

Management Guidelines for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker

Landowners with Red-cockaded Woodpeckers can implement management practices that enhance survival, regardless of the size of their property. However, because these birds forage over large areas, forest conditions on adjacent land may ultimately determine the fate of the birds. On larger tracts, particularly those 200 acres or larger, these birds can be maintained with greater assur-



Prescribed burning
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Longleaf pine habitat
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ance. Successful management for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers must do five things: (1) retain existing cavity trees, (2) provide trees for new cavities, (3) provide adequate foraging habitat, (4) control hardwood and pine midstory in the cluster site, and (5) provide for future cluster sites.

Cluster Site

Do not remove or damage active cavity trees. Selective cutting within cluster sites can be used to maintain

the desired basal area. However, thinning within a cluster site should not be done if stocking is below 50 square feet of basal area per acre of stems 10 inches DBH or larger. Also, all potential cavity trees (older, relict pines) within the cluster should be retained for replacement cavities. Do not isolate cluster sites from foraging areas of pines 4 inches or greater in diameter.

Burning or otherwise treating cluster areas to control midstory vegetation is vital. Do not allow midstory to exceed 6 feet in height, especially within 50 feet of the cavity trees. In cluster sites lacking past hardwood control, the fuel load may be too great to burn without destroying the cavity trees. In these cases, it may be necessary to remove them by cutting or use of herbicide. Raking to remove mulch at the base of cavity trees is also helpful in preventing fire damage. Regular, periodic prescribed burning should be implemented to control midstory growth and maintain the open forest preferred by the birds.

Pine stands surrounding cluster sites should be thinned to 50 to 80 square feet of basal area per acre. Maintain groups of larger pines (10 to 12 inches or larger DBH) within the surrounding forest for future cluster sites. Leave some dead and abandoned cavity trees of both pine and hardwood for other cavity nesters, to reduce competition for the Red-cockaded cavities. Maintain a spacing of 20 to 25 feet between trees to maintain stand vigor and minimize the probability of southern pine beetle infestation and spread.

Foraging Area

Provide adequate foraging habitat to support existing clusters and to facilitate establishment of new territories. A minimum of 3,000 square feet of pine basal area (10-inch DBH or larger) should be provided on at least 60 acres and up to 300 acres for each active cluster. Avoid isolating cluster

sites from foraging areas. Most of the foraging acreage should be adjacent to (within 300 ft.) or within 1/4 mile of the cluster site. Thin sapling and pole stands to improve diameter growth and open the pine stand to a condition more favorable for the woodpecker. Prescribe burn for hardwood control. When regenerating stands, plant pines at 10x10 or 12x12 foot spacing to encourage rapid stand development. Use natural regeneration, such as seed tree, shelterwood, and group selection to develop an open park-like stand of pines. Favor longleaf pine over loblolly and shortleaf whenever possible.

Rotation Age

Generally, the longer the rotation age, the greater the opportunity the Red-cockaded Woodpecker has to maintain existing clusters and to create new ones. Rotation cycles of 80 to 120 years are encouraged. When it is not feasible to have long rotations over the entire ownership, setting aside smaller acreages of older pines will benefit the bird. Also, leaving old-growth remnant groups of trees well distributed throughout younger stands, and maintaining small remnant stands or patches of old-growth pines throughout the forest are helpful.

For More Information Contact

For detailed timber management guidelines, private landowners are referred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Draft Red-cockaded Woodpecker Procedures Manual for Private Lands, by Ralph Costa. A number of management options are available for landowners with Red-cockaded Woodpeckers on their land. Contact the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (800) 792-1112 (Austin), (512) 912-7011 (Austin), or (409) 564-7145 (Nacogdoches); or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at (409) 639-8546 (Lufkin) for more information.