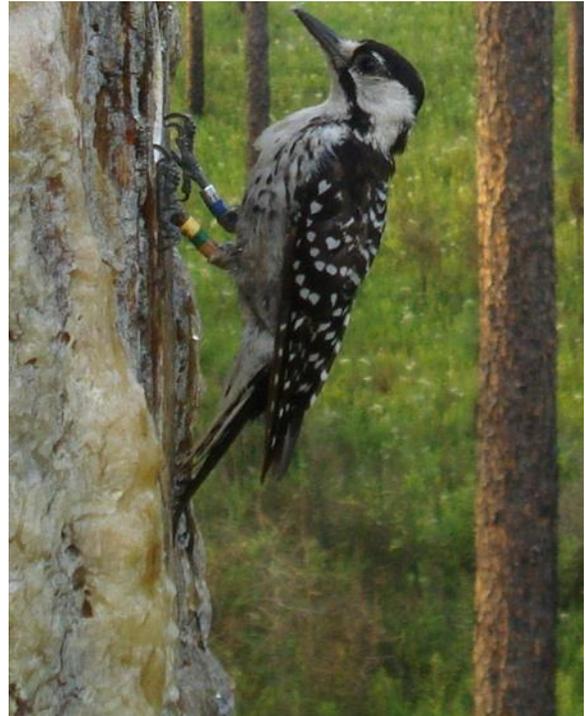


Endangered Species Act ESA 40 Success Stories Southern Region Talladega National Forest

The sun is starting to peak above the horizon, and golden rays of sunlight begin to slant through the open, park-like stand of pine trees towering over a carpet of native grass and bright wildflowers. The air is suddenly filled with the sound of rapid wing beats and the shrill calls of red-cockaded woodpeckers as they leave their nest cavities and begin their day.

The red-cockaded woodpecker is making a comeback on the Talladega Ranger District. The red-cockaded woodpecker, often referred to by its abbreviation of RCW, was listed as endangered in 1970, and received federal protection with the passage of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. At the time, the RCW was extirpated from the Talladega Ranger District, due to lack of suitable habitat. The original longleaf pine habitat had disappeared due to a combination of fire suppression, and harvesting of the native longleaf pine forest. Once protected from fire, lands formerly occupied by fire-resistant longleaf pine could be planted with loblolly pine, a fire-sensitive species that grew more quickly, and reached market earlier.

Since the mid 1990's, however, restoring the longleaf pine ecosystem – and RCW habitat – across the southeastern United States has been one of the top priorities of the USDA Forest Service. The Talladega Ranger District, located in the southern terminus of the Appalachian Mountains in Alabama, uses timber harvests and prescribed burning to restore the longleaf ecosystem. Timber harvest removes loblolly pines, and the fire helps restore the open, park-like appearance of mature longleaf stands. Once enough longleaf pine habitat was restored, the Forest Service began to reintroduce RCW to the Talladega Ranger District through an intensive translocation program.



Each fall, biologists from the Talladega Ranger District travel to larger RCW populations across the southeastern United States. The biologists trap ten, unrelated juvenile RCWs (5 male & 5 female), and transport them back to the district, where they are released, in pairs, into suitable habitat. The Talladega Ranger District currently has eight potential breeding groups and two single bird clusters. The eight potential breeding groups of RCWs are all reproducing and the population on the forest is growing -- a sign that the Talladega Ranger District's longleaf pine ecosystem restoration efforts are having a positive impact on our native threatened and endangered species.



**Southern Region
Talladega National Forest**