

[From Summer 1995]

What Happened to the Trees?

In response to the 1994 southern pine beetle infestation on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, efforts have been focused on removing dead trees and reestablishing the forest in the affected areas. Heavy equipment has infiltrated the once pristine and relatively untouched stands of loblolly pines along the Wildlife Loop and the Woodland Trail. Several hundred trees have been cut down and burned in order to eliminate safety hazards to visitors, to provide quick recovery of wildlife habitat value, and to reduce the potential for widespread outbreaks of the southern pine beetle in the future.

The main objective of cutting the dead trees is to remove the dangers that they pose to refuge visitors. Standing dead trees become increasingly unstable as they decompose. Therefore, in order to eliminate hazards resulting from dead trees along the Wildlife Loop and Woodland Trail, the cutting effort has been concentrated directly adjacent to these trails.

If left untouched, the large areas of standing dead trees would also be of less value to certain forms of wildlife. The presence of a large number of dead trees would hamper the growth of new trees. The area that was once used extensively by the endangered Delmarva Peninsula fox squirrel would be undesirable for many years to come. The restoration program will speed up the recovery process by removing the dead trees and replanting of large sapling trees.

An "Adopt-a-Tree" program has been organized by the refuge in order to raise funds for purchasing trees. This project has been bolstered by public and special donations. Businesses belonging to the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce contributed over \$2,000 to the tree fund. Former Chincoteague Refuge Manager, Dennis Holland, and his wife, Kathy, graciously donated a memorial fund in excess of \$4,000 in the name of their son, Patrick Holland, to the replanting effort. In addition, more than \$1,500 has been donated by private individuals. With these funds, one hundred trees, consisting mostly of water oaks, were purchased. With the help of volunteers, the trees were planted during Earth Day activities on Saturday, April 22. The refuge staff would like to thank those who gave their time and money to help preserve refuge habitat. However, according to Refuge Manager Schroer, many more trees are needed to complete the reforestation project. Due to the magnitude of the southern pine beetle infestation, the planting of new trees will continue into next year. Donations to the "Adopt-a-Tree" program will be gratefully accepted through next spring. Contact the refuge for more information on the program.

*Michelle Bulger,
Visitor Services Intern*