

History of the Francis Marion National Forest ~

Us (real) Berkeley Countians know the National Forest got its name from our most famous Patriot son, Francis Marion. But, unfortunately, some of us don't know how the woodlands became the National Forest, so I thought I'd do some research and see what I can find.

But first, I have a bean to pick, and its about (the lack of) the name, Francis Marion, being recognized and honored here in Berkeley County. It is completely beyond my comprehension that we ONLY have the Francis Marion National Forest, no school(s), no town or village, river, highway, etc., etc. That, in my eyes, is plum sinful! (Well, yes, we do have the Swamp Fox Passage section of the Palmetto Trail.)

Let me tell you some landmarks found that are named after Francis Marion across our whole country . . . here's a Brigadier General in the American Revolutionary War, from South Carolina, who had more places named after him than any other Revolutionary War soldier, except George Washington: a Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Fl.; cities, communities, and/or townships in Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Virginia; and more than 30 townships in at least 13 states; Counties in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Mississippi, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, & West Virginia; counties in at least 17 states; Swamp Fox Highway in North Carolina; Lakes in SC, Minnesota, Oregon; Francis Marion Intermediate School in Marion, Iowa; Francis Marion High School and Marion Military Institute, both in Marion, Alabama; Francis Marion Military Academy in Marion County, Florida; Marion High School in Marion, SC and Francis Marion University in Florence, SC; the Swamp Fox 169th F-16 Fighter Wing of SCANG in McIntire, Eastover, SC; US Navy is home to the USS Francis Marion, a Paul Revere-class attack transport ship (APA-249); Submarine Squadron Four at Charleston Naval Base called itself the Swamp Fox Squadron; bronze plaques, monuments, statues all over SC and many other states, numerous museums with Francis Marion artifacts; a public park in Georgetown, the Francis Marion Park; Swamp Fox festivals and parades, annually; the Francis Marion Hotel, Francis Marion Square in Charleston and the Swamp Fox Hotel in Myrtle Beach, SC; many paintings and murals all over Clarendon County; a movie and tv series, and well over 20 books. A pretty extensive list, I'd say. And

what does Berkeley County have? A national forest and a trail. What say ye people???

Al Hester tells us how the Francis Marion National Forest came about, when, in the end of the nineteenth century, the center of lumber production was shifting from the Great Lakes states and the Northeast to the vast southern pine belt, stretching from Virginia to Texas. The big timber corporations began running out of forests in the north, and logging and timber mills began moving into South Carolina, commencing with large-scale industrial logging in the coastal plain pine belt. Berkeley County was prime property, and companies such as E.P. Burton Lumber Company, A.C. Tuxbury Lumber Company, the North State Lumber Company, and the Atlantic Coast Lumber Corporation began building mills and buying land in the Lowcountry around 1899. We are told that within ten years, most of the forest land in Berkeley, Charleston, and Georgetown counties was controlled by these companies.

South Carolina landowners were a bit hesitant with turning over forestlands to these companies due to them having left hundreds of thousands of cutover timberlands up north, almost worthless, and without purpose. However, the U.S. Bureau of Forestry (predecessor to the U.S. Forest Service) assured landowners that with guidance of “scientifically trained professionals,” logging operations could safely be accomplished, provided reforestation practices utilized, using fire breaks, and wise use of fire, wise conservation plans. Skepticism by landowners continued, due to the larger lumber corporation’s clearcutting with seemingly no intent of reforestation, just buying up more land and moving there.

The Bureau of Forestry recommended that the company hire a trained forester and increase forest efficiency by leaving loblolly pines to act as seed trees and minimize woodland damage caused by the steam skidders. Also suggested was that stumps be cut lower to reduce waste and that fire be kept out of the woods completely, allowing the loblolly to reproduce to its full potential. Longleaf and hardwoods should be eliminated completely and replaced with loblolly. And even with this plan, many thousands of additional acreage (upwards of 53,000 acres) would be needed to provide sustainability.

The Burton Company quickly complied with most of the recommendations, hiring a German forester, Rothkugel, who had worked as an agent for the Bureau. He soon arrived at Conifer, the new company town in Berkeley County, and began work under the recommendations of the Bureau in the Hell Hole tract. Rothkugel

was impressed with the potential of the land and in 1906, wrote the Bureau, "You ought to see the reproduction of loblolly, Limerick is colossal!"

Unfortunately, Burton was the only company who hired a forester and followed the Bureau's reforestation plan. However, the cooperation was a major failure in another regard. The company never purchased the additional land necessary for achieving sustained yield, and ceased its operations in 1916, holding the same acreage it had owned in 1903. Even with the best efforts of the Bureau, the Burton Company failed to implement the key ingredient of the Bureau's plan and as a result, long-term protection of South Carolina's coastal pine forests would have to wait for more direct intervention. Fortunately though, the seeds were sown for later national forest establishment.

Economic conditions favorable to lumber production during World War I caused logging activity in the southern pine belt to reach a crescendo by 1918. Demand for lumber and prices soared during the war. It had been predicted in 1903 that only enough forest to support logging for twenty-five years were available. All across the South, that was beginning to appear closer than desired. By this time the Forest Service was becoming aware that the forest problem was really part of a larger land use problem and that this concern was maybe bigger than the individual landowners could handle. Foresters saw the forest problem as a major land problem in which soil and water, agriculture and pastures, fire, labor, housing and industry were all interconnected. Yes, forests were suffering, but communities and timber industries were suffering also, as cutover timberland was shutting down mills and mill towns alike. Thousands of acres of cutover and burned timberland were available, but nobody wanted it at any price. By the mid 1920's, most southern pine belt lands were completely cut over, fire-scorched, and dominated by millions of stumps. It was quite evident at this point that a larger and more definite forestry plan be implemented.

By the summer of 1927, Tuxbury and North State companies committed their own money for forest fire control, fifteen hundred dollars each, as did other companies as well. Commitment for purchase of a firetruck and building of a fire tower was implemented, though, once again, skepticism stepped into the picture as to whether or not the forest fires could be stopped. A one-hundred foot tall wooden tower was built on Tuxbury's land in Berkeley County (and is considered the first fire tower to have been built in South Carolina). Unfortunately, the tower burned shortly after it was completed.

The one thing that was determined was that “cooperation” alone couldn’t solve the land problem, the Forest Service had to step in to solve the problem. Best solution: direct land acquisition. The one question: how much land would be needed? Chief of the Forest Service, William Greeley, announced that it was “possible to secure a National Forest for some part of the Coastal Section of the South, an area between 50,000 and 100,000 acres.”

In the fall of 1927, the Forest Service sent staff to South Carolina to study and learn the most suitable areas for development, and in February 1928, the National Forest Reservation Commission approved two purchase units for South Carolina. First was the Black River purchase unit, located between Georgetown and Andrews on the Sampit and Black Rivers, approximately 75,000 acres. Second, was the Wambaw unit, located on the holdings of the North State and Tuxbury Lumber Companies in Berkeley and Charleston counties, about 100,000 acres. Both units included property of lumber companies as well as a number of small landholders.

Even though the National Forest Reservation Commission had approved the purchase of the units, acquisition didn’t occur. During the next year, copying of original grants, plats, surveying tracts, negotiating prices and options were considered . . . but in five and a half years, no lands were actually purchased. Many obstacles, too hurriedly gathering too little information, as well as local prices becoming inflated when specific tracts were announced. Landowners held out for the highest possible sale price. Almost three more years passed without a purchase, this time because of lack of funding.

With the election of President Franklin Roosevelt, and the push to put the country back to work through the new Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) that the President approved in 1933, creation of the Francis Marion National Forest took on a new kind of urgency. Land was needed, and needed quickly! Men needed to go to work.

CCC Camps needed to be located on national forest properties, like the Wambaw and Black River. The pressure was on. By June 1933, two Wambaw camps were begun, one at Witherbee in Berkeley County and one at Awendaw in Charleston County. Appraisals were based on Depression era market conditions, and as a result, acreage pricing was affected from both sides. Companies drove a hard bargain and Forest Service and State were equally trying to get “the best” price per acre. Each holding out for ‘his’ price.

The lumber company managers were all close friends who had discussed together possible offers by the Forest Service, and finally, the first company, Dorchester Land and Timber Company, signed an option selling 48,000 acres at \$4.00 per acre, on October 10th, 1933. A.C. Tuxbury Company followed, after stubborn negotiation, selling 44,000 acres at the same price in late December 1933. These two sales broke the deadlock that had existed since 1928 and during the two following years 1933, many remaining landowners sold their land to the government as well.

Despite local enthusiasm for the Black River unit, no land in Georgetown County was ever acquired, and in 1934, the Commission rescinded the unit.

Finally, in the spring of 1936, enough land was acquired to assure project success, and on July 10, 1936, a presidential proclamation designated the Wambaw purchase unit as the new Francis Marion National Forest.

Three days later, President Roosevelt formed the Sumter National Forest out of two Piedmont forest areas, *Long Cane*, and *Enoree* purchase units. In a little less than three years, and primarily due to the Depression, the Forest Service had acquired its desired acreage of almost 400,000 acres in South Carolina . . . although one must consider, this concept and establishment of the National Forest was begun almost thirty-five years before (in 1902).

Former U.S. Forest Supervisor H.M. Sears is said to explain to Ranger W.A. Garber, in 1953, "I still believe that the old Francis Marion is one of the best pieces of property that the Forest Service ever bought." We believe him right!

Containing just under 259,000 acres, the Francis Marion National Forest contains 25 of the 200 pristine Carolina Bays in South Carolina. The 42-mile Swamp Fox Passage path, part of the 425 mile Palmetto Trail begins in Moncks Corner and ends in Awendaw. The Forest contains four "wilderness" areas: Hell Hole Wilderness, Wambaw Swamp Wilderness, Little Wambaw Wilderness, and Wambaw Creek Wilderness.

For more activities in the Francis Marion National Forest, stop in at the Berkeley County Welcome Center in Moncks Corner and get Diane to tell you about all the interesting places to see. There are too many for me to list here.

Keith Gourdin

Resource: *History of the Francis Marion in Depth*, by Al Hester.



FRANCIS MARION
National Forest
HIKING TRAIL

SWAMP FOX





