



*It's not a National Park ...
the emphasis here is on research.*

The Savannah River Site was designated as the first National Environmental Research Park (NERP) by the Atomic Energy Commission in 1972. NERPs were established to provide tracts of land where the effects of human impacts on the environment could be studied. There now are seven NERPs at DOE reservations throughout the United States.

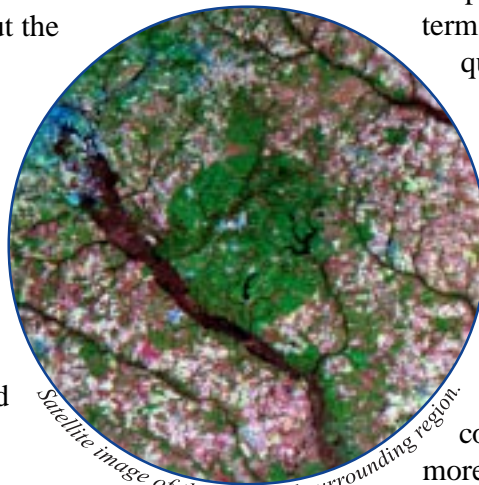
NERPs are unique outdoor laboratories where ecologists, engineers and land managers work together to improve our understanding of how human activities affect the environment. These areas also serve as islands of habitat where native species thrive and endangered, threatened, and sensitive plants and animals are protected.

The existence of ongoing human activities such as energy production, industrial, and cleanup operations provide unique opportunities for study. However, portions of each NERP are protected from the effects of human activities as much as possible. NERPs are an important national legacy. Their continued existence will enable us to provide sites where new technologies can be developed that will help counteract the impacts of human activities both on the SRS and in other industrial areas throughout the United States and the world.

History of the NERP

In 1970 the Office of Science and Technology delivered to President Nixon ten recommendations concerning federal lands. The tenth recommendation instructed Federal agencies to accelerate their efforts to set aside locations for ecological research and wildlife preservation.

As a result of this recommendation, the Savannah River Site became the first National Environmental Research Park, or NERP. This opened the site to scientists from other government agencies, universities and private foundations for use as a protected outdoor laboratory where long-term projects could be conducted to address questions about human impacts on the environment.



Satellite image of the SRS and surrounding region.

The value of the SRS NERP clearly is demonstrated in the more than 2,000 published scientific findings based on work done on-site. Resident scientists have produced a series of over 20 NERP technical reports describing and cataloging the plants, animals, ecological communities, and habitats of the SRS. Also, more than 200 doctoral dissertations and master's theses have proven the value of this national treasure in educating environmental scientists and in providing us with a broader understanding of how to minimize adverse impacts of human activities on the environment.



Ecological research at Lost Lake on the SRS.

The Savannah River Site NERP

Along the western border of the state of South Carolina lies the Savannah River Site, a Department of Energy nuclear production facility. Spanning more than 300 square miles, the SRS plays a key role in the nation's defense mission by housing nuclear materials and waste processing facilities, as well as research laboratories. Roughly 85% of the site is forested and over 20% of the site is valuable wetlands, including more than 200 Carolina bays.

At the height of the Cold War in the early 1950s, the Atomic Energy Commission, now the Department of Energy, acquired the vast land area for the SRS. Here, the government built reactors to produce nuclear materials for weapons, and the site served a critical role in maintaining America's military defense during the years that followed. Today, the site still serves important functions in national defense, waste processing, environmental remediation and ecological research. Unlike a national park, the SRS NERP serves as an outdoor laboratory for environmental research on energy technologies and the effects of human activities on the natural environment. In the years since the park was first named, the SRS has come to demonstrate the compatibility of nature, human technology and environmental research.

Greg Rudy, Manager of the DOE-SR Operations says, "As the country's first National Environmental Research Park, the Savannah River Site advanced the science of ecology while fulfilling its major defense missions. This foundation is essential as the Site continues its national defense and environmental work and prepares to take on new nuclear missions in support of our Nation's international nonproliferation efforts in the post Cold-War era."



The SRS NERP offers scientists an opportunity to study the environmental impacts resulting from past and current Site operations and routine Site and forest management activities.

Set-Aside Areas

Especially valuable components of the Savannah River NERP are the DOE Research Set-Aside Areas, representative habitats that DOE has preserved for ecological research. These 30 areas, encompassing more than 14,000 acres, are protected from most routine site operations, and active management is not allowed. Largely unaffected by industrial activities, the Set-Aside Areas serve as natural reference areas or "controls" for environmental research and monitoring efforts. Set-Asides provide baseline areas for comparing the effects of human activities and valuable information on how contaminated areas should look and function after they have been cleaned up.

NERP OBJECTIVES

- Assess and predict impacts of human activities on natural ecosystems.
- Manage for sustainable natural resources (timber, wildlife, soil, water, and air).
- Develop environmental restoration and cleanup methods and standards.



The Mixed Swamp Forest Set-Aside Area.



[11 September 1998]