years ago of all the game lands in NC. Weren't many deer in 1930's but had a stocking program around 1944 – forest now has an estimated 2.5 deer per square mile. Wild turkey now at huntable levels. Fishing mostly popular for the local counties; Badin Lake stocked annually.

Boating, Watersports, Gold Panning – dams on Yadkin and Pee Dee form six lakes with more than 600 miles of shoreline. Boating and watersports popular during summer. Recreational gold panning permitted with shovels and pans only.

### Tracks on the landscape

Impacts of trails – hiking less invasive than anything else. Motorized trails have the most effect, then mountain biking, horseback riding, and hiking (in terms of trampling/skidding effect only). Soil compaction, erosion/muddiness, loss of vegetative cover, changes in species composition, introduction of exotics.

OHV impacts – very significant impact on streams – break down stream banks, damage riparian vegetation, erosion, turbidity, increased suspended solids. Also cause soil compaction (ponding) – reduces water infiltration. Water pollution from gasoline and motor oil leaching into water. Can carry seeds up to 10 miles on a single trip. Noise – harass wildlife and humans in local communities. Hiking and horseback riding can accommodate more users before the same impacts can be seen.

### Fire and recreation

Fire burns much of the infrastructure used for recreation – trail signs, recreation areas – visitors avoid areas that have been scorched/charred since it's not pretty to walk through them. Also, burnt trees can be a safety liability by falling to the ground.

### OHVs and other recreation

Noise scares horses and is a nuisance to others. Also scares off wildlife.

#### Fire and hunting

Fire creates excellent foraging habitat for deer, wild turkey, and quail. Native Americans often used controlled fire to attract game and improve hunting visibility.

UNF is small (50,189 acres) but most popular tourist destination in Montgomery County. Hosts 20,000 visitor days on its lands (20,000\*1 visitor visiting for 12 hours). Accessible to 60% of NC's population. Uses must be balanced for these people, the local communities, wildlife, and the landscape.

#### Recommendations for the future

Conduct survey to determine recreational management needs

Conduct survey (visitors and locals) to determine social values placed on the forest

Use an integrated planning method which incorporates both biophysical and social parameters as layers in a GIS analysis. Increases public support and success for projects.

Share integrated management maps with the public to better enable them to comment and actively participate in the planning process.

Undertake more projects that encourage coordinated land use (TNC example)

Promote user understanding and knowledge of recreational impacts through a course required for obtaining recreational passes. (especially for OHV use)

#### Alex's talk – Mining

No mining in the UNF any more, but there is some in the surrounding area. What dictates what's going to be mined are economics, and what's available at the site. Are mineral resources considered at all in the planning? How should public involvement be a part of that, or can it be, since people have mineral rights. Public doesn't have much input on reclamation of mines, but these mining sites influence surrounding forest areas. Mercury was used in amalgamation of gold – helps gold particles stick together – so there is a lot of mercury contamination. Most of the mercury entering the water is coming from mercury that has been buried, and is eroding into the water system.

Sluicing – automatic, can get larger pieces of gold vs. panning – by hand, working with gold dust.

Many disturbances that haven't been recorded – mercury release into the soil and water is a problem that people don't know much about because it's undocumented, but erosion that's occurring right now is releasing mercury into the water. No one we know about has tested fish for mercury concentrations. Do the highest correlations exist near mines or where OHV use is? All fish in the area probably has some mercury, but how much?

The oldest mines have mercury contamination (before ~1850); later (~1870), cyanide was used to extract gold. Today, there isn't any gold mining, just recreational mining.

Legally, the only mining that needs to be reclaimed are coal mines.

Idea suggested – adopt mining sites as OHV trail areas if possible – can close off the actual mine site but run trails nearby. People owning the mine land might want to sell it for low prices just to get it off their hands. Many mine sites are adjacent to UNF lands. There are defunct mines within the UNF boundary – they are very old though. Should plan for the future of the mines nearby since they won't be active forever. The land will be quite undesirable since all the vegetation is gone, so some plans could be made for it. Also, the mines are likely impacting water quality in the UNF, making these outside mines important for the planning process.

Carly – mentioned that Uwharrie has had problems due to its fragmentation; people want to sell it off b/c of this. Maybe people could be convinced to manage it as a coordinated unit so it will seem less fragmented.