



**File Code:** 1950  
**Date:** October 1, 2018

Dear Planning Partner,

Attached is the signed decision memo (DM) to amend the Sumter National Forest's land management plan (Sumter forest plan). The amendment recognizes red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) as occurring on the Sumter National Forest and establishes a desired condition to develop a breeding RCW population in the Restoration and Enhancement of Native Ecosystems for Wildlife (RENEW) project area on the Long Cane Ranger District.

Per recommendations from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), we are acting quickly to take measures to enhance the existing RCW breeding cluster. I am requesting comments on a proposal to complete RCW population monitoring, cavity management and translocation on nearly 3,500 acres in the RENEW project area. To be most helpful, I need your comments by October 12, 2018.

### **Background**

In February, 2018, a male red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) was found in the RENEW project area. See vicinity map attached to this letter. Past management activities in the RENEW project area have created desirable habitat for the RCW on nearly 3,500 acres. The RENEW project area is located in Compartments 307, 308, part of 309 and 311 on the Long Cane Ranger District in Edgefield County, South Carolina. Historically, the RCW was wide spread across the coastal plains and occurred in this area prior to being extirpated. After a 40-year absence, RCW are breeding in the RENEW project on the Long Cane Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest. Based on a habitat assessment the RENEW project area can currently support nine breeding pairs of RCW. See maps for more information. See the attached foraging habitat analysis and map on foraging habitat analysis for more information.

### **Need for Proposed Action**

The proposed action (below) includes activities that meet recommendations from the USFWS to manage RCW in the RENEW project area. These efforts are needed to enhance the population and monitor the results of these efforts. This work implements direction in the Sumter forest plan as amended in the signed DM (*Amendment #2- Addition of Red-cockaded Woodpecker*) attached to this scoping notice.

### **Proposed Action**

#### *Population Monitoring*

Population monitoring is a critical component of the conservation and recovery of RCW. Population monitoring will involve nest checks, aging of nestlings, capturing and banding nestlings and adults, fledgling or late nestling checks, color-band observation, and determining group composition. All population monitoring will follow the guidelines identified in USFWS's 2003 *Recovery Plan for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW Recovery Plan)*.



### *Cavity Management*

Loss of cavities and cavity trees was a primary cause of the decline of RCW and is currently a substantial threat. The use of artificial cavities and restrictor plates will be used to manage the population of RCW. Associated activities, such as predator and kleptoparasite control, will also be implemented. Cavity trees will be tagged and banded with paint to facilitate monitoring and to ensure that they are protected during land management activities, such as timber harvesting or prescribed burning, which are covered under separate NEPA decisions. All cavity management activities will follow the guidelines identified in USFWS's *RCW Recovery Plan*.

### *Translocation*

Translocation is the artificial movement of wild organisms between or within populations to achieve management objectives. Translocation of RCW would take place in order to reintroduce birds into suitable habitat, develop a better spatial arrangement of groups to reduce isolation of groups or subpopulations, and to better manage genetic resources. All translocation activities will be coordinated with USFWS and South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and will follow the guidelines identified in USFWS's *RCW Recovery Plan*.

### **Environmental Regulations**

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations provide for categorical exclusions (CEs) to the implement the NEPA for the purposed of reducing delay and paperwork. CEQ regulations allow Federal agencies to exclude from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement categories of actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment. Refer to Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Chapters 10 and 30 for additional information. This project appears to fit into the following CE: Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction. (36 CFR 220.6(e)(6)).

### **Responsible Official Opportunity to Comment**

This project will be documented in a Decision Memo (DM) signed by the Responsible Official, the Forest Supervisor.

### **Instructions for Making Comments**

At this time, I am interested in hearing your thoughts about RCW population monitoring, cavity management and translocation in the RENEW project area. I welcome hearing your questions, concerns, issues, or other information relevant to the proposal. This project is also listed in the Planning, Administrative Review and Litigation System (PALS) and is available for public review at [https://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa\\_project\\_exp.php?project=54528](https://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=54528).

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments should be submitted to: Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, Attn: RCW Management Actions, 4931 Broad River Road, Columbia, SC 29212. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM Monday through Friday, excluding holidays and lunch 12:00 to 1:30 pm. Comments can be faxed to 803-561-4004. Electronic comments should be sent to [comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us) and should be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message or as an attachment in Microsoft Word, rich text format, or portable document format only.

Comments received, including names and addresses of those who respond, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. If you have questions, please contact Mark Garner, Forest Wildlife Biologist or Mary Morrison, Forest Planner at 4931 Broad River Road, Columbia, South Carolina, 29212, or telephone at 803-561-4000.

Thank you for your interest in the management of the Sumter National Forest. Your comments, concerns, and observations about this project are important to the development of the final project.

Sincerely,



JOHN RICHARD LINT  
Forest Supervisor

Enclosures (3) two maps of RENEW, Amendment#2 Decision Memo

cc: cc: Kirkaldie, John R -FS <jkirkaldie@fs.fed.us>;Morrison, Mary W -FS  
<mwmorrison@fs.fed.us>;Magniez, Jeff -FS <jmagniez@fs.fed.us>

# **Sumter Land Management Plan Amendment #2 Addition of Red-cockaded Woodpecker**

USDA Forest Service  
Sumter National Forest

## **Background**

In February, 2018, a male red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) was found in the Restoration and Enhancement of Native Ecosystems for Wildlife (RENEW) project area. (See attached vicinity map). Past management activities in the RENEW project area have created desirable habitat for the RCW on nearly 3,500 acres. The RENEW project area is located in Compartments 307, 308, part of 309 and 311 on the Long Cane Ranger District in Edgefield County. Historically, the RCW was wide spread across the coastal plains and occurred in this area prior to being extirpated. It is believed that the lone woodpecker flew from Fort Gordon. It has been living in the area for approximately 18 months based on the fact that it had excavated a cavity. The RENEW project, developed in 2006, provides habitat for species associated with grassland, shrub-scrub and pine-native grass ecosystems. These ecosystems have been declining in the Piedmont, resulting in a lack of open land and/or disturbance dependent species.

In consultation with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, three artificial cavities have been installed and on March 23, 2018, a female red-cockaded woodpecker was translocated to the area in the hopes of establishing a breeding pair and the female RCW has laid three eggs and two chicks have hatched. Based on a habitat assessment completed in April 2018, the RENEW project area could support nine breeding pairs of RCW. (See attached map of foraging analysis).

## **Need for Change**

To address the recent discovery of a federally listed species, on the Long Cane Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest (Sumter), an amendment is needed to the Sumter National Forest Land Management Plan (Sumter forest plan). This amendment adds the RCW to the list of Threatened and Endangered Species (T&E species) in Chapter 2, amend forest plan direction in Management Prescriptions 8.B.2 and 10.B in Chapter 3 and remove 90 acres from the suitable timber landbase in Appendix D. The changes to the management prescriptions are specific to nearly 3,500 acres in the RENEW project area located in compartments 307, 308, part of 309 and 311 on the Long Cane Ranger District (See Table 1 below).

## Decision Memo – Sumter Forest Plan Amendment – Addition of Red-cockaded Woodpecker

**Table 1. Management Prescriptions in the RENEW area**

Management Prescription	Acres
8.B.2 – Woodland and Grassland/Savanna Habitats	3115
10.B High Quality Forest Products (Piedmont only)	300
7.D Concentrated Recreation Zone (Lick Fork Lake Recreation Area)	65
11- Riparian Corridors is embedded within these other management prescriptions. The riparian corridor consists of perennial and intermittent streams.	N/A

### Decision

In this Decision Memo, I amend the 2004 Sumter forest plan to add RCW. Amendment #2 adds the red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) to the list of Threatened and Endangered Species (T&E) that occur on the Sumter, amends forest plan direction in Management Prescriptions 8.B.2 and 10.B, and removes 90 acres from the suitable timber landbase. The new direction is highlighted in yellow and deleted text has been struck out. Table numbers used in the section below are the table numbers used in the Sumter forest plan.

#### *Add New Federally Listed Species*

To address the new endangered species located on the Long Cane Ranger District of the Sumter, Table 2-2 on page 2-8 is updated.

**Table 2-2. Federally proposed, endangered, or threatened species on or likely to occur on the Sumter National Forest.**

Federally Listed Species	Status	District most likely to occur
Red-cockaded Woodpecker ( <i>Picoides borealis</i> )	Endangered	Long Cane

#### *Add Direction to Manage for RCW*

To address the need for habitat management for RCW on the Long Cane Ranger District, the following text highlighted in yellow is added to the Desired Condition statements in 8.B.2 Woodland and Grassland/Savanna Habitats on page 3-30.

*The emphasis on developing and maintaining open forest woodland to savanna and grassland habitats with scattered trees produces ideal habitats for fire- adapted species, including northern bobwhite quail, cottontail rabbit, bluebird, turkey, deer, sparrows, rodents, raptors, and bats. On the Long Cane Ranger District, management activities focus on establishing breeding pairs of red- cockaded woodpecker in the RENEW project area (Compartments 307, 308, part of 309 and 311). Management activities for red-cockaded woodpecker are closely coordinated with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and include a variety of wildlife habitat improvements, such as installing artificial cavities, banding existing cavity trees or translocating birds.*

### *Address Changes in the Suitable Timber Landbase*

To address the changes in the suitable timber landbase, the following changes are made in the Sumter forest plan in Chapters 2 and 3 and Appendix D:

**Chapter 2, Wood Products and Special Forest Products** on page 2-16 is updated as follows:

**Table 2-3 Acres suitable and unsuitable for Timber Production**

Management Prescription	Description	Acres Unsuitable for Timber Production	Acres Suitable for Timber Production	Total Acres
8B2	Woodlands/Grasslands/Savannas	90	6,540 6,630	6,630

**Chapter 3, Standard 8.B.2.-3** on page 3-31, is changed as follows:

*These lands are suitable for timber production except for the red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) cluster sites.*

**Chapter 3, Standard 10.B-2** on page 3-39, is changed as follows:

*These lands are suitable for timber production except for the red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) cluster sites.*

**Appendix D, Suitability for Timber Production and Timber Sale Program** on page D-1 is updated as follows:

**Table D-2. Results of Stage 3 Analysis**

Selected Alternative		Acres
Tentatively Suitable		349,279
8B2	Woodlands/Grasslands/Savannas	90
Total Suitable		259,223 259,313

## **Extraordinary Circumstances**

I find that my decision does not have any extraordinary adverse effects that warrants further analysis and documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). I do not believe that adding the RCW to the list of federally-listed species, making edits to the management prescriptions, and removing 90 acres from the suitable timber landbase has extraordinary circumstances as defined by 36 CFR 220:

### **Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species**

This amendment does not affect any other federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or on any Region 8 Forest Service designated sensitive species. Historically RCW

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occurred on the Long Cane Ranger District. The RENEW project was already being managed for the open pine habitat that is preferred by RCW and the male RCW moved to this area because of the presence of suitable habitat. This forest plan amendment does not change the on-going management in the RENEW project, but recognizes that the desired condition for management prescription 8B2 is to establish breeding pairs of RCWs in the RENEW project area.

### **Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds**

This amendment does not pose new risks to flood plains, wetlands or municipal watersheds. Standards for the protection of these areas remains in place. There are no changes in the management direction for Management Prescription 11 Riparian Areas or in standards that protect soil and water quality.

### **Congressionally designated areas such as roadless areas, wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas**

This amendment does not pose any risk to roadless areas, wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas. There are no changes forest plan direction for these designated areas.

### **Research Natural Areas**

This amendment does not pose any risks to research natural areas. There are no changes forest plan direction for these designated areas.

### **American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites**

Ongoing consultation with American Indian tribes is occurring to ensure protection of religious and cultural sites. This amendment does not affect any sites.

### **Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas**

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires each Federal agency to take into account the effects of its actions on historic properties prior to approving expenditure of Federal funds on an undertaking or prior to issuing any license. However, according to the Advisory Council's regulations 36 CFR Part 800.1 (c): *This does not prohibit agency official from conducting or authorizing nondestructive project planning activities before completing compliance with section 106, provided that such actions do not restrict the subsequent consideration of alternatives to avoid, minimize or mitigate the undertaking's adverse effects on historic properties. The agency official shall ensure that the section 106 process is initiated early in the undertaking's planning, so that a broad range of alternatives may be considered during the planning process for the undertaking.*

I find this decision is fully compliant with the Act. The land management plan amendment is a programmatic level planning effort that will not directly authorize any specific activities or projects. Site-specific projects that are undertaken as a result of the direction in the amended plan will fully comply with laws and regulations that ensure protection of heritage resources. Significant cultural resources will be identified, protected, and monitored in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act. Tribal consultation will occur and proposed activities will be coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) of South Carolina.

## Rationale

I have decided to address the recently discovered federally listed species on the Long Cane Ranger District by amending the Sumter forest plan. The RCW historically occurred on the Long Cane Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest and the male RCW moved into the RENEW project because suitable habitat already existed. Addressing the presence of the RCW in the Sumter forest plan will not impact other wildlife, water, fish or any other natural resources.

## Forest Plan Amendments

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency regulations 36 CFR 220.6(e)(16) as "Land management plans, plan amendments, and plan revisions developed in accordance with 36 CFR 219 et seq. that provide broad guidance and information for project and activity decision-making in a National Forest System administrative unit." This amendment recognizes that the RCW is now found on the Sumter National Forest and adds the management of RCW into the set of desired conditions for managing lands within Management Area 8.B.2. While this amendment does change some acres from being classified as suitable for timber production to unsuitable for timber production, this change does not alter the management that can occur on the ground as timber harvesting activities can still occur on lands unsuitable for timber production when needed to protect other multiple-use values such as managing the habitat of an Endangered species.

In meeting the requirements for amending a forest plan, the identification of the need to change the plan can be based on new information, changed conditions, or changed circumstances (36 CFR 219.13(b)(1)). As was identified in the Background section of this Decision Memo, the recent discovery of a new male RCW in the Long Cane Ranger District (where the RCW has historically occurred before it was extirpated approximately 40 years ago) constitutes the new information/changed condition/changed circumstances that instigated the need to change the forest plan. A RCW habitat assessment was also completed in April 2018 to determine the scope and scale of the changes needed by this amendment.

## Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests Schedule of Proposed Actions (June 2018) and updated periodically during the analysis. A public 30-comment letter was sent to the mailing list for the Sumter on June 18, 2018. The legal ad was published on June 26, 2018 in *The State* newspaper. A total of nine responses were received in response to the public scoping letter. Most of the comments were supportive of the proposed forest plan amendment as written, but there were some concerns particularly related to increases in the prescribed fire program were identified. Attached is a summary of the comments and the Forest Service response to the comment.

The draft decision memo was emailed to the nine respondents on August 3, 2018. The legal ad to start the 45-day objection period ran on August 9, 2018 in *The State* newspaper. No objections were received.



## Findings Required By Other Laws and Regulations

**Table 2. Compliance with Other Laws, Regulations, and Policies**

Year Enacted	Title	Summary	How applied to this project
1897	Organic Act	The law is the foundation for multiple use and Forest Service management of National Forest System lands.	This forest plan amendment follows direction in this law for the National Forest to manage National Forest System land.
1969	National Environmental Policy Act	Establishes the content and format requirements of environmental analysis and documentation as well as requirements for public involvement and disclosure. Forest Service implementing regulations at 36 CFR 220 provides further direction for categorical exclusions.	Amendment #2 is consistent with the NEPA and its implementing regulations. Procedures for public disclosure were followed in 26 CFR 220 and 36 CFR 219.
1973	Endangered Species Act	Provides broad protection for species of fish and wildlife and plants that are listed as threatened or endangered in the U.S. or elsewhere. Provisions are made for listing species, as well as for recovery plans and the designation of critical habitat for listed species. The Act outlines procedures for federal agencies to follow when taking actions that may jeopardize listed species, and contains exceptions and exemptions.	Amendment #2 is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act. Applicable procedures were followed with respect to threatened and / or endangered species.  A Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment was completed for plan amendment #2 in August 2018. A "no effect" determination was made for red-cockaded woodpecker. Pursuant to section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, as amended, consultation with U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not needed. There are no species on the Sumter National Forest that fall under the responsibility of the National Marine Fisheries Service.
1976	National Forest Management Act (NFMA)	Requires the Secretary of Agriculture to assess forest lands, develop a management program based on multiple use, sustained yield principles and implement a resource management plan for each unit of the National Forest System. It is the primary statute governing the management of national forests. Forest Service implementing regulations at 36 CFR 219 provide further guidance to determine consistency.	This forest plan amendment was developed in full compliance with NFMA. This forest plan amendment updates direction in the 2004 Sumter forest plan to recognize a recently discovered a federally-listed species on the Sumter National Forest.

## Meeting Substantive Requirements of the Rule

In conducting a plan amendment, the specific substantive planning rule requirements within 36 CFR 219.8 through 219.11 that are “directly related” to the plan direction being amended need to be identified and applied. (Conversely, any substantive rule requirements that are not directly related do not need to be applied to the amendment.) (See 36 CFR 219.13(b)(5).)

For Amendment #2, I have identified that the planning rule requirements found in 36 CFR 219.9(b) (with respect to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species), and 36 CFR 219.11(a) (the identification of lands not suited for timber production) are directly related to this plan amendment.

Amendment #2 meets the planning rule requirements in 36 CFR 219.9(b) and 219.11(a) as follows:

### **36 CFR 219.9(b) – Contribute to the recovery of T&E species**

Amendment #2 recognizes that the RCW is now found on the Long Cane Ranger District of the Sumter, and adds direction into the desired conditions for Management Area 8.B.2 to manage the applicable lands to meet the habitat needs of the RCW. The remaining management direction that is a part of Management Area 8.B.2 is already compatible with meeting the habitat requirements of the RCW.

### **36 CFR 219.11(a) – Lands not suited for timber production**

Amendment #2 recognizes that for the lands within RCW cluster sites, “timber production is not be compatible” (see 36 CFR 219.11(a)(iii)) with the management needs for the RCW. Consequently, in accordance with the planning rule requirements, this amendment changes the classification of those lands in the RCW cluster sites from “suited for timber production” to “not suited for timber production”. (As was identified from the habitat assessment completed in April 2018, the RENEW project area could support nine breeding pairs of RCW. In USFWS’s 2003 *Red-cockaded Woodpecker Recovery Plan*, Second Revision), a “RCW cluster site” is a minimum of 10 acres per breeding pair. So nine breeding pairs translates into 90 acres that will be within the “RCW cluster sites”).

RCW foraging habitat remains in the suitable timber landbase where the regeneration of stands could occur as long as the foraging habitat requirements are met. Thinning activities will also be needed to maintain foraging habitat. While the RCW cluster sites will be unsuitable for timber production, timber may still be harvested commercially from these sites through thinning activities needed to maintain habitat quality. Regeneration harvests, however, will not occur within these cluster sites.

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It should also be noted that while Amendment #2 removes 90 acres from the suitable timber landbase, this is not enough of a change to reduce the anticipated timber sale quantity identified in the Sumter forest plan.

### Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision memo, contact Mary Morrison, Forest Planner, at 803-561-4000.

### Approval

I approve *Amendment #2 Addition of Red-cockaded Woodpecker* to the Land Management Plan for the Sumter National Forest. This amendment has been built on a strong foundation of science and recommendations from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and in cooperation with the SC Department of Natural Resources. Amendment #2 is effective upon my signature.



John Richard Lint  
Forest Supervisor  
Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests



Date

**Analysis of Public Comments and the FS Response to Comments**  
**RCW forest plan amendment**  
**Sumter Forest Plan**

A total of nine responses were received in response to the public scoping letter. Most of the comments were supportive of the proposed forest plan amendment as written, but some concerns particularly related to increases in the prescribed fire program were identified. Below is a summary of the comments. The Forest Service response immediately follows the comment.

**Comment:** I oppose any increases in the fire regime or funding. The prescribed fire program to manage RCW is highly destructive to other species. Forest conversion by fire has been executed with blatant disregard for scientifically proven game management principles and reduced the carrying capacity for game populations.

**Response:** This comment is outside the scope of this decision. Management of the prescribed fire program is outside the scope of this forest plan amendment. The decision to create the RENEW project and the development of the prescribed fire program was made in 2006.

**Comment:** The RCW is without question the keystone species of southern pine ecosystems and deserves a place in all such suitable habitats. A significant benefit that is sometimes overlooked regarding RCW populations is their impact on the cavity using/nesting vertebrate community in pine ecosystems. There are now 30 known vertebrates (amphibians, reptiles, mammals, birds) that are known to use RCW cavities. It is important to include these data in any analyses of the ecological significance of RCWs. The appearance of the RCW is but one of the positive confirmations that habitats are developing in the ways nature intended with shortleaf regeneration and Northern bobwhite quail, red-headed woodpecker, eastern bluebird, pine warbler, yellow-breasted chat, tanager, oriole and wild turkeys benefiting from the creation of early successional habitat.

**Response:** Your comments on the benefits of the RCW to other wildlife in the RENEW project will be considered during the analysis of effects.

**Comment:** I am in full support of your Forest Plan Amendment to revise your Plan to accommodate the conservation and recovery of the RCW including specific management activities, such as installing artificial cavities, banding existing cavity trees and translocating birds to increase the population of red-cockaded woodpecker on the Forest. Now is the time to proceed expeditiously to grow this population to its capacity as soon as possible. Population stability, resiliency, and survival is a function of size. The RCW will remain vulnerable to demographic and environmental stochasticity in addition to potential genetic threats. Fortunately, we have translocations in our tool box which can be used to help manage all of those threats. So, moving forward there will be new, but hopefully easily manageable, impacts on budgets, staffing, etc. to keep your new RCW population viable.

**Response:** Your comments on the vulnerability of the RCW in the RENEW project will be considered during the analysis of effects.

**Comment:** A very important component of your new project is the opportunity for educational outreach and private land conservation.

- Two years ago we began the reintroduction of RCWs to Hitchcock Woods in Aiken, SC. Hopefully, the Forest can foster, develop and implement similar outreach programs to

further engage your constituents on the management and conservation of the RCW and its relationship to the Forest's diversity.

- If there are any landowners with potentially suitable habitat an outreach effort to introduce them to safe harbor would certainly be appropriate. The SH program will provide the assurances they need to not only "protect" themselves but also to support your efforts.
- If there is anything we can do to help the Forest Service in this important project, please let us know. For example, if there is a need to protect private lands in historic territory for the birds in the Piedmont, we will be happy to work with you on these opportunities.

**Response:** Forest Service staff are excited about the potential opportunities on public outreach and conservation efforts to bring back the RCW.

**Comment:** I am sure there is a good reason(s) why Cluster 8 is located where it is, but is there any opportunity to move it more to the center of the stand and away from the extreme corner and the private land? I would ask the same for Cluster #2.

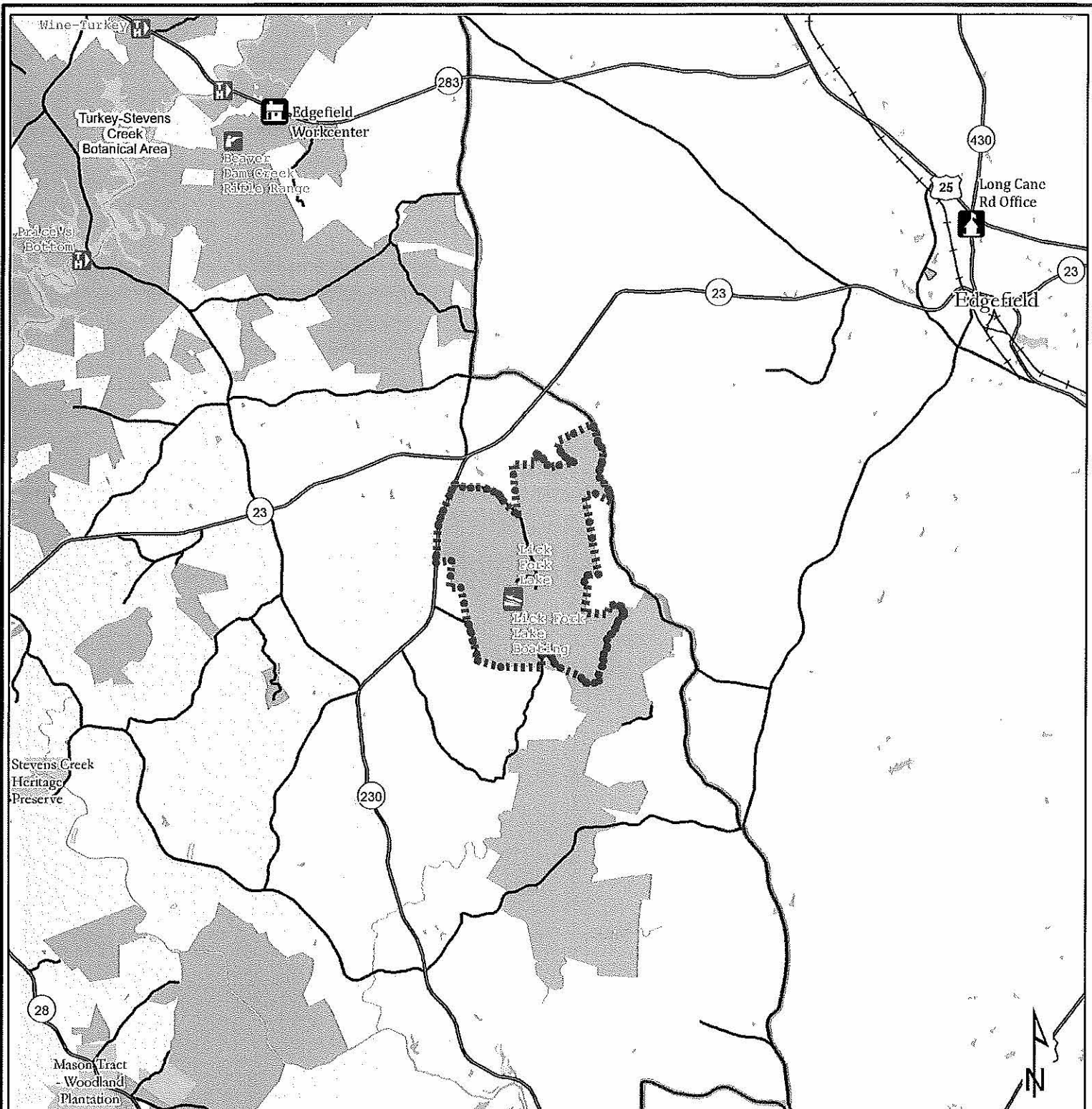
**Response:** The habitat assessment is not the location of any RCW clusters, but a model of existing suitable foraging habitat and potential cluster sites. However, we consider your concerns when we look at installing artificial cavities.

**Comment:** The routine pre-planning procedures of securing donor individuals, scheduling installation of nest cavity inserts, and scheduling translocation of birds this November should proceed expeditiously. Given the lengthy administrative process associated with this proposal, to not do so concurrently with this process would likely jeopardize the fate of the two females that have already fledged on the Long Cane District.

**Response:** Your concerns about the lengthy process are noted and will be considered as we move forward with project-level planning.

**Comment:** What is needed after the initial response of installing nest cavity inserts, is the enhancement of existing habitats and the creation of more suitable habitats across the District. Beginning the process of creating suitable RCW habitat (woodlands) from existing trees (including loblolly) and the incremental process of converting to fire tolerant regeneration and eventually overstories of shortleaf and longleaf pine should start shortly thereafter by identifying blocks of National Forest that can support a healthy population of shortleaf and longleaf pine. The NWTF would also have you consider creating a patchwork of small burn blocks of both growing and dormant season prescribed burning to complement the cluster locations where and when possible. These changes will not only benefit RCW's, but other species, like the wild turkey, that must have early successional habitat of varying stages of growth to flourish.

**Response:** As we develop projects to implement the amended forest plan direction, we will consider your comments on suitable next steps.



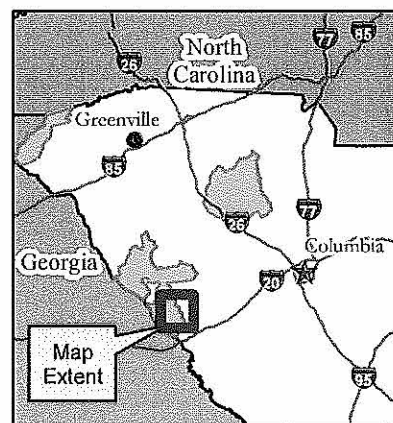
-  Project Boundary
-  US/State Highway
-  County Road
-  Forest Boundary
-  State Land
-  Urban Area
-  Francis Marion and Sumter NF
-  Private/Other Land



## RCW RENEW Project Vicinity Map Long Cane Ranger District

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 17N

Disclaimer: The USDA Forest Service makes no warranty, expressed or implied, regarding the data displayed on the map, and reserves the right to correct, update, modify, or replace this information without notification.



## **Red-cockaded Woodpecker Foraging Habitat Analysis for RENEW Project Area**

### **Background**

In February 2018, a male red-cockaded woodpecker was discovered in the RENEW Project area on the Long Cane Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest. After close coordination with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), the Forest Service decided to translocate a female woodpecker into the project area the following month. The birds bred and successfully fledged two chicks in May.

The USFWS suggested that the Forest Service perform an assessment of existing foraging habitat within the RENEW Project to determine how many potential breeding pairs of red-cockaded woodpeckers the area can support. The USFWS recommended that the Forest Service follow the standard for managed stability (from USFWS's 2003 *Red-cockaded Woodpecker Recovery Plan, Second Revision*) for determining woodpecker foraging habitat. Unlike the recovery standard, which is designed to promote expansion of the species, the standard for managed stability is designed to maintain an existing population size, or, in the case of red-cockaded woodpeckers within the RENEW Project area, to achieve a sustainable population size within existing habitat and then to maintain it over time.

### **Description of Suitable Foraging Habitat**

A summary description of suitable foraging habitat using the standard for managed stability is listed below (see the *Recovery Plan*, Appendix 5, for a complete description):

- Each group of woodpeckers has a minimum of 75 acres of pines
- Stands are at least 30 years old or older
- Average basal area of pines  $\geq 10$  inches is 40-70 ft<sup>2</sup>/acre
- Average basal area of pines  $< 10$  inches is less than 20 ft<sup>2</sup>/acre
- Average basal area of stands, including overstory hardwoods, is  $< 80$  ft<sup>2</sup>/ac
- No hardwood midstory is present, or if present it is sparse and less than 7 feet in height
- Frequent prescribed burning, especially during the growing season, is recommended

### **Existing Habitat Conditions**

There are currently 1,240 acres of pine woodlands within the RENEW Project area. Pine woodlands are predominantly loblolly pine with an average age year of 85. Trees within woodlands average 20 inches dbh. The total basal area of each woodland stand ranges between 30-60 ft<sup>2</sup>/acre, with an average of 45 ft<sup>2</sup>/ac. Most pine woodlands have sparse hardwood over- and midstories with understories dominated by native grasses and forbs. There are 410 acres of loblolly pine stands with basal area ranging between 60-80 ft<sup>2</sup>/ac that also provide potential foraging habitat.

Prescribed burning is used on a 2-year rotation across most of the RENEW Project area. Most burning has taken place during the late dormant season (February-April); however, the amount of growing season burning is expected to increase.

### **Foraging Habitat Analysis**

The Forest Service collaborated with SCDNR to perform the foraging habitat analysis. The analysis was done using guidelines contained in the *Recovery Plan*. It was determined that the RENEW Project area has suitable habitat for nine breeding pairs of woodpeckers. The USFWS Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Recovery Coordinator concurred with the results of the habitat analysis.

Each woodpecker territory is referred to as a foraging partition. There is a minimum of 75 acres of suitable habitat (using the standard for managed stability) within each foraging partition. All foraging habitat is within 0.5 mile of the center of each partition. The center of each foraging partition is the recruitment cluster. Artificial cavities would be placed at each recruitment cluster. Recruitment clusters are at least 200 feet from any road or private property.

### **Protection Guidelines**

Human-caused disturbances within recruitment clusters during the nesting season may disrupt red-cockaded woodpecker nesting activities, decrease feeding and brooding rates, and cause nest abandonment. Use of vehicles and other activities throughout the year may cause indirect impacts to woodpeckers through excessive soil compaction, damage to cavity tree roots, and disturbance of the ground cover. The following guidelines are recommended within recruitment clusters to protect cavity trees and to reduce human disturbance:

- Prohibit, with rare exceptions, the use of heavy equipment and machinery within 50 feet of cavity trees. Do not establish plow lines within 200 feet of cavity trees.
- Reduce human disturbance within clusters as much as possible, especially during nesting season. At a minimum, follow these guidelines:
  - Restrict vehicles to existing roads. Avoid construction of new roads and trails (for motorized and unmotorized use) within clusters.
  - Use of mechanized equipment in a cluster is permitted during the non-breeding season (August-March) for red-cockaded woodpecker management activities (e.g., mechanical midstory reduction).
  - Habitat management activities other than prescribed burning, for example timber thinning and hardwood midstory control, are prohibited during the breeding season (April-July).

Additional guidelines are listed in the *Recovery Plan* (Section 8F).



Red-cockaded Woodpecker  
RENEW Project  
US Forest Service  
Sumter National Forest  
Long Cane Ranger District  
Edgefield County, SC

