

## NC Forest Service Hosts Mock Disaster Exercise in Durham May 23-26

During the week of May 23-26 a mock disaster exercise was conducted in several parks in Durham, NC. The exercise was a cooperative effort with the US Forest Service, organized by the NC Forest Service, and involved the NC Division of Emergency Management, Durham County Emergency Management and the City of Durham.

The exercise was not to test first responders, such as police or paramedics; this exercise was for the Urban Forest Strike Team (UFST) to demonstrate its natural-disaster recovery capabilities and to provide a realistic field experience for tree risk assessment and recent improvements for data collection.

UFST was created in 2007 to assist communities in the evaluation of public tree risk following a natural disaster. Urban Forest Strike Teams operate throughout the eastern United States and are assisted by Urban Forestry South, a U.S. Forest Service regional operation in Athens, GA. There are trained team members in 31 states, including 23 in NC.

The UFST has been activated for 5 dispatches across state lines and individual states have dispatched in-state crews following hurricanes, ice storms, and flooding. [www.ufst.org](http://www.ufst.org)



During an actual disaster recovery event, the assessments ensure that damaged trees are identified for appropriate mitigation, and the data collected helps impacted communities document losses for federal disaster assistance. With the generous assistance from the City of Durham and Durham County Emergency Management, the exercise afforded team members an opportunity to refresh their skills, test new procedures and equipment, and work as a team. After a ½ day refresher course, crews were sent to 6 different parks. Team members conducted assessments of trees “damaged or destroyed” by a mock hurricane and used ArcGIS Online on tablets and smartphones to record their assessments and the GPS coordinates of trees they inspected.

Other participants included personnel from state forestry agencies in South Carolina and Virginia, Raleigh and Wake Forest, Fairfax County, VA and a local Durham arborist. Additionally, the US Forest Service Northeastern Area and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation participated in the event to prepare for similar mock exercises planned for their areas. The exercise included Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) communications with both South Carolina and Virginia, and Mutual Aid requests to the City of Raleigh and the Town of Wake Forest. Data collected for the exercise can be seen here: [UFST Durham Exercise](#)

