

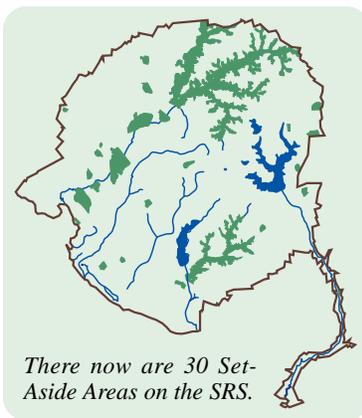


Set-Aside Areas *of the* SRS

Program history

The origin of the Set-Aside Program on the Savannah River Site (SRS) can be traced to 1951, when the Atomic Energy Commission-Savannah River Operations Office (AEC-SROO) invited the Universities of Georgia (UGA) and South Carolina to conduct land-use surveys and ecological inventories at the newly acquired Savannah River Plant (SRP). These surveys and inventories gathered baseline ecological data from different habitats on the SRP to monitor ecological impacts from plant construction and operation. As part of the land-use survey, UGA scientists selected representative examples of the ecological habitats known to exist on the SRP, so that research projects could be conducted in them. Early recognition by the AEC of the value of these ecological habitats set the stage for the present SRS Set-Aside Program.

In 1967, the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory (SREL) selected seven areas on the SRP and recommended that the



AEC set these aside as examples of the various ecosystems on the SRP. In 1968, these areas, combined with three habitats previously allocated to UGA, were granted set-aside status and officially were called SREL Reserve Areas. These ten areas, totaling 892 acres (0.5% of the SRP), permanently were set aside by the manager of the AEC-SROO to represent and protect examples of the major plant communities and habitat types within SRP boundaries. These areas, protected from public access, forest management, and most routine Site activities, offered locations for

long-term ecological research as well as “reference” sites for collecting data to compare with other areas of the SRP that could be impacted in some way by Site operations. That same year, the Society of American Foresters (SAF) registered two Natural Areas on the SRP—the Boiling Springs Natural Area and the Scrub Oak Natural Area. These two areas, added to the ten SREL Reserve Areas, gave the SRP 12 areas recognized as part of the SRP Habitat Reserve System.



The sandhills habitat, represented in the Set-Aside Program, is becoming increasingly rare in the southeastern United States.



The Mature Hardwood Forest Set-Aside Area.

In 1988, a document was prepared for SREL describing the role that Set-Aside Areas play in natural resource management on the SRS and a proposal was submitted to DOE by SREL to expand the program by adding long-term study sites, additional representative habitat areas, and SAF Natural Areas. In 1989, as a result of this proposal, the DOE approved the addition of 18 areas to the program, resulting in 30 Set-Aside Areas totaling 14,005 acres (5,668 ha), or 7% of the land on the SRS. The 30 Set-Aside Areas encompass the eight vegetation communities characteristic of the SRS: old-fields, sandhills, upland hardwoods, pine forests, bottomland forests, swamp forests, Carolina bays, and fresh water streams and impoundments. These 30 areas are designated as DOE Research Set-Aside Areas.

Set-Aside administration

SREL serves as custodian for the 30 DOE Research Set-Asides and provides day-to-day administration of the SRS Set-Aside Program, including boundary maintenance and coordination of the activities of SREL and other contractors within and around the Set-Aside Areas. The Set-Aside Program receives guidance and technical advice from the Set-Aside Task Group, which was established in 1992 under the auspices of the Natural Resources Coordinating Committee (NRCC) to assist DOE in the management of the natural resources of the SRS. The Set-Aside Task Group ensures that the Set-Aside Program meets the objectives of the “Set-Aside Protection and Management” Plan, which stipulates that:

- Set-Aside Areas are for research, not for intensive management objectives,
- Set-Aside Areas should receive as little management as possible,
- Set-Aside Areas should be protected to remain as natural as possible with little or no human influence, and



Set-Aside Areas, originally marked with white painted blazes, now are marked with white signs.



Upper Three Runs Creek, part of the largest Set-Aside Area on the SRS.



Rare and sensitive plants are found in Set-Aside Areas, including (clockwise from top) the wild azalea, the hooded pitcher plant, and the flame azalea.

- Set-Aside Areas are primarily for nonmanipulative research, with no research being conducted in a Set-Aside Area that would alter the long-term value of the Set-Aside.

Purpose of the DOE Research Set-Aside Areas

The 30 Set-Aside Areas serve a number of functions on the Savannah River Site, including the following:

- Set-Aside Areas serve as sources of “control” data for compliance-mandated environmental monitoring activities because they are not associated with normal Site operations and forest management activities.
- Set-Asides serve as reference “clean” areas which can be assessed for appropriate reference or “end-point” species used in ecological risk assessments of potentially contaminated areas.
- Set-Asides provide baseline information on how SRS natural communities are structured and how they function in a setting relatively unimpacted by human activities, thus providing targets for how restoration/remediation activities should proceed to restore disturbed and contaminated areas to functioning biological systems.
- Set-Asides provide areas in which to conduct long-term ecological research, to enhance our understanding of how communities on the SRS function and how these communities may be impacted by human activities.
- Some of the Set-Asides have been documented to contain significant archaeological sites and the “Set-Aside” status of these Areas serves to preserve and protect these cultural resources.
- Set-Aside Areas provide natural settings for educational and public outreach activities.