



News Release



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Red-cockaded Woodpeckers Re-nest in the National Forest after Tornado Damage to Habitat

(Brent, Ala.) July 1, 2011 – Tornadoes that ripped through the Talladega National Forest, Oakmulgee District on April 27, impacted the homes of red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCW) during a very critical time – their nesting season. The Oakmulgee District has approximately 104 active RCW clusters located on the western half of the district where the tornado damage was most prevalent. The April storms damaged approximately 3,500 acres of hardwood and longleaf pine trees on the Oakmulgee District.

“Based on the time of day the storms occurred, the RCWs were likely roosting and probably inside the trees as they were falling,” said Mike Caylor, forester and biologist on the Oakmulgee District in Brent, Alabama.

Nine active RCW clusters were impacted by the April 2011 tornadoes, along with tree cavities and considerable foraging habitat. No dead birds were found. One confirmed nest with four eggs was lost due to the tree being broken off below the natural cavity and falling to the ground.

In response to the damage within the nesting habitat, the Forest Service installed 19 artificial cavities in five clusters. In addition, to increase available cavities the Forest Service removed flying squirrels in the area of two clusters, who are known nest competitors.

USDA Forest Service biologists are pleased to announce that after five weeks of diligent monitoring, the birds have re-nested and hatched two chicks within the cluster.

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“It really says something about the resiliency of the RCW,” said Caylor. “They were able to overcome loss of habitat, home, nests, and eggs and successfully re-nested within a matter of five weeks. That’s pretty incredible.”

The RCW is an endangered species that require large tracts of aged, open pine woodlands. Pine trees that are 30 years or older are needed for foraging habitat, and pine trees 70 years or older are needed for nesting habitat.

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(Photographs/Cutlines included – electronic photos available upon request)



AL_Oakmulgee Tornado Damage Photo 043 cutline: Mark Garner, USDA Forest Service biologist, installs an artificial cavity in a longleaf pine tree on the Talladega National Forest, Oakmulgee District after tornadoes impacted the homes of red-cockaded woodpeckers during their nesting season.



AL Oakmulgee Tornado Damage Photo 076 cutline: Pictured are native longleaf pines that provided foraging habitat for the red-cockaded woodpeckers damaged during the tornado. Nine active RCW clusters along with tree cavities and considerable foraging habitat were damaged after the April 2011 tornados.