



Regional Ecosystem Management in the North Carolina Sandhills

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Background:

Many military installations, such as Fort Bragg in North Carolina, must contend with problems brought on by encroaching development. Conflicts will continue to increase as civilian development and military training areas come closer together. The military must also manage conservation concerns such as endangered species and protected habitats. Fort Bragg experienced training constraints due to unsustainable endangered species habitats in the Sandhills of North Carolina. The Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) needed a more established habitat before restrictions on the base could be lifted. The Army, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, North Carolina resource agencies, and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) worked together to support a mechanism to protect the habitat of the RCW on private lands.

Objective:

The goal of this Legacy Resource Management Program funded project was to restore and preserve the RCW and its habitat on private lands to reduce training constraints at Fort Bragg. The desired outcome was a sustainable military mission training environment and maintained readiness at Fort Bragg and the adjoining Pope Air Force Base, recovery of RCW habitat, protection of longleaf pine ecosystem, and enhancement of goodwill with local communities by limiting encroachment and minimizing training areas near developed areas.



Photo by FWS

Red-cockaded Woodpecker
(*Picoides borealis*)

Summary of Approach:

A partnership between TNC, Fort Bragg, and the Army Environmental Center was a key element in the Cooperative Agreement. This agreement states that TNC would purchase conservation easements or development rights, or gain title to properties that meet the goals of minimizing encroachment and protecting the RCW. An estimated 3 to 5,000 acres provided training areas that were also consistent with the conservation purposes

established by TNC. This property is under the management of TNC but is usable for compatible training by the Army, thereby meeting the needs and goals of both groups. The acquiring of conservation encumbrances of adequate habitat size for the protection of longleaf pines was needed to create buffers from encroaching development and for RCW recovery. Some lands will be used for other appropriate uses such as outdoor recreation. Establishment of a monitoring protocol and a North Carolina Regional Data Server assisted in better understanding of the species habitat needs.



Photo by USAEC

Fort Bragg, N.C. Red-cockaded Woodpecker Habitat Established

Benefit:

This initiative was beneficial to the ecosystem and the military. The longleaf pines restored provided RCW habitat and buffers against encroaching development. The management provided by the TNC allows Fort Bragg to continue with military training. The increase of RCW will hopefully lead to the increase of bird populations on and adjacent to the fort.

Accomplishments:

Restoration actions created more longleaf habitat making it less likely that species would become cause for concern. The land acquisition by TNC provided more training area for the military along with protected species habitats. This program also promotes goodwill between military installations and neighboring communities. This project contributed significantly to the May 2006 announcement that Fort Bragg had met its recovery goal of 350 breeding groups of RCWs.

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