



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the
Interior

Blue Ridge Parkway
www.nps.gov/blri

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Blue Ridge Parkway News Release

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Harsh Winter Creates Challenges for Blue Ridge Parkway

(Asheville, NC) The Blue Ridge Parkway is undergoing substantial clean-up efforts in the wake of several severe winter storms that hit the East Coast this year. Heavy snow and ice accumulations, strong winds and soil saturation contributed to an estimated 1,500 to 2,000 downed trees and scattered debris, forcing extended closure of much of the well-traveled scenic roadway in both North Carolina and Virginia. In addition to downed and hazardous trees, prolonged sub-freezing temperatures and snow accumulations in excess of three feet in many high elevation sections of the Parkway have severely hindered park staff from being able to access some of the worst damaged areas.

Superintendent Phil Francis stated, "We are doing all we can to quickly clear closed sections of the Parkway and make travel safe." Many areas have already been cleared of hazardous trees and are open for travel; however, lingering snow and ice at high elevations, steep slope stability concerns and limited numbers of winter employees are contributing to remaining closures.

The Parkway has received supplemental funding and has requested additional funding for hazardous tree and debris removal. Initial amounts, funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), are being used to award a contract for hazard tree removal along the most heavily damaged sections of the Parkway motor road in North Carolina and southern Virginia. The remaining storm damage funding will be used to award additional contracts for debris removal along the motor road; clean-up in developed areas such as campgrounds, picnic areas and hiking trails; and hiring an additional 30-35 seasonal employees to assist with clean-up efforts.

For the safety of workers cleaning up debris adjacent to the motor road, discreet sections of the parkway may be closed for short durations. For information on road closures, travelers are encouraged to contact the Parkway information line at 828-298-0398 or visit the website at www.nps.gov/blri.

Many Blue Ridge Parkway supporters have offered to help with debris removal. Chainsaw training, traffic flagging and road operations certification may be required. Volunteers may call Shawn Rhodes at 828-271-4779, extension 242.

Superintendent Francis expressed gratitude for the public support received, for extraordinary employee efforts to safeguard resources and protect the safety of our visitors, and he hopes for continued understanding of the challenges resulting from some of the most severe winter weather the Parkway has faced in over 15 years.

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