

Our National Forest Treasures

We are blessed with four National Forests in our little state. From any point in South Carolina, we can be in a National Forest in less that two hours. We all know how we got them. Degraded farmlands that were not productive enough for even subsistence farming, were eroding rapidly and contributing to siltation of every stream. It was the Great Depression, and the Federal government bought the land so that the former owners could have an opportunity to start over in a better situation. Those rescued land resources became our National Forests, due in large part to the efforts of desperate young men suffering from the corrosive effects of the Great Depression.



The Civilian Conservation Corps hired unemployed young men (17 to 28 years old, 50% of whom were unemployed), gave them a small income and a structured situation in which they could learn to be productive citizens, as well as an opportunity to get an education. They lived in camps of tents or cabins, ate good meals in a dining hall, and received training in the jobs they were asked to perform. They earned \$30 per month, and sent \$22 home to their families. There were 99 CCC camps in South Carolina. They were overseen by the US Forest Service, the National Park Service, the Soil Conservation Service, and the US Army.

They worked at revegetating the ruined farmlands that the Federal government had purchased, and installing soil conservation measures. They built recreation facilities in the the Federal lands and newly created state parks. Many of the recreation facilities in today's National Forests were built by the CCC. They built campgrounds, lakes, cabins, picnic areas, forest roads, and fire towers. We today are the lucky recipients of the efforts of the "CCC boys". Then, when World War II broke out, many of these young men joined the military and fought in Africa, Europe and the Pacific. Another chapter, one we don't often hear about, in the story of this "Greatest Generation".

It was a brilliant effort at a time when only brilliant efforts would suffice. The idea for this program to help the Country step back from the throes of the Great Depression came from the fertile mind of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

From this turbulent time in our history came things like national and state parks and the National Forests, things we take for granted today. We owe it to the memory of these young men of the Great Depression era to preserve and protect the results of their efforts that we still need and enjoy today. The legacy they left us is a vital resource that Americans need today, more than ever, when lack of exposure to nature is a documented cause of some of the social problems we are experiencing in today's America (see attached powerpoint slides). There is a story that we need to teach about and celebrate. It would be a terrible time to start dis-assembling (de-commissioning) the valuable resources they labored to build for us.

Bill Stringer

Note: At least three of the proposed decommissioning of facilities, were built with the hand labor of CCC boys: Molly's Rock, Parsons Mountain and Woods Ferry.