

**FY 2016**  
**Communications Working Group Annual Report**

**Date:** December 7, 2016  
**Working Group Chair:** Debbie Crane  
**Date of Last Meeting:**

**Goals:**

The goals of the CWG are to establish an external communications program for the Partnership that raises awareness and educates the target audiences about the work of the Partnership and maintain strong internal communications within the Partnership.

**Objectives:**

- 1) Brand the Sandhills Conservation Partnership.
- 2) Build Support and Awareness for the Sandhills Conservation Partnership through the use of earned or free media.
- 3) Build Support and Awareness for the Partnership in the community through partner and other groups.
- 4) Build Support and Awareness for the Partnership through nontraditional media
- 5) Create stronger ties with elected officials, particularly at the state and federal level
- 6) Ensure partners are informed of potential news

**Strategies:**

- Develop boilerplate information for Partnership and partners to use in news releases, publications, and op-eds.
- Strategy: Develop op-eds from partners for placement in Sandhills newspapers and other media.
- Publish and publicize annual "State of the Sandhills" report.
- Plan at least one Sandhills media event a year.
- Keep Partnership website (ncscp.org) up-to-date with information useful to the general public.
- Distribute news releases regarding Sandhills Conservation to partners prior to release to the media, and provide notification about ongoing media requests.
- News stories dealing with Sandhills conservation should be compiled by the communications committee and emailed to membership list.

**Performance Measures:** The success of the CWG can be measured by the following:

- Events held by the Partnership
- Events Partnership is represented (Partnership information displayed)
- State of Sandhills Report

**FY 2016 Accomplishments:**

No report submitted.

**FY 2016**  
**Land Protection Working Group Annual Report**

**Date:** December 7, 2016  
**Working Group Chair:** Jeff Marcus  
**Date of Last Meeting:** Informal meetings throughout year, no formal meetings

**Goals:**

The goal of the LPWG is to coordinate the protection of a viable, ecosystem-scale network of conserved lands and waters across the NC Sandhills.

**Objectives:**

- 1) Protect the most important areas to conserve from a biological perspective.
- 2) Protect buffers to adequately conserve the resources and ecological processes of protected areas.
- 3) Protect connections between important areas that promote gene flow and wildlife movement.
- 4) Work with other working groups and partners for implementation of reserve design, resource management, and/or private land strategies.

**Strategies:**

- Utilize existing funding sources and look for new sources to protect land through fee simple purchases and easements
- Work with Partners to share information about land protection opportunities
- Conduct joint meetings with working groups as appropriate to share most up to date biological information for focusing land protection efforts
- Work with federal and state agencies that oversee cost share programs to steer financial resources to private lands in priority areas. Use safe harbor as one means to engage landowners.

**Performance Measures:**

The success of the LPWG can be measured by the following:

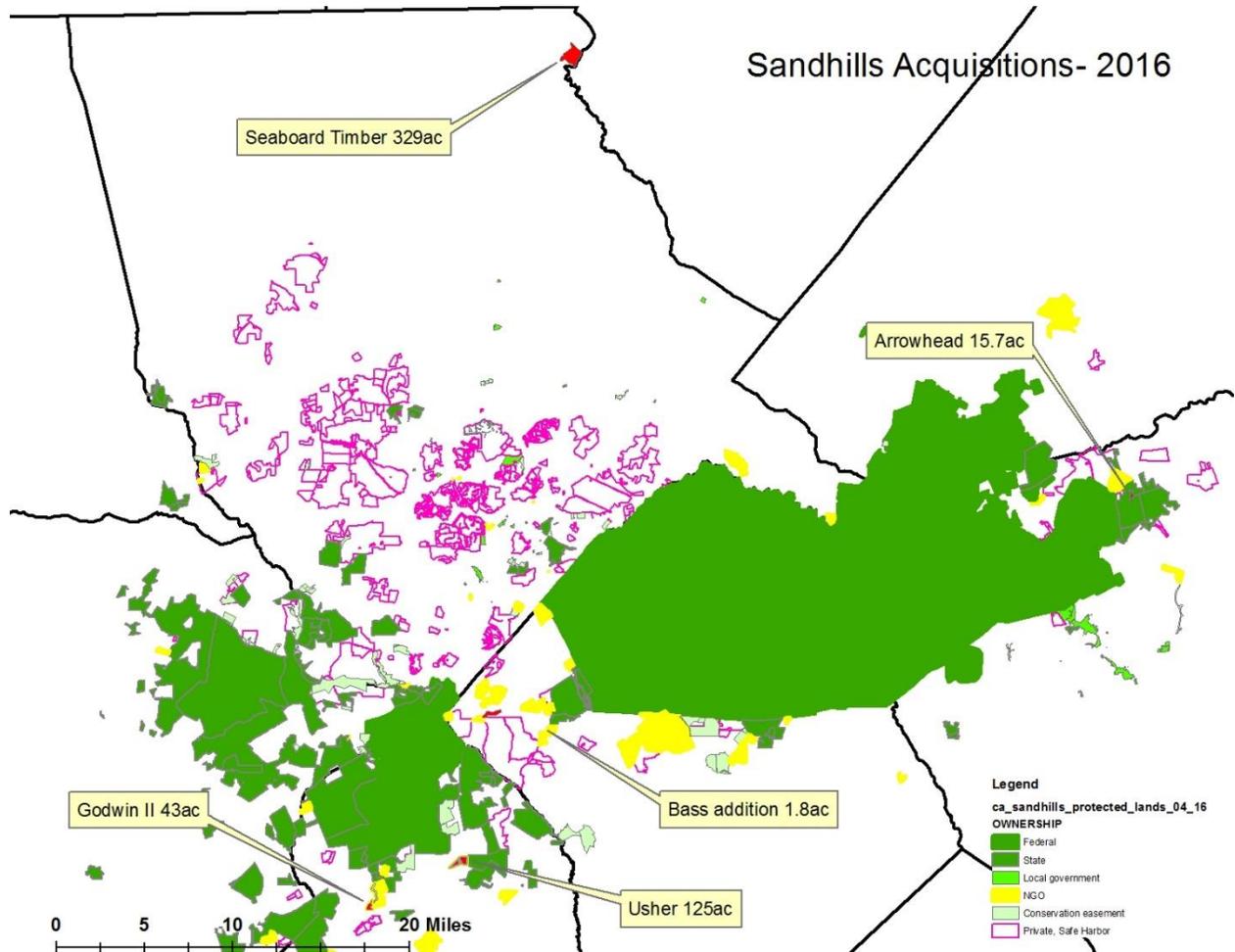
- Properties/acres protected that were identified in the reserve design/JLUS.
  - Longleaf habitat connectivity established in RD corridors
- Length of military buffers created in ACUB priority areas.
- Length/acreage of riparian corridor protected in conservation focus areas.
- Number/acres of farms and family lands placed under conservation easement.
- Funding secured for land protection

**FY 2016 Accomplishments:**

During calendar year 2016, the following properties were protected:

- 1.8 ac Bass home site in Hoke Co- added to TNC preserve
- 329 ac Seaboard tract in Moore Co- SALT SEER training area
- 125 ac Usher tract in Scotland Co- will eventually transfer to WRC Sandhills Game Land
- 43 ac Godwin II tract in Scotland Co- will eventually transfer to WRC Sandhills Game Land

- 15.7 ac Arrowhead tract in Cumberland co- TNC swapped portion of its Lafayette tract for this inholding in Carver's Creek State Park and donated the Arrowhead tract to State Parks



TNC also transferred ownership of the Catherine Gibson tract (379 ac) in Scotland Co, the Tom Godwin tract (47ac) in Scotland Co, and the Poplin tract (143 ac) in Richmond Co to NC Wildlife Resources Commission for inclusion in Sandhills Game Land.

The following projects received funding from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund in 2016:

- NC Parks- Carver's Creek State Park, Broadwell tract, 106ac
- SALT/PCP- Eastwood Preserve, Kiser tract, 22ac
- SALT- SEER training area on Deep River, Newell tract, 17ac
- SALT- SEER training area on Deep River, Sanders tract, 17ac
- SALT- SEER training area on Deep River, Kuusinen tract, 12ac
- WRC- Sandhills GL, Hutchison (TNC), 56ac
- WRC- Sandhills GL, Buckrub (TNC), 105ac

**Priorities:**

The priorities for land protection continue to include the gap between blocks B, C & T of Sandhills Game Land, the gap between Fort Bragg and Camp Mackall, properties that border Fort Bragg and Camp Mackall, properties along the Deep River for SEER training, and properties along Drowning Creek.

There was renewed interest in 2016 in focusing land protection on the northern boundary of Fort Bragg since developers have starting buying up land in this area. Fort Bragg and TNC have developed a list of target properties for land acquisition on the northern Bragg boundary and Fort Bragg submitted a REPI Challenge pre-proposal to help fund a couple of these acquisitions.

**FY 2016**  
**RCW Working Group Annual Report**

**Date:** December 7, 2016

**Working Group Chair:** J.H. Carter III

**Date of Last Meeting:** 28 June 2016

**Goals:**

Develop a working plan which provides guidance and expertise to facilitate and maintain recovery of the North Carolina Sandhills Primary Core RCW population (SANDHILLS EAST) and the Essential Support Population (SANDHILLS WEST) goals of 350\* and 100\* potential breeding groups (PBG), respectively.

\* Note: Population goals within both SANDHILLS EAST and SANDHILLS WEST were met by 2005. However, SANDHILLS EAST and WEST, will not be officially recovered until all habitat variables have been met and the populations are not reliant on artificial cavities.

**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 and maintain recovery goals.

**Strategies:**

- Convene RCW Working Group as needed to discuss RCW population monitoring and other recovery-related activities.
- Prioritize focus areas for acquisition by the Land Protection WG which will benefit RCW recovery and longleaf pine conservation/restoration.
- Develop and update RCW monitoring plan(s) suitable to assess population dynamics and maintain recovery status as required by the USFWS Recovery Plan (Second Revision 2003).
- Coordinate and execute as needed intra-population translocation efforts to select focal areas identified by RCW Working Group.

**Performance Measures:**

- Sandhills East and West Population Status: estimated Potential Breeding Groups (PBGs)
- Translocation Results
- Regional Coordination Efforts

## **FY 2016 Priorities & Accomplishments:**

The RCW Recovery Working Group convened in January and June of 2016 to establish and refine guidance for the coordination and management of RCW nesting and foraging habitat across Partnership Lands.

### **Management of RCW foraging partitions that span multiple property owners**

RCW Foraging Habitat Matrix (Matrix) analyses were run by Fort Bragg Endangered Species Branch (FB ESB) and Dr. J.H. Carter III and Associates (JCA) to determine the number of foraging partitions for existing RCW groups on Fort Bragg and Camp Mackall that would exceed, meet or fall short of the Recovery Standard (i.e., at least 120 acres of good quality habitat). A detailed RCW foraging partition map was generated to identify NCSCP, state or private ownership partitions that extend onto Fort Bragg or Camp Mackall, and partitions in federal ownership that extend across installation boundaries. Results of the Matrix analyses were presented in detail and discussed at the 14 September 2016 NCSCP Steering Committee Meeting.

RCW Working Group recommended the following actions:

- If habitat on NCSCP or other private lands is essential to meeting habitat goals for clusters (partitions) located on Fort Bragg, every effort should be made to coordinate management and habitat removals on other applicable ownerships in order to ensure that quality RCW habitat is available in perpetuity.
- Likewise, if essential foraging habitat for non-federal clusters occurs on Fort Bragg, the installation should work with the appropriate landowner(s) to ensure that its habitat management enhances and perpetuates necessary quality habitat.

### **Silvicultural practices that impact RCW nesting and foraging habitat**

The RCW Working Group compiled general silvicultural recommendations for managing RCW clusters and associated foraging habitat within the NC Sandhills. Managing for either the high Recovery Standard or the Standard for Managed Stability (Private Lands), the recommendations incorporated regional expertise and guidance from the RCW Recovery Recovery Plan, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (USFWS 2003). Overstory thinning may at times be desirable, but significant single entry basal area (BA) removals should be limited and suggested limit of 30% removal of overstory pines per thinning event. During harvest, retention of older, bigger pines and a higher BA is desirable within the cluster management unit (no less than 10 acres) as opposed to surrounding foraging habitat. Avoid use of heavy machinery or skidders in close proximity to cluster management unit and ensure that logging decks are staged outside the cluster

boundary. Carefully evaluate relative to existing and projected RCW group density and existing stand age and structure.

**Management of Safe Harbor properties supporting RCW groups and similar properties that have potential for future RCW recruitment**

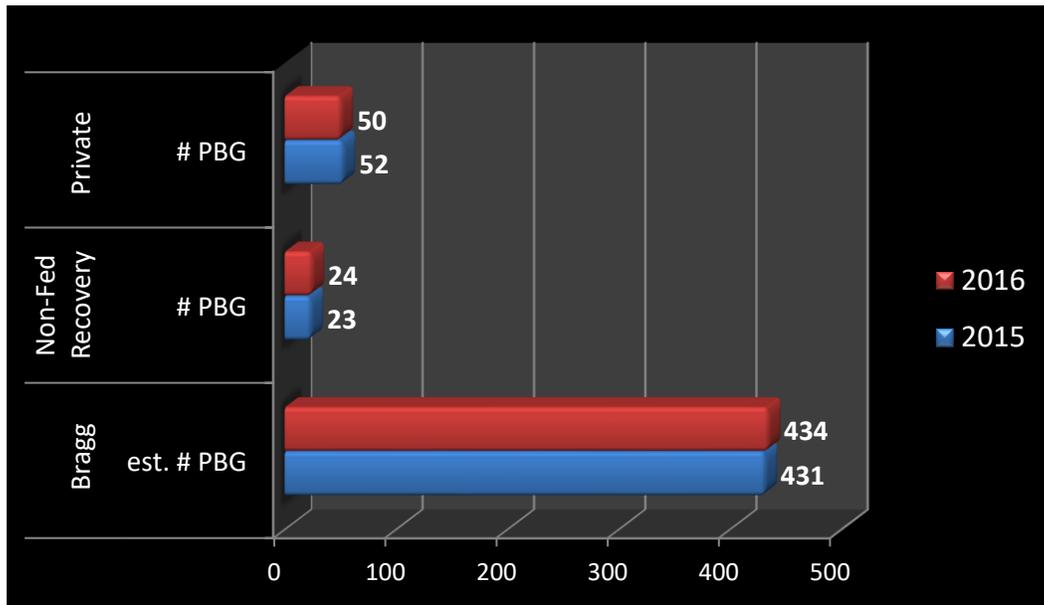
RCW WG recommended the following:

- Pursue Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) and prescribed fire where feasible on Safe Harbor properties
- Partners and particularly the USFWS, shall increase presence and coordination with landowners to assure compliance of Safe Harbor Agreements, Section 7 Biological Opinions and existing management plans

**FY 2016 Quantitative Performance Measures**

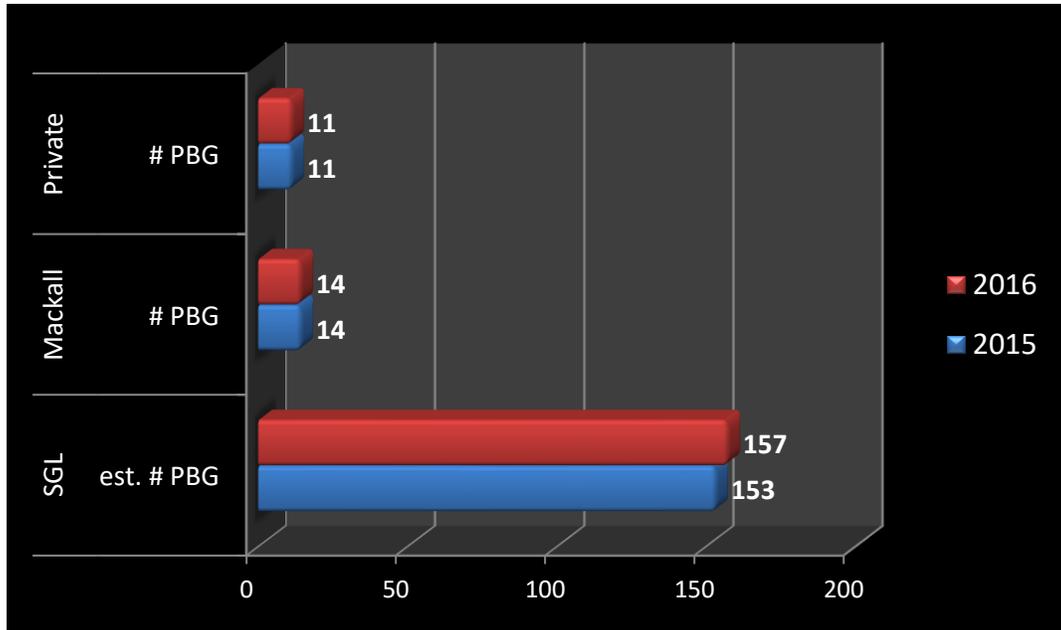
**Population Status:**

- **SANHDILLS EAST**  
TOTAL ↑ Estimated Potential Breeding Group (PBG) --- 2015 from 2016: **506** to **508**



- **SANDHILLS WEST**

TOTAL ↑ Estimated PBG --- 2015 from 2016: **178** to **182**



- **TOTAL PBG EST. from 2015 to 2016 within NC Sandhills: 684 (2015) → 690 (2016)**

**Intrapopulation Translocation:**

RCW breeding season monitoring on private lands by Sandhills Ecological Institute (SEI) in 2016 detected 5 of 7 first-year RCWs that were translocated from Fort Bragg during December 2015 within the Moore County (MOOR) and Southern Pines/ Pinehurst (SOPI) Significant Support Population. Four of 7 achieved breeding status within or close to the Safe Harbor recipient clusters where they were introduced. One male dispersed to, and remained at MOOR 5 (Martin) during the summer as a solitary male.

The 2015 cohort accounts for 24 total juvenile RCWs translocated during late autumn/ early winter in 4 annual events from 2012 to 2015. Thirteen (13) of the 24 RCWs moved from Bragg were retained within Sandhills East private land groups in subsequent years; 9 of the 13 produced young at age year 1, 2, 3 or 4.

RCW groups within the western MOOR subpopulation (i.e., the Hoffman Road Corridor from West End south to SGL A-Block) have increased over the last decade through artificial cavity installation and translocation. There are presently (2016) 11 active clusters and 10 potential breeding groups identified as compared to 3 PBGs in the same area during 2006. In the same decade, the SOPI Significant Support Population has experienced incremental declines of baseline RCW groups despite continued artificial cavity augmentation. Those losses are likely from ongoing deterioration and elimination of pine foraging habitat together with intense competition from other cavity using species. The SOPI landscape condition ranges widely from the fire-maintained and expanding RCW groups that inhabit the Walthour Moss Foundation to surprisingly stable groups within the manicured Country Club of North Carolina. However, numerous significant forested private lands that support RCW are

increasingly fragmented due to intensifying residential and commercial development in Southern Moore County. There were 37 PBGs documented within SOPI in 2016, the first year since 2009 that PBG numbers fell below 40.

**Future Priorities / Actions:**

- (1) Strengthen regional coordination and oversight of RCW nesting and foraging habitat management.
- (2) Continue to monitor both Sandhills East and Sandhills West RCW populations at levels comparable to recent years.
- (3) Identify Partner or Safe Harbor Properties for additional population expansion opportunities.
- (4) Continue to translocate and augment juveniles to MOOR Safe Harbor properties and select SOPI properties.
- (5) Develop a plan to guide SOPI and MOOR RCW cluster management activities. Expand education and outreach on Safe Harbor Properties regarding RCW ecology, with attention to species persistence within a developed and fire suppressed landscape.

**FY 2016**  
**Reserve Design Working Group Annual Report**

**Date:** December 7, 2016  
**Working Group Chair:** Matthew Moskwik  
**Date of Last Meeting:** July 13, 2016

**Goals:**

The goal of the RMWG is to synthesize biological information and create a vision to guide long-term conservation of native Sandhills ecosystems.

**Objectives:**

Identify the most important areas to conserve from a biological perspective.

- 1) Identify buffers to adequately conserve the resources and ecological processes of protected areas.
- 2) Identify connections between important areas that promote gene flow and wildlife movement.
- 3) Provide this information to other working groups and partners for implementation of land protection, resource management, and/or private land strategies.

**Strategies:**

- Identify biological targets for conservation, including species, natural communities, and animal habitats unique to the Sandhills
- Map areas of known and potential ecological significance
- Identify functions of individual connectors and buffers; fill information gaps; map functional connectors and buffers
- Periodically review new information and update reserve design
- Interpret and share this information for the purposes of implementing the conservation plan, including for other working groups, the Green Growth Toolbox, and communication with local land use planners and governments.

**Performance Measures:**

The success of the RDWG can be measured by the following:

- Acres conserved within Reserve Design priority areas (joint metric with LPWG)
- New information shared with working groups, GGT, and local land use planners and governments
- Annual joint meetings held to share new information for implementing conservation plan

**FY 2016 Accomplishments:**

- Scott Pohlman and Allison Weekley conducted longleaf habitat surveys in stands that Mike Shafale had identified as potential longleaf upland habitat. They reviewed 31 potential areas, 13 of which were natural area candidate sites. Their recommendations included two potential new natural areas, and two expansions of existing natural areas. They also found five new occurrences of a rare plant (*Carex austrodeflexa*), and will provide information to NHP for approximately 14 new natural community occurrences.
- A Conservation Research Needs Assessment was conducted. At the meeting in July, the group reviewed the summary of the responses to the related survey (46 responses from 18 individuals and/or organization representatives) and did some drill-down to help in prioritizing research needs. In summary, the focus of the recommended research topics was on fire management and other factors impacting, and resulting from, longleaf pine forest preservation efforts.
- NFWF now requires each longleaf partnership to map regions where they will focus on restoring and improving longleaf habitat. This group identified 2 regions to target longleaf pine restoration. The results were shared at the Longleaf Alliance conference in early November in Savannah, GA.

**Priorities:**

- This group will finish the upland longleaf pine surveys.
- Potentially plan for and hold a conservation research symposium in the Sandhills based on the feedback from the Conservation Research Needs Assessment.
- Design a model capable of identifying dominant longleaf stands and the conditions of those stands across eastern North Carolina.
- Finish monitoring efforts associated with blackwater streams and begin developing a monitoring program that will examine and streamhead pocosins/seeps.

**FY 2016**  
**Resource Managers Working Group Annual Report**

**Date:** December 07, 2016

**Working Group Chair:** Chris Jordan

**Date of Last Meeting:**

**Goals:**

1. Promote cooperative management of natural resources in the NC Sandhills.
2. Evaluate cooperative strategies for natural resource management at the landscape level.

**Objectives:**

- 1) Increase cooperation and knowledge sharing between land managers and landowners to improve land management of private and public lands.
- 2) Increase knowledge and skill of prescribed burning community and increase the number of qualified private burners.
- 3) Work with other working groups and partners to ensure implementation of restoration and management activities on key conservation lands identified in the reserve design.

**Strategies:**

- 1) Establish an MOU for TNC, WRC, State Parks, and Ft. Bragg to work cooperatively on habitat management projects, invasive species eradication, RCW provisioning, training courses, and monitoring work.
- 2) Support Partner prioritization of prescribed fire as a management tool for all partners
- 3) Work to reduce barriers for private landowners to implement prescribed fire through education and workshops, training landowners and private contractors in fire management and expanding the use of cost share programs.
- 4) Support expansion of EDRR efforts in Sandhills to reduce impacts of invasive species
- 5) Work to procure adequate funding to implement strategies and meet objectives.

**Working Group's Performance Measures:**

- 1) Holding 2 meetings per year. This will include a mix of field trips and indoor meetings w/ mix of agency, non-profit, private land managers, and interested parties.
- 2) Signed MOUs among all partners with multiple annual cooperative burning projects and resource sharing.
- 3) Partners achieving fire management goals.

**FY 2016 Accomplishments:**

Nothing to report.

**Priorities:**

Chris will be stepping down, so a new chair is needed.