

JUNE 14, 2017 WORKING GROUP REPORTS

RCW WORKING GROUP

Objectives:

- 1) Develop a series of strategies to address the overall recovery of the RCW population in the North Carolina Sandhills, including connectivity between subpopulations within SANDHILLS EAST and WEST.
- 2) Work with other working groups and partners for implementation of RCW recovery strategies.

April 20th - 21st 2017

Members of the RCW Recovery Working Group organized a field tour with USFWS RCW Recovery Coordinator Will McDearman to Western Fort Bragg and Sandhills Game Land to discuss forestry and silvicultural practices within RCW clusters and foraging habitat within and across Partner Lands.

2017 NC SANDHILLS RCW MONITORING – preliminary findings

SANDHILLS EAST:

- **FORT BRAGG**
 - Western FB – new Cluster 156. Budded groups aren't always stable into future years. They can become captured again (FB 145, 155) or remain separate groups.
 - ~ 6 budded groups throughout installation (3 NEA)
 - Nesting effort above average, but not without failures (18 initial failures – 6 renests)
 - Chicken Road x Sandy Grove Church Road (7 failures).
- **MCCAIN Forest**
 - 7 potential breeding groups (PBG) in 2017 (same as 2016).
- **TNC Calloway Forest**
 - RCW groups on Calloway increased from 8 to 10 PBGs from 2016 to 2017.
 - Cluster HOKE 7 split (new cluster is HOKE 19)
 - Cluster HOKE 16 split (new cluster is HOKE 20)
 - For a second year in a row, a second brood attempt was detected for the HOKE 9 group during the first week of June.
- **Southern Pines – Pinehurst (SOPI)**
 - Potential breeding groups within SOPI, notably Pinehurst, were fewer in 2017 than 2016.
 - Three (3) additional 'Pinehurst Resorts' clusters have become destabilized (SOPI 47, SOPI 50 and SOPI 74). Yearling solitary males presently occupy these territories that were previously occupied by 13 year, 6 year and 8 year males. The decline and eventual loss of RCW groups within Pinehurst residential and golf course developments has been accelerated in recent years. The SOPI 39 group on Pinehurst No. 9 and the SOPI 114 group on Pinehurst No. 5 were the sole nesting groups in western SOPI.
 - SOPI 80 has destabilized and is potentially abandoned. 2017 is the first year since observations began in 1979 where no RCW nests were documented outside of the Walthour Moss Foundation (WMF) or the Boyd Tract within horse country.
 - Recruitment cluster MOOR E07 was created in fall 2016 near Moore Meadow within the WMF North Country and recruited a pair which nested this season.

- Two females of the 6 juveniles translocated in December 2016 from Fort Bragg donor groups have been seen within SOPI and MOOR clusters. Neither female is part of a breeding pair and no translocated yearling males have been observed to date.
- **Western Moore County (MOOR) subpopulation** – (i.e. the Hoffman Road Corridor)
 - Between 2016 and 2017, active clusters increased from 12 to 14. Four of the 14 MOOR clusters are on SGL property and 10 are on private lands, most enrolled in Safe Harbor.
 - Pioneer cluster MOOR 51 was detected on private land close to Hoffman Road-Roseland Road intersection.
 - MOOR 1 has a PBG for the first time since the 1980s.
 - MOOR 5 has a PBG, but had been historically abandoned for over 3 decades.

SANDHILLS WEST:

- **Sandhills Game Land (SGL) A-Block**
 - No budded groups documented on SGL yet in 2017. Artificial cavity installation has lessened on SGL and the proportion of nest cavity trees excavated by RCW as opposed to insert or drilled cavities has been on the rise. The NCWRC staff have detected numerous recently completed RCW cavity trees during annual surveys.
- **CAMP MACKALL**
 - PBGs increased from 14 to 15 between 2016 and 2017.
- **BLUE TRACT**
 - 9 PBG in 2017 (same as 2016).

COMMUNICATIONS WORKING GROUP

No report received.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

Nothing to report.

LAND PROTECTION WORKING GROUP

There were no land closings between March 8 – June 14, 2017, in part because the Army instituted a “Pause” for the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program in order to audit the program and review procedures nation-wide. As of early June, the Pause has been lifted with some new protocols in place. TNC and SALT are actively working on new acquisition projects, and WRC will soon purchase 2 TNC-held properties to add to Sandhills Game Land.

RESERVE DESIGN WORKING GROUP

We are in the process of completing upland longleaf surveys. There are around 10 sites remaining. After all surveys are complete, all reserve design layers will be updated and provided to the Green Growth Toolbox.

Work on the models to identify and assess the condition of longleaf within North Carolina is on schedule. At this time, the models should be complete by the end of this year.

Later this month, work will begin on assessing streamhead pocosins, seeps, and canebrakes within the Sandhills.

The top topic identified in the conservation research needs assessment was management for species of concern. Many respondents indicated that they do not have enough information about species of concern to properly manage for them. Lynn Richards, a retired research librarian, is working to obtain this information from scientific journals, technical documents, and state and federal agencies. After compilation of the information, a presentation will be given to the steering committee and be made available to everyone in the Sandhills.

A manuscript has been submitted to the Journal of Herpetology that summarizes our efforts/results from assessing ephemeral wetlands in the Sandhills.

After discussions with TNC's Water Director, Julie DeMeester, we decided to submit a request to the state to list Drowning Creek as an impaired water due to reduced e-flows. We have yet to receive a response. If Drowning Creek is listed, it should not affect withdrawals for drinking water by the City of Southern Pines.