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Red-cockaded Woodpecker Investigations

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Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
PERFORMANCE REPORT (July 1, 1991 - June 30, 1992)

Project:	Nongame & Endangered Species Investigations	**No:**	EW-2-4
Study:	Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Investigations	**No:**	X
Job:	Development of a Land Management Strategy	**No.**	A-C
Personnel:	Dana Bradshaw	**Costs**	
		Total:	$16,461
		State:	$ 4,115
		Fed'l:	$12,346

Status/Recommendations: On schedule, continue study

Summary

One red-cockaded woodpecker site that was abandoned in 1990 remains idle with no evidence as to the current disposition of this clan. One new woodpecker clan was discovered this year by Game Department personnel bringing the total back up to 5 active sites. These five sites contained 12 adult birds this spring which produced 6 young, generating a total of 18 red-cockaded woodpeckers known to be present in Virginia as of July.

In a cooperative venture between state and federal agencies, 4 of the 5 red-cockaded woodpecker sites were treated with herbicides to control the hardwood midstory. This effort was extremely succesful and was designed to be a precursor to a controlled burn project scheduled for the next project year.

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

Procedure

Interact with state and federal agencies to accomplish long-term management goals on existing red-cockaded woodpecker sites. Advise participating parties on appropriate methodologies and techniques. Supervise actions conducted at active sites.

Findings

TABLE 1. Red-cockaded Woodpecker Status and Productivity - 1992

Site	May Survey	Young Prod.	June Totals
Manry East	2	1	3
Manry West	3	2	5
Manry South	3	1	4
Sebrell	2	0	2
Yale	0	0	0
Sussex	2	2	4
1992 Totals	12	6	18

Despite reported sightings of red-cockaded woodpeckers in the area of the 1990 abandoned site, this colony has yet to be relocated. There have been timber activities adjacent to this site that would have improved foraging habitat, and this site was also treated with herbicides to control hardwood encroachment. If this clan of birds fails to respond to these site improvements, and cannot be located elsewhere nearby, it may indicate that these birds did not survive their relocation attempt.

In the early spring of 1992, Department personnel located two red-cockaded woodpeckers foraging in the area of an existing active site. However these birds were subsequently followed to their respective cavity trees allowing confirmation of a new active site. Since the cavity trees in use were at least a few years old, there is a possibility that this clan may represent a survivor from one site which may have paired up with a member of the nearby site. Although none of the Virginia red-cockaded woodpeckers are banded, this offers the best possibility in recent years of genetic exchange between two colonies. The new colony is now located approximately 1 mile from an existing colony which will foster the possibility of future contacts two clans.

For the second year in a row, another clan has shown no evidence of succesful nesting. Since there continues to be only two birds at this site, the possibility exists that this clan may have lost a breeding female and may now exist with only male birds. A thorough survey is proposed this winter to ascertain the true status of this clan.

Each colony site has undergone changes in the status of cavity trees. Many trees that were in use last year are abandoned this year, however many cavities have been excavated in new trees. The long term plan for monitoring the status of cavities was to mark the cavities in accordance with a standardized methodology. (See 1989-90 Annual Report for

details.) However, the principal landowner for most of these sites has delegated that responsibility to a contracted consultant. Therefore many cavities go unmarked and the status of other cavities is incorrect due to the lagtime inherent in relying on an annual or bi-annual contract visit. We hope to negotiate a different strategy for handling this facet of the project in the coming project year.

As for the current status of red-cockaded woodpeckers in Virginia, surveys were conducted throughout the breeding season to ascertain population numbers and reproductive success. Results are presented in Table 1.

Cavity trees were not climbed to assess productivity again this year, but regular surveys were conducted during the breeding season to monitor results. Fledging dates occurred early again this year, with young leaving the nest as early as May 20. A final fledging date was not established this year but all young had fledged by June 1.

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

Procedure

Interact with state and federal agencies to accomplish long-term management goals on existing woodpecker sites. Advise participating parties on appropriate methodologies and techniques. Supervise actions conducted at active sites.

Findings

The principal landowner of red-cockaded woopecker sites in Virginia has been reasonably receptive toward implementing some of the objectives of a long term management plan for this species.

In an extremely succesful first effort, the Game Department enlisted the aid of the Department of Forestry and the Fish and Wildife Service to conduct an aerial application of hardwood herbicides for the control of hardwood encroachment within red-cockaded woodpecker habitat. The Virginia Department of Forestry was contracted under a federal grant to apply a chemical herbicide (arsenal) to the colony sites of 4 of the 5 woodpecker sites as determined by Game Department and Fish and Wildlife Service personnel. This effort was undertaken in the late summer of 1991 to coincide with the Department of Forestry's normal spraying season. Game Department personnel assisted in the identification and delineation of exact spray boundaries and served to evaluate the results this spring. After spring was well underway and leaf-out conditions were prevalent, it was apparent that the spray project had been succesful with most of the hardwood midstory

and understory components having been killed in the actual colony areas.

These spray results should provide at least short term benefits to the woodpeckers by helping to protect the available nesting habitat from being overtaken by hardwoods. These results may even serve to boost productivity and serve to enhance survivorship within the colonies from year to year. Hardwood control should reduce the numbers of cavity competitors as well as nest predators that tend to be more prevalent in hardwood or mixed habitats.

To improve upon this success, it is hoped that the spray effort can be followed-up by a controlled burn project for the next project year. If these sites could be brought under a maintenance burn program every 2 to 4 years, the sites could be managed as model habitats for red-cockaded woodpeckers, as well many rare plant species that are characteristic of fire-maintained communities.

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

Procedure

Locate and search additional locations where appropriate habitat exists. Investigate potential sightings of red-cockaded woodpeckers by the public and other resource personnel.

Findings

No comprehensive survey was undertaken this year to evaluate additional locations for the presence of red-cockaded woodpeckers. Many potential habitats were noted and mapped during routine travel through Sussex County and these habitats will be searched during winter as time permits.

Game Department personnel responded to three reports of red-cockaded woodpecker cavity trees during the project year. All were determined to be old loblolly pine trees showing signs of characteristic pileated woodpecker foraging activity.