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Development of a Land Management Strategy for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker

D. S. Bradshaw

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Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
PERFORMANCE REPORT (July 1, 1992 - June 30, 1993)

Project:	Nongame & Endangered Species Investigations	No:	WE99R-2
Study:	Bird Conservation	No:	IV-7
Job:	Development of a Land Management Strategy for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker	No.	A-C

Personnel:	Dana Bradshaw	Costs	
		Total:	\$26,000
		State:	\$ 6,500
		Fed'l:	\$19,500

Status/Recommendations: On schedule, continue study

Summary:

The red-cockaded woodpecker population in Virginia remains unstable and continues to show evidence of decline. Of 5 clans with a total of 12 adults prior to breeding season, only one clan was known to be successful this year producing 2 young. At two additional sites, clans abandoned colony areas prior to breeding season and were not relocated in time to assess productivity. At least one other clan failed to produce young. The fifth site harbors only one bird.

Following several land transfers this year, all known red-cockaded woodpecker colonies are currently under some type of protective management agreement with respective landowners. The Department of Forestry was instrumental in facilitating communications with landowners as well as in directing intensive habitat management activities this year in coordination with the Game Department. Maintenance burns were conducted on two active sites to reduce the hardwood understory and midstory with very good results.

Objective A: To survey and monitor existing populations of Red-cockaded woodpeckers in Virginia.

Findings:

Both fall and spring surveys were conducted to determine the status and distribution of red-cockaded woodpeckers in Virginia. Of the five known sites that continue to harbor birds, only one site was known to produce young this year. The Many West site contained four adults prior to breeding season and produced two young. This site appears to have benefitted from the application of hardwood herbicide during the fall of 1991. Most of the hardwood overstory

and much of the midstory component was killed, improving site quality for the woodpeckers. At least two new cavity trees were discovered in use at this site. The Manry East site was unproductive this year. The nest tree was killed by pine bark beetles during the breeding season causing the adults to abandon the area. No new cavity trees have been discovered. The Manry South site was abandoned this year by the three adults that were present. The two active cavity trees at this site died during the year forcing the birds to relocate. Two new cavity trees were discovered after the breeding season, but there was no evidence of productivity at this site this year. The Sussex tract also underwent herbicide application in 1991, but the birds abandoned this site too. There were only two adults present in the spring, but it could not be determined where they were roosting. There was also no evidence that this pair bred successfully. After mid-June, no red-cockadedes could be located in this tract, and they have not been relocated nearby as of this writing. One reason for site abandonment at this location may stem from the proportion of foraging area that was harvested in 1990, thereby reducing the overall quality of this site to woodpeckers. The Sebrell site was the final site to have received herbicide application, but unfortunately, it now supports only one bird, with no signs of additional woodpeckers at the site. Although not active for the last three years, the Yale site yielded reports of red-cockadedes this summer, but these have not been confirmed. Repeated visits have turned up no new evidence of birds at this site, signifying a continuation of its abandoned status.

Table 1. Red-cockaded woodpecker status and productivity, 1993.

Site	May Survey	Young Produced	June Totals	1992 June Totals
MANRY EAST	2	0	2	3
MANRY WEST	4	2	6	5
MANRY SOUTH	3	0	3	4
SEBRELL	1	0	1	2
YALE	0	0	0	0
SUSSEX	2	2	12	4

Objective B: Coordinate the implementation of a long-term management plan for red-cockaded woodpeckers in the state.

Findings:

All current red-cockaded woodpecker sites are now under some degree of protection through various management agreements. This has been facilitated by the transfer of ownership of three red-cockaded woodpecker colony areas to a more conservation oriented land management organization. The three sites included the Manry East, Manry West and Yale sites. An active program of hardwood removal, prescribed burning, and protection of existing and future cavity trees is underway. Under this conservation plan, the two Manry sites offer the best opportunity for genetic exchange and long-term survival of red-cockaded in Virginia. In an unprecedented situation for Virginia, another landowner allowed the Department of Forestry, in conjunction with VDGIF, to burn two red-cockaded sites in an effort to control the hardwood midstory. The sites in question were the Sebrell and Sussex sites. Although neither of these sites appear to have produced young this year, burning was not believed to be a causative factor. More importantly, both sites are much improved in overall quality and will be in better shape to support birds in the future. The Manry South site is under the ownership of a third timber organization that is also working with VDGIF to maintain adequate habitat to support the birds, although no burning or hardwood removal plan is currently in place. All three landowners are however allowing regular surveys and permitting VDGIF personnel to identify and mark cavity trees and provide status reports. All activities regarding the conservation of this species in Virginia are being coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Objective C: Survey appropriate areas for additional clans of red-cockaded woodpeckers.

Findings:

No comprehensive survey was undertaken this year to evaluate additional locations for the

presence of red-cockaded woodpeckers. However, in the negotiations preceding the exchange of three colonies to a new landowner, much of the remaining mature pine habitat in Sussex County was surveyed by the new landowner to evaluate the possibility of additional clans occurring on property that was involved in the sale. Two historical sites were located, with no evidence of recent use, but no additional indication of red-cockaded woodpeckers was discovered in some of the last remaining potential habitat in the state.