

APPENDIX 4. SURVEY PROTOCOL

Guidelines for Surveys to Assess Potential Project Impacts to Red-cockaded Woodpecker Nesting and/or Foraging Habitat

Surveys are used to determine whether the nesting and/or foraging habitat of a red-cockaded woodpecker group will be adversely impacted by a proposed project, such as a timber sale or development activity, on a particular tract of land. This is an important part of the conservation and management of this endangered species, and therefore the Fish and Wildlife Service has developed standard survey and analysis procedures for such determinations. These determinations must be undertaken prior to the initiation of any project within the southeastern United States that calls for removal of pine trees 30 years or older; typically such trees will be at least 25.4 cm (10 in) dbh or larger. The procedure is also used following new land acquisition by state and federal agencies in the southeast or any other circumstance in which the presence or absence of red-cockaded woodpeckers is to be assessed.

The first step in the survey procedure is to determine if suitable nesting or foraging habitat exists within the area to be impacted by the project. If no suitable nesting or foraging habitat is present within the project impact area, further assessment is unnecessary and a "no effect" determination is appropriate. If no suitable nesting habitat is present within the project impact area, but suitable foraging habitat is present and will be impacted, potential use of this foraging habitat by groups outside the project boundaries must be determined. This is accomplished by identifying any potential nesting habitat within 0.8 km (0.5 mi) of the suitable foraging habitat that would be impacted by the project. Any potential nesting habitat is then surveyed for cavity trees. This procedure is described in greater detail below. If no active clusters are found, then a "no effect" determination is appropriate. If one or more active clusters are found, a foraging habitat analysis is conducted (see 8I) to determine whether sufficient amounts of foraging habitat will remain for each group post-project.

For nesting and foraging habitat surveys within project impact areas and within 0.8 km (0.5 mi) of the project site, potential habitat is assessed at the level of the stand. A stand is a term often used to refer to a wooded area receiving past or current silvicultural treatment as a single management unit. Here we expand the term to include any subset of a tract of wooded land, divided by biological community type, management history, or any other reasonable approach. A small tract of land may be considered a single stand.

Identification of Suitable Foraging Habitat

For the purpose of surveying, suitable foraging habitat consists of a pine or pine/hardwood stand of forest, woodland, or savannah in which 50 percent or more of the dominant trees are pines and the dominant pine trees are generally 30 years in age or

older. These characteristics do not necessarily describe good quality foraging habitat (see 2E, 8I); rather, this is a conservative description of potentially suitable habitat.

Identification of pine and pine/hardwood stands can be made using cover maps that identify pine and pine/hardwood stands, aerial photographs interpreted by standard techniques, or a field survey conducted by an experienced forester or biologist. Age of stands can be determined by aging representative dominant pines in the stands using an increment-borer and counting annual growth rings. Stand data describing size classes may be substituted for age if the average size of 30 year-old pines is known, i.e., at least 25.4 cm (10 in) dbh or larger, for the local area and habitat type.

If no suitable foraging habitat is present within the project area (that is, no pines 30 years or older will be impacted), then further evaluation is unnecessary and red-cockaded woodpeckers are considered absent. If the project area contains any suitable foraging habitat that will be impacted by the project, that habitat, if it contains any 60 year old trees or older, and all other suitable nesting habitat within 0.8 km (0.5 mi) of the project site, regardless of ownership, must be surveyed for the presence of red-cockaded woodpeckers.

Identification of Suitable Nesting Habitat

For the purpose of surveying, suitable nesting habitat consists of pine, pine/hardwood, and hardwood/pine stands that contain pines 60 years in age or older and that are within 0.8 km (0.5 mi) of the suitable foraging habitat to be impacted at the project site (see above). Additionally, pines 60 years in age or older may be scattered or clumped within younger stands; these older trees within younger stands must also be examined for the presence of red-cockaded woodpecker cavities. These characteristics do not necessarily describe good quality nesting habitat (see 2D, 8E, 8F); rather, this is a conservative description of potential nesting habitat.

Determination of suitable nesting habitat may be based on existing stand data, aerial photo interpretation, and/or field reconnaissance. All stands meeting the above description, regardless of ownership, are surveyed for cavity trees.

Surveying for Red-cockaded Woodpecker Cavity Trees

Once suitable nesting habitat is identified (above), it must be surveyed for cavity trees of red-cockaded woodpeckers by personnel experienced in management and/or monitoring of the species. Potential nesting habitat is surveyed by running line transects through stands and visually inspecting all medium-sized and large pines for evidence of cavity excavation by red-cockaded woodpeckers. Transects must be spaced so that all trees are inspected. Necessary spacing will vary with habitat structure and season from a maximum of 91 m (100 yards) between transects in very open pine stands to 46 m (50 yards) or less in areas with dense midstory. Transects are run north-south, because many

cavity entrances are oriented in a westerly direction, and can be set using a hand compass.

When cavity trees are found, their location is recorded in the field using a Global Positioning System (GPS) unit, aerial photograph, and/or field map. Activity status, cavity stage (start, advanced start, or complete cavity), and any entrance enlargement are assessed and recorded at this time. Again, it is extremely important to have all surveys and cavity tree assessments performed by experienced personnel.

If cavity trees are found, more intense surveying within 457 m (1500 ft) of each cavity tree is conducted to locate all cavity trees in the area. Cavity trees are later assigned into clusters based on observations of red-cockaded woodpeckers as described in 3A. Any cavity trees or other evidence of red-cockaded woodpecker activity is reported to the Fish and Wildlife Service, at either a local office or the Clemson Field Office, Clemson, South Carolina.