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# North Carolina Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Safe Harbor Program



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## Information for Landowners: Is it right for you?

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### Program Coverage Area

Any non-federal landowner in North Carolina whose property is east of NC Highway 29 / Interstate 85 and falls outside the boundaries of the NC Sandhills Safe Harbor Program is eligible to enroll in the program.



■ NC State-wide Safe Harbor boundary  
▨ NC Sandhills Safe Harbor boundary



### Program Goals

- To maintain and enhance Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) populations on non-federal properties through voluntary land management commitments by landowners
- To help North Carolina landowners by removing some of the regulatory restrictions imposed by the federal Endangered Species Act
- To provide benefits to other plants and animals that inhabit RCW habitat

### Program Eligibility Requirements

The North Carolina RCW Safe Harbor Program will consider any property within the coverage area. However, all enrolled properties and the habitat management performed on those properties must provide an overall conservation benefit to RCWs.

The North Carolina RCW Safe Harbor Program is interested in properties that meet one or more of the following situations:

1. RCWs are currently using a property for nesting and/or foraging (feeding) either entirely or partially, or

2. A property had RCWs using it at some time in the past, or
3. A property has longleaf, loblolly, and/or pond pine stands or has the potential to support pine stands.

### Landowner Responsibilities

- Enhance and maintain currently existing RCW nesting and/or foraging habitat, [if present](#)
- Perform or allow habitat enhancement activities on the property
- Coordinate and cooperate with NC Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) and any other authorized biologists or consultants

### Red-cockaded Woodpecker Habitat Requirements

Red-cockaded woodpeckers require mature pine trees covering at least 75 acres for nesting and finding food. They prefer [pine forests that are open and park-like](#) with a large amount of natural grass growing underneath the pine trees. They do not like woody vegetation, such as shrubs and hardwood trees, growing into the midstory and overstory.



RCWs preferred habitat are longleaf pine savannas or forests that are maintained by periodic fire as shown in the photo. [Periodic fire](#) promotes the development of grasses and controls growth of shrubs and hardwoods. In

the absence of fire, an open pine forest will transform into a dense pine-hardwood forest and RCWs will abandon the site. Pine stands that are currently unsuitable for RCWs can be [restored to a suitable condition](#) using proper habitat management (see below).

### **Beneficial Habitat Management**

The North Carolina RCW Safe Harbor Program will require participating landowners to perform or allow one or more habitat enhancement activities on their property. The number and type of habitat enhancement activities to be performed on an enrolled property will depend on several factors, such as habitat condition and type, presence of RCWs, and proposed land uses. All habitat enhancement activities will be mutually agreed upon by both the participating landowner and WRC.



### Some RCW Habitat Enhancement Activities:

- Prescribed fire on a recurring basis.
- Midstory and overstory hardwood control using prescribed fire, chemicals, or mechanical removal.
- Planting longleaf pine on appropriate sites and maintaining those pines for more than 30 years.
- Lengthening pine timber rotations.
- Thinning pine stands and maintaining those stands at 40 to 70 ft<sup>2</sup> of basal area per acre.
- Managing timber in a way that is compatible with RCW habitat requirements.
- Installing artificial cavities in occupied or unoccupied habitat and maintaining those cavities.

### **Other Plants and Animals That May Benefit from RCW Management**

Many species of native grasses and wildflowers can benefit from RCW management, particularly when prescribed fire is used on a recurring basis. Fire actually stimulates and promotes growth of native grasses and wildflowers. The grassy understory that develops with fire is beneficial to many animals, such as [bobwhite quail](#) and [Bachman's sparrow](#). In addition, the open, park-like condition of RCW habitat is preferred by [eastern bluebirds](#), [red-headed woodpeckers](#), and many other animal species. Longleaf pine savannas are also home to southeastern [fox squirrel](#) and are utilized by [white-tailed deer](#).

### **Land Uses That May Be Compatible with RCW Habitat Requirements**

Landowners may want to use their enrolled property for economic benefit or for personal reasons. Many types of land uses can be compatible with RCW habitat management. The following is a list of some potential land uses:

- Timber production
- Pine straw raking
- Quail Management
- Hiking, hunting, or other recreation
- Home site

### **Steps in the Program**

1. Contact the RCW Safe Harbor Biologist
2. Provide information such as a map of the property and proposed management activities or land uses
3. WRC will make a site visit
4. A survey of the property is performed to determine presence or absence of RCWs.
5. The coordinator will work with you or your representative to develop a Safe Harbor Management Agreement

### **For more information, contact:**

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