

**Amendment #7**  
**to the**  
**1996 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan**  
**National Forests and Grasslands in Texas**  
**April, 2006**

This amendment incorporates the latest findings issued by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the recovery of the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) by replacing several standards for Management Area (MA) 2 – Red-cockaded Woodpecker Emphasis and MA-6 – Longleaf Ridge Special Area of the 1996 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for National Forests and Grasslands in Texas (the *Plan*).

**MA-2-80-4.1**

On page 116-117 of the *Plan*, delete the language under MA-2-80-4.1 and replace with the following:

**MA-2-80-4.1 Foraging Habitat Management – General**

The following foraging habitat requirements must be met for all active clusters and recruitment clusters.

Foraging habitat for recruitment clusters must meet all requirements, except 2a and 2e below, if good quality foraging habitat is not available. These stands should contain no more than 70 square feet per acre of basal area in total.

Foraging habitat is not required for inactive clusters unless identified as recruitment stands.

*1) Area Provided by Site Productivity*

*a) In systems of medium to high site productivity (site index 60 or more, for the dominant pine species), provide each group of woodpeckers 120 ac of good quality habitat as defined below. A specific exception to this area requirement is made for longleaf and shortleaf habitat types under group selection silviculture.*

*b) In systems of low site productivity (site index below 60, for the dominant pine species), provide each group of woodpeckers 200 to 300 ac of good quality habitat as defined below (2003 RCW Recovery Plan, p. 188).*

- 2) *Definition of Good Quality Foraging Habitat. Good Quality Foraging Habitat has some large old pines, low densities of small and medium pines, sparse or no hardwood midstory, and a bunchgrass and forb groundcover. Good quality habitat has all of the following characteristics: (2003 RCW Recovery Plan, p. 188-189).*
- a) *There are 18 or more stems per acres of pines that are  $\geq 60$  years in age and  $\geq 14$  in dbh. Minimum basal area for these pines is 20 square feet per acre. Recommended minimum rotation ages apply to all land managed as foraging habitat*
  - b) *Basal area of pines 10 – 14 in dbh is between 0 and 40 square feet per acre.*
  - c) *Basal area of pines  $< 10$  in dbh is below 10 square feet per acre and below 20 stems per acre.*
  - d) *Basal area of all pines  $\geq 10$  in dbh is at least 40 square feet per acre. The minimum basal area for pines in categories (a) and (b) above is 40 square feet per acre.*
  - e) *Groundcovers of native bunchgrass and/or other native, fire-tolerant, fire-dependent herbs total 40% or more of ground and midstory plants and are dense enough to carry growing season fire at least once every 5 years.*
  - f) *No hardwood midstory exists, or if a hardwood midstory is present it is sparse and less than 7 ft in height.*
  - g) *Canopy hardwoods are absent or less than 10% of the number of canopy trees in longleaf forests and less than 30% of the number of canopy trees in loblolly and shortleaf forests. Xeric and sub-xeric oak inclusions that are naturally existing and likely to have been present prior to fire suppression may be retained but are not counted in the total area dedicated to foraging habitat.*
  - h) *All of this habitat is within 0.5 mi of the center of the cluster, and preferably, 50% or more is within 0.25 mi of the cluster center.*
  - i) *Foraging habitat is not separated by more than 200 ft of non-foraging areas. Non-foraging areas include (1) any predominantly hardwood forest, (2) pine stands less than 30 years in age, (3) cleared land such as agricultural lands or recently clearcut areas, (4) paved roadways, (5) utility rights of way, and (6) bodies of water.*

Where foraging is limited, make thinning of young stands (<10" DBH) within 1/2 mile of active clusters a priority. Thin such stands using standard silvicultural prescriptions (the Plan, p. 117).

Provide 100% of foraging for RCW groups whose 1/2 mile foraging zone extends onto another ownership unless a coop agreement exists with the non-Forest Service landowner to ensure they will provide their proportional share of foraging habitat.

Provide the Forest Service proportional share of foraging for RCW groups on adjacent non-Forest Service land when a group's 1/2-mile foraging zone extends onto national forest, even if no cooperative agreement exists.

#### **MA-2-80-4.2**

On page 118 of the Plan, delete the language under MA-2-80-4.2 and replace with the following:

#### **MA-2-80-4.2 Reduced Foraging Habitat**

Foraging habitat may be provided at a level below that given in MA-2-80-4.1 if the following situations occur and providing there is a finding that RCW populations would benefit in the long-term:

- 1) *Thinning to reduce risk of SPB outbreaks per the SPB EIS and ROD, even if foraging is limited. Such thinning must be supported by a SPB hazard analysis showing a moderate or high risk of infestation*
- 2) *If a project will impact some of the best 120 (200-300) acres dedicated to foraging habitat, and will not move the habitat directly toward the desired structure, the project would need modification before implementation. In some cases, such as the restoration of site appropriate pine species, it may continue at a reduced level.*

#### **MA-2-80-4.7**

On page 120-121 of the Plan, delete the language under MA-2-80-4.2 and replace with the following:

#### **MA-2-80-4.7 Thinning**

Thinning of forest stands is a key activity in the timely production of good RCW habitat. Direction for thinning pine stands varies depending on the age of the stand to be thinned and its suitability as RCW foraging habitat.

Thinning of stands considered unsuitable as foraging habitat (average DBH of < 10") is encouraged and may take place at any time. Standard silvicultural guidelines apply.

Provide for the following in stands that are > 10" DBH:

*Maintain pine BA of 70-110 square feet, depending on site and stand condition.*

*Maintain loblolly pine < 80 square feet of basal area.*

*Do not remove more than 30 square feet of BA in the dominant or codominants in any single thinning operation.*

In MILs 2-4:

*Use the following priority to select pine trees to retain:*

- (1) relict trees*
- (2) other potential cavity trees*
- (3) trees >10" DBH that are not potential cavity trees*
- (4) trees <10" DBH*

*In MIL 1: Same as in MILs 2-4 except trees to retain should be well formed, healthy, and vigorously growing.*

As stands approach the age to provide potential nesting habitat, generally 70-100 years depending on pine species, they should be managed as follows:

*Maintain a pine BA of 60-80 square feet and maintain a minimum spacing of 20-25 feet between dominant and codominant trees. Spacing is especially critical in the non- longleaf types.*

*Maintain an open park- like structure through regular prescribed burning. See MA-2-80-4.4.*

#### **MA-2-80-4.8.5**

On page 125-126 of the Plan, delete the language under MA-2-80-4.8.5 and replace with the following:

#### **MA-2-80-4.8.5 Accelerated Pine Restoration**

The rate of restoration may be accelerated as long as there are no short-term adverse effects on RCW and there will be a long-term benefit to them. There are three specific situations where an accelerated rate of restoration may be desirable, and is allowed:

- 1) HMAs with sparse or scattered RCW populations. To expedite restoration in portions of an HMA that are 1.5 miles or more from an active cluster the 0-10 and 0-30 guidelines may be exceeded, provided that:

*During the first 20 years of RCW Strategy implementation the area in the 0-10 age classes cannot exceed 15%, and the area in the 0-30 age classes cannot exceed 40%.*

- 2) When soils or other site factors cause off-site species to experience severe mortality after 40-50 years of acceptable growth.

*This situation is one of the most difficult to resolve because available foraging habitat is frequently being lost at a rate far in excess of the rate of replacement. Restoration efforts should be concentrated in the oldest stands of off- site species.*

- 3) When soils or other site factors prohibit trees from reaching foraging size (10 inches DBH) regardless of age (stagnation).

*The off-site stands being regenerated do not qualify as foraging habitat, therefore the rate of restoration is limited only by the previous mitigation measures which apply to all restoration efforts. See MA-2-80-4.8.4.*