

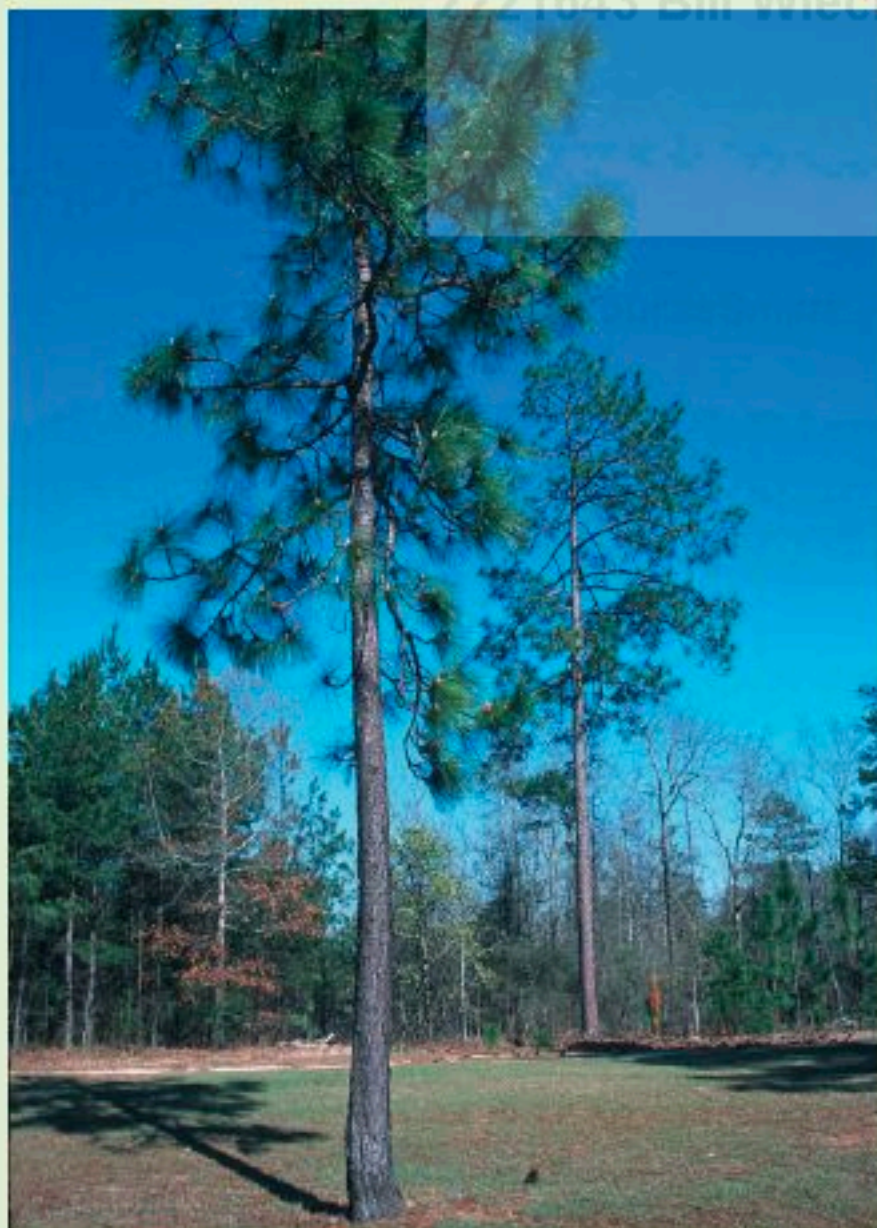
INCREASING POPULATIONS OF RED-COCKADED WOODPECKERS

The red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) is listed as an endangered species. This medium-sized bird (about the size of a cardinal) is a cooperative colony nester—the dominant male and female raise young with the support of nonbreeding members of the colony. They are only found in the southeastern United States—southern Virginia to eastern Texas—where native southern yellow pine forests occur. Several pine species, including slash pine, shortleaf pine, loblolly pine, and longleaf pine, are typical of this region. The original forests were fire-adapted in that mature trees were able to withstand moderate ground fires. This resulted in a rather open forest type. The woodpeckers typically construct their nesting cavities in older, diseased longleaf pine trees.

The trees these birds use for nesting are also commercially important. Thus, the amount of suitable breeding habitat has been severely reduced as older trees are harvested and natural stands of pines have been replaced with plantations, where large tracts are planted to a single species and the trees are harvested before they reach old age.

Since much of the suitable habitat is privately owned, protecting populations of red-cockaded woodpeckers requires the cooperation of private landowners, conservation organizations, state and federal governments, and commercial forest products companies.

In 1998, International Paper entered into an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which is responsible for monitoring the status of endangered species, to increase the amount of suitable nesting habitat on its lands. International Paper agreed to set aside particular parcels of forest to maintain colonies of red-cockaded woodpeckers. One of those parcels was the Southlands Experimental Forest near Bainbridge, Georgia. When the agreement was signed in 1998, there were three male red-cockaded woodpeckers at the site. By 2008, there were over 50 individuals. The increase is attributable to protection and improvement of the birds' habitat and transfer of birds to the area from other locations. In 2006, the company decided to sell nearly all of its land holdings in the United States. Many environmentally sensitive lands were sold to conservation organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and the Conservation Fund, as well as state governments. The Southlands Experimental Forest was sold to the state of Georgia with some funding assistance from the Conservation Fund. This land transfer protects the population gains made by this population of red-cockaded woodpeckers.



Red-cockaded woodpecker habitat



Red-cockaded woodpecker