



Corridor of Flight Project Grant Source: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

BACKGROUND

The red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) was listed as endangered by the USFWS and the State of Georgia in the early 1970s due to severe population declines from the destruction of old-growth pine forests throughout the southeast. To bring the RCW population in the Piedmont Unit up to the recovery objective of 250 breeding pairs, the USFS and the Refuge have developed recovery programs in accordance with the objectives and direction provided in the revised RCW Recovery Plan.

Historically, the open and continuous character of the landscape facilitated dispersal to unoccupied clusters from occupied clusters, naturally. Unoccupied clusters are re-occupied by dispersing existing RCWs clusters. However, several needed resource management activities to re-create this open corridor between the Forest and the Refuge have not been conducted in recent years due to lack of funds.

In order to successfully re-create the conditions for a natural dispersal corridor, vegetation manipulation and other silvicultural methods need to be incorporated in the resource management activities of both the Oconee NF and the Piedmont NWR. The ultimate goal of this project is to use mechanical and/or chemical timber stand improvement (TSI) treatments to enhance 5,000 acres of unoccupied RCW habitat. Areas within this area will be targeted to create corridors of suitable habitat between both ends of the Piedmont NWR and the Oconee NF.

A majority of the pine stands within the project area have excessive amounts of pine stems beyond the preferred habitat requirements. Preferred habitat is between 40 and 70 basal area (BA), while current stand information within the project area shows basal areas over 100. Thus, at present, stands do not provide the open park-like stands that the RCW needs for suitable habitat.

LOCATION

Georgia

ISSUES BEING ADDRESSED

Management for red-cockaded woodpeckers provides strong benefits for entire ecosystems. Such benefits are mainly the result of broad-scale prescribed burning programs and broad-scale silviculture that restores open conditions and retains old trees throughout the landscape. Based upon this premise, this project will conduct TSI treatments on currently unoccupied RCW habitat with the objective of restoring it to recruit new potential breeding pairs from existing populations.

The short-term objective is to maintain current population levels as forest stands continue to improve and re-create conditions for a natural RCW dispersal. The long-term objective of the multi-year project is to accelerate recovery of existing RCW populations from currently documented 55 potential breeding pairs to 100 potential breeding pairs with the ultimate goal of reaching at least 250 potential breeding pairs.

OBJECTIVES

1. Enhance 3,000 acres of Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) habitat.
2. Create corridor habitat conditions between occupied clusters and unoccupied clusters or potential new cluster sites.
3. Integrate forest management activities along the boundary of USFWS and USFS properties to create landscape level habitat improvement for RCW populations and other species of concern.

PARTNERS

NWTF
Oconee National Forest
Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge

FUTURE PLANS

Project is just starting.

TIMEFRAME

Project Start Date: August 2007
Project End Date: June 2009