



## Questions and Answers

### Q. What is a Red-cockaded Woodpecker?

A. The red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) is a federally endangered bird that inhabits mature pine forests across the southeastern United States. The RCW needs help to survive because it lacks a sufficient amount of suitable habitat. It is one of eight species of woodpeckers in North Carolina and the only one that excavates cavities in **living** pine trees.

### Q. What is the North Carolina Red-cockaded Woodpecker Safe Harbor Program?

A. The North Carolina RCW Safe Harbor Program is a state program authorized through an agreement between U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The agreement allows NCWRC to enter into **voluntary** Safe Harbor Management Agreements (SHMA) with non-federal landowners who agree to implement land management techniques that benefit RCWs. In exchange, landowners receive regulatory assurances that no additional ESA restrictions will be imposed as a result of their management actions. Landowners decide whether or not they want to participate in the program and a management agreement can be terminated with a 60-day written notice to NCWRC.

### Q. Who can participate?

A. Any non-federal landowner (private, corporate, state, or county) in North Carolina whose property is east of NC Highway 29-Interstate 85 and falls outside the boundaries of the NC Sandhills Safe Harbor Program is eligible to enroll in the program. In addition, a property must either currently have RCWs using it or have the potential to support RCWs on an upland pine environment.

### Q. Why is the Safe Harbor Program important?

A. Conservation efforts on non-federal lands can boost RCW numbers by providing habitat buffers around

established RCW populations, linking isolated RCW populations, creating a surplus of young RCWs to augment nearby populations, and by protecting valuable habitat.

### Q. How does the Safe Harbor Program benefit landowners?

A. The use of a land tract by RCWs brings with it some land use restrictions under the ESA. Many landowners are fearful that their land management actions may result in the use or increased use of their property by RCWs. The Safe Harbor Program benefits landowners by providing regulatory assurances that no additional land use restrictions will be imposed as a result of their management actions. Landowners enrolled in the Safe Harbor Program may make any lawful use of their property as long as they fulfill their baseline responsibilities and complete any other agreed upon habitat management.

### Q. What are baseline responsibilities?

A. Baseline responsibilities are a condition of the SHMA and are equal to the number of RCWs and/or foraging habitat present on a landowner's property at the time of enrollment. Landowners agree to maintain and/or enhance RCW cavity trees and foraging habitat on their property. In exchange, the SHMA provides incidental take authorization for any new RCWs that take up residence after the SHMA is signed.

### Q. What types of habitat management benefit RCWs?

A. RCWs need older pine forests that have an open midstory and a grass-dominated understory for nesting and finding food. Many nesting sites (called 'clusters') have been abandoned by RCWs because of hardwood encroachment into the midstory and overstory. This encroachment transforms open, pure pine forests preferred by RCWs into dense pine-

hardwood forests that becomes unusable to the species. One option available to control hardwood encroachment is the use of prescribed fire on a recurring basis. Landowners can also plant longleaf pine and lengthen timber rotations to grow the older pine trees preferred by RCWs. In addition, landowners are encouraged to thin overstocked stands to create and maintain a more open pine forest. These techniques will provide habitat for many other plants and animals, including bobwhite quail, and will also reduce the risk of wildfire and create ideal hunting conditions for numerous species.

**Q. Can I enroll in the program if my property currently has no RCWs?**

A. Yes. A property does not have to currently have RCWs using it and, in this case, the landowner has no baseline responsibilities. However, the property should have the potential to provide suitable RCW habitat. Landowners will be required to implement habitat management on the property that creates or maintains suitable RCW habitat. NCWRC will determine whether or not the landowner's proposed habitat management plan is suitable for the program.

**Q. Can I terminate the agreement?**

A. Yes; however, termination of a SHMA results in a loss of the regulatory assurances and the RCW incidental take authority provided to a landowner by the agreement. A landowner must provide a 60-day written notice and give the NCWRC an opportunity to relocate any RCWs within 30 days of such notice.

**Q. Can I sell my land? Are these agreements transferable?**

A. Yes, you can sell or transfer your land to another owner. If ownership is transferred, NCWRC will honor the agreement. The new owner must willingly sign the original agreement or a new mutually beneficial one to receive the benefits. Transfer of ownership requires a 30-day written notice. If the new landowner does not wish to participate in the Safe Harbor Program, then the agreement may be terminated.

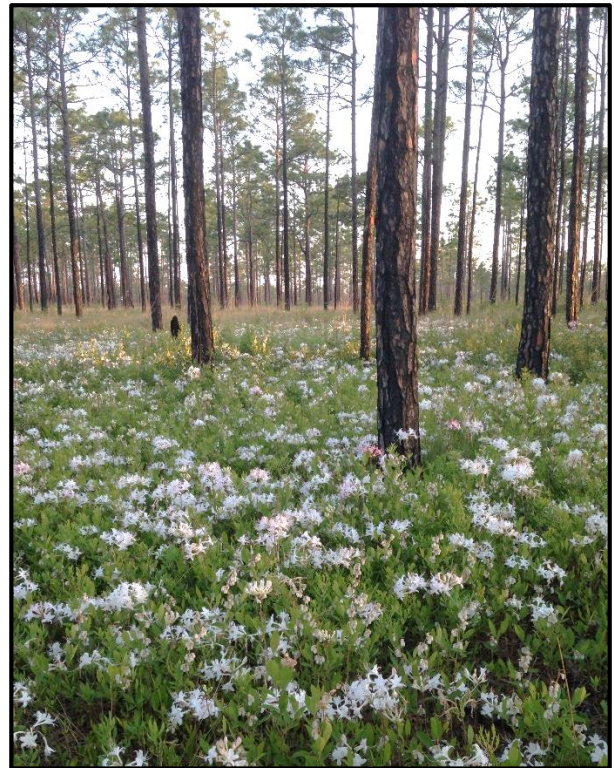
**Q. Is financial and/or technical assistance available?**

A. A landowner is solely responsible for funding and completing all agreed upon habitat management activities. However, NCWRC can provide technical assistance whenever possible and will provide financial assistance for certain activities when

funding is available. This assistance is not guaranteed. Financial and technical assistance is also available from other sources; for example, other government agencies, private consultants, and private groups. NCWRC can help landowners in finding and acquiring this assistance.

**Q. What are the steps to develop a management agreement?**

A. First, you must contact the NC RCW Safe Harbor Coordinator. Second, provide information such as a map of the property and proposed management activities or land uses. Third, NCWRC will make a site visit. Fourth, NCWRC or an agreed upon consultant will determine the baseline responsibilities. Finally, the coordinator will work with you to develop a SHMA.



*Longleaf pine forest, Pender County, NC.*

**For more information:**

<http://www.ncwildlife.org/rcwsafeharbor>

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