



Forest Service

Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests

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FAQs

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Rainbow Family National Gatherings on National Forests

1. What is the Rainbow Family of Living Light?

The Rainbow Family is a loose-knit group of people who gather on national forests to discuss political and environmental issues, pray for world peace, and celebrate life. They describe themselves as having no leaders and no organization.

2. What is the National Gathering?

The Rainbow Family holds a national gathering once a year. Since 1972, the event has taken place on a different National Forest during the July 4 holiday and has fluctuated in size. In recent years, national gatherings have attracted approximately 2,000-10,000 people. Local and regional gatherings occur during other times of the year.

3. How does the Rainbow Family decide where to gather?

At the end of each annual gathering, members form a vision council meet to discuss the location of the following year's event. During the 2018 Rainbow spring council it was agreed that the gathering would be held in the National Forest, off of Forest Road 28-1 near Nimblewill and Dahlonega, Georgia.

4. How and when is the specific site selected?

During the spring and early summer, Rainbow scouts research and visit areas to find a suitable location, according to their standards. Scouts may visit local Forest Service offices requesting information and maps. In mid-June the spring council occurs, often at the location of the annual gathering. The specific location and time typically is not revealed to the Forest Service until it happens.

5. What resource impacts may occur?

Possible resource impacts include: compacted soil, water quality degradation, sanitation issues, disturbance to sensitive archaeological sites, disruptions to threatened and endangered plant and animal species, and fire danger.



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<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/conf/RainbowFamily>
or bit.ly/2018Rainbows

6. When does the National Gathering begin?

Within one week of the spring council about 1,000-2,000 attendees arrive on site. There will be a continual build-up of Rainbow Family members reaching 2,000-10,000 people by July 4. Once the site is determined, the Rainbow Family will utilize the internet and other communication methods to let Rainbow Family members know the location and directions to the site.

7. When does the gathering end?

The event peaks on July 4. After that, there is a drastic reduction in attendance. However, there is a group of Rainbows that stay to clean up and rehabilitate the site. There may be other people as well that remain for a couple weeks.

8. How does a large group, potentially 2,000 to 10,000 people, live in the woods?

As soon as Rainbow Family members select a site, they set up a welcome tent, camping and social areas, parking and shuttle areas, health care areas, and several outdoor kitchens. They develop water sources and dig trench latrines. There is no fee for attendance, but they collect donations for food and other necessary items for distribution. They designate special areas for group gatherings, families with children, men, women, and partygoers, to name a few. Attendees are advised to bring their own camping gear. Family members use campfires exclusively to cook on.

9. Did the Family get a permit?

No.

10. Why is the Forest Service cooperating with an event that doesn't have a permit?

The Forest Service requires a Special Use permit for every group of 75 or more people conducting a meeting or event on National Forest System lands. The Rainbow Family has consistently refused to comply with the permit process during national gatherings, since they claim to have no leaders and no one member who can speak for the group or sign a permit on behalf of the Family.

The Forest Service has periodically cited Rainbow Family members for failing to obtain a permit. However, the agency also works with the family to adhere to a resource protection plan in lieu of a special use permit to protect the health and safety of individuals at the gathering and in the surrounding community, to ensure sensitive resources are protected, to minimize any environmental damage and to coordinate post-event cleanup and rehabilitation of the event site.



11. Why can the Rainbow Family members camp for more than 14 days?

On the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests there is a 14-day camping limit across the entire national forest, including both developed sites (developed campgrounds) and dispersed sites (non-developed campgrounds or sites). The majority of participants will not be at the event for more than 14 days. It would be impossible for the Forest Service to track thousands of participants and their individual stay lengths.

12. What social impacts are expected?

The group represents a very diverse group of individuals. As with any large population, a certain percentage of gathering participants can be expected to engage in illegal or socially unacceptable behaviors. In part, some activities may include public nudity, civil disobedience, drug and alcohol abuse, confrontations between Rainbows and locals, abandoned or disabled vehicles, and traffic congestion and parking for 4,000-7,000 vehicles.

13. Can the Rainbows use campfires if fire restrictions are in place?

No, the participants must abide by all local, state and federal laws, including fire restrictions.

14. How does the Forest Service manage this event?

A National Incident Management Team (NIMT) was delegated on June 15, 2018 by Acting Southern Regional Forester Ken Arney and Regional Special Agent-in-Charge Michael Donaldson. Team objectives will include:

- Address health and safety risks to the public and participants.
- Minimize environmental impacts with Law Enforcement presence and action.
- Recognize and mitigate social and political impacts.
- Respect civil rights of all members of the public.
- Management of the event is being fully integrated with local officials. The incident management team is working in partnership with state, county, and local law enforcement, health, and other organizations. Informational meetings involving the NIMT, the Forest Service, Federal, State and local agencies and entities will occur as needed.
- Where possible, the local forest also assists Rainbow members in locating potentially suitable sites for their gatherings before they occur.

15. Is the Forest Service testing water?

The Forest Service is doing water quality testing as part of the regular monitoring procedures. If during these tests the data indicates there is a problem, the appropriate health departments will be contacted.



16. Is there a resource protection plan in place?

A resource protection plan is in the process of being issued. The primary goals of the plan are:

- Public Health and Safety
- Minimizing the impact to the resources and leaving the site at or near pre-gathering conditions.
- Minimizing impacts and disruptions to local communities, adjacent landowners, and other special use permittees.

Issues addressed in the resource protection plan are: designating parking areas so as not to interfere with traffic flow; locating camps, kitchens and slit trenches away from water sources; trash removal; and rehabilitation of the site after the gathering is over.

17. Who will rehabilitate the area after the gathering concludes?

It is the Rainbow Family's responsibility to do rehabilitation of the land. Site rehabilitation guidelines will be outlined in the resource protection plan. At past events, many individuals have stayed to assist in site clean-up, and the Rainbows have paid for trash disposal with a local vendor. Forest officials anticipate this will occur again this year.

18. What role does the state and county play in this event?

Management of the event is being fully integrated with local officials, including all federal, state, county and local law enforcement agencies, as well as emergency service organizations, public health departments, and social services.

19. Are there special closure orders in effect?

Developed recreational areas are not affected, but specific access routes may be closed. Alternate route information will be provided when available.

20. Will there be alcohol, drugs, or nudity at this event?

Historically, yes. Law enforcement organizations will be present to monitor and manage violations.

21. Will the area be open to the public?

Yes. However, all national forest visitors must obey federal, state, and local laws and regulations. The Forest Service takes the enforcement of those laws very seriously. There may be impacts to the community, neighbors, and other forest visitors. The Forest Service will work hard to minimize any negative effects to local communities and the environment.

