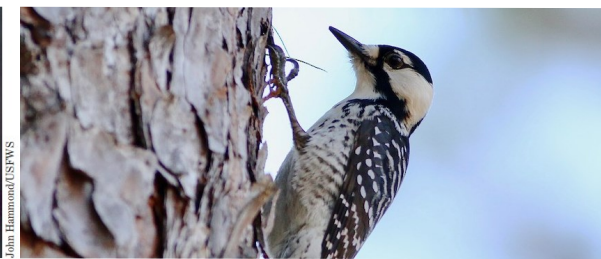


USACE Natural Resource Management

Non-migratory Birds



Red-cockaded Woodpecker

FAST FACTS

REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS: The USFWS listed the Red-cockaded Woodpecker as an endangered species in 1970. In September 2020, the USFWS proposed downlisting the species to Threatened as a result of conservation efforts. The species was once considered common throughout its historical range which included Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia. Red-cockaded Woodpeckers are considered a “keystone” species because their cavities are used by at least 27 other vertebrate species for either roosting or nesting.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: The Red-cockaded Woodpecker is a territorial, non-migratory species. Working with conservation partners, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service created the Red-cockaded Woodpecker recovery plan featuring the participation of other Federal and State agencies and private landowners. Because many large landscapes that provide habitat are on federal land, the U. S. Forest Service and the Department of Defense have developed special management guidelines for the woodpeckers on national forests and military installations.

HABITAT NEEDS: The Red-cockaded Woodpecker is a habitat specialist of the Southeast’s longleaf pine stands.

- Historically, the species inhabit longleaf pine stands with very little understory due to shaping by frequent lightning fires. Today, the species has inhabited loblolly, slash, and other pine species.
- The red-cockaded woodpecker is the only woodpecker species that excavates cavities exclusively in living pine trees with cavity excavation taking one to six years. Typically pines selected as cavity trees are softened by heartwood rot with an average age of 80 years old.
- Red-cockaded woodpeckers live in groups with a breeding pair and as many as four helpers, usually male offspring from the previous year.
- Each group needs about 200 acres of old pine forest to support its foraging needs.

Height: Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers grow to be 7—9 inches in length weighing 1.5 to 1.8 ounces. (*All About Birds*)

Color: This woodpecker is black and white with a ladder back, large white auricular patches, and white “cheeks” which make this woodpecker stand out from other species in the same range. The breast is gray-white and its belly has distinct black spots along the sides of the breast. (*All About Birds*)

Information and photos obtained from USFWS and All About Birds-The Cornell Lab (Macaulay Library)

Natural Resource Management (NRM)

This fact sheet has been prepared as an unofficial publication of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). This online publication is produced to provide its readers information about best management practices related to special status species. Editorial views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army. Mention of specific vendors does not constitute endorsement by the Department of the Army or any element thereof.



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USACE ROLE: Federal lands, such as those managed by USACE, within the range of the species provide perhaps the greatest opportunity to preserve, maintain, and create optimal Red-cockaded Woodpecker nesting habitat. Planting longleaf pine trees and conducting controlled burns to remove undergrowth to create the open, park-like areas that the woodpeckers prefer has helped the recovery effort as noted by USFWS. Additionally, artificial cavity construction has enhanced clusters and established new groups.

Photo: USACE works with contractors at Sam Rayburn Lake to install Red-cockaded Woodpecker nest inserts. The photo on the left depicts the nest insert process, while the photo on the right is the completed nest insert.



WHAT IS USACE NRM DOING:

1 Sam Rayburn Lake, located in the southeastern corner of Texas near the Louisiana border, is on the western edge of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) range. Project lands at Sam Rayburn Lake include several hundred acres of longleaf and/or mixed loblolly, shortleaf, and longleaf pine savannah that has the capability to provide quality habitat for the RCW. Sam Rayburn Lake is somewhat unusual in that it was created within the boundaries of a previously established national forest. Therefore, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands are interspersed and interlock with USACE lands around a large percentage of the reservoir. As the national forest was established prior to the construction of Sam Rayburn Lake, there are several active RCW colonies near USACE managed lands. From 1995 to 2005, USACE staff worked with contractors to construct several recruitment clusters on Sam Rayburn lands, placing six nesting inserts within each colony. These were strategically situated on lands between active colonies on USFS and adjacent timber company lands, to provide for potential migration and population interbreeding.

2 Today, staff at Sam Rayburn continue to manage the habitat in a way that has the potential to attract the species: maintaining the basal area in optimal stands through selective harvests, occasional herbicide treatments to remove invasive species and maintain the desired basal area, and a regular fire regimen (every 2-3 years when possible).

