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# The Florida Forest Steward



A Quarterly Newsletter for Florida Landowners and Resource Professionals

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## 2008 Farm Bill Opportunities: Get Involved at the Local and State Level

American Forest Foundation Release

The 2008 Farm Bill, passed by Congress in June 2008, gives the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) new and improved programs to help family forest owners conserve and manage their forests. Through these new programs qualifying landowners can receive both technical and financial assistance to deal with forest management concerns like wildfire, insects and disease, and wildlife management.

To make sure these new programs actually work on the ground, *forest owners need to participate and speak up* at local working group and state committee meetings. These meetings will help decide how the Farm Bill programs are implemented.

For a summary of the Farm Bill and to learn more about the new and improved programs for family forest owners visit

[www.treefarmssystem.org/actionalerts](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/actionalerts).



Photo by Robin Boughton, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

**Inside: RCW Safe Harbor –  
What are landowners allowed to do  
under this agreement?**



## **YOU Can Influence How Farm Bill Programs are Implemented**

Landowners can influence the process by attending and participating in local work groups and State Technical Committees - two bodies that advise NRCS State Conservationists on the implementation of certain NRCS programs in the state. NRCS State Conservationists are the federal agency employees in charge of NRCS programs in each state.

State Technical Committees and local work groups influence many programs that are important to forest owners. These programs include: the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and the Healthy Forests Reserve Program.

Because of changes in the 2008 Farm Bill, each State's Technical Committee must include spokespersons for family forest owners. This is an important opportunity for landowners to serve on state committees and influence program implementation.

State Technical Committees and local work groups advise NRCS State Conservationists on conservation issues in the state, help set state priorities for conservation program funding, and make conservation program policy recommendations. With forest owner involvement, forest issues can be brought to the table for funding and program consideration.

### **How to Get Involved**

**Local Work Groups:** To participate at the local level, contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District Office, likely

located at your local USDA service center. You can find your local USDA Service Center by visiting <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

**State Technical Committees:** To participate in your State Technical Committee take the following steps to get involved.

1. Contact your NRCS State Conservationist and ask whether they now have representation of family forest owners on the Committee. You can find a listing of the State Conservationists and more information about joining your State Technical Committee at [www.treefarmssystem.org/actionalerts](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/actionalerts).
2. If there is an opening for family forest owner representation on your State's Technical Committee, coordinate with the leadership of your State Tree Farm Committee to get a family forest owner representative on the Committee. To find the contact information for your State Tree Farm Committee visit [www.treefarmssystem.org/stateleaders](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/stateleaders).
3. Even if you are not appointed as an official member of your State Technical Committee, you can still attend Committee meetings, which are open to the public.

### **Stay Involved**

**Join the American Tree Farm System's Grassroots Action Network:**

- Stay on top of the latest public policy issues impacting family forests
- Get timely alerts so you can influence public policy when the time is right

- Get training, tools, and tips on effective advocacy

How do I join? Go to [www.treefarmssystem.org/grassrootsnetwork](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/grassrootsnetwork) and enter your contact information.

Please direct your questions to:  
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[www.forestfoundation.org](http://www.forestfoundation.org)

### **The Little Bird With the Big Reputation: RCW Safe Harbor Myths and Truths**

By Kristina Jackson, Florida Safe Harbor Coordinator, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The red-cockaded woodpecker, also called the RCW, is a small black-and-white bird that has gained a large, mostly negative, reputation among private land owners because it is protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

Like other woodpeckers, RCWs excavate holes in trees for their nests. However, they are very fussy about the type of trees they nest in – primarily mature living longleaf or South Florida slash pines. About 97 percent of the pine habitat they originally inhabited no longer exists, and much of what still does exist is owned and managed privately.

#### **RCW Safe Harbor**

Some landowners who have suitable RCW habitat are understandably concerned that if they undertake certain forest management practices, such as planting longleaf pine trees, lengthening timber

rotations, and using prescribed fire, the RCW may be attracted to their property and in turn they will be limited in how they can use their land because of the bird’s protected status. The voluntary RCW Safe Harbor Program was created to alleviate these concerns and provide assurances to landowners who want to be good stewards of their land and improve wildlife habitat.

When a landowner enrolls in a voluntary Safe Harbor Agreement, he or she agrees to enhance the habitat of a listed species. In return the landowner gets assurances that if a listed species moves onto their property, or increases its population above a base line number (how many are there prior to the agreement), the landowner will not be liable for that increase, and will not be subject to additional regulatory restrictions imposed under the Endangered Species Act.

The RCW Safe Harbor program was created to effectively freeze a landowner’s Endangered Species Act responsibilities while the owner agrees to restore, enhance or maintain habitat that benefits the species. The landowner signs an agreement with the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to protect existing birds and habitat.

You don’t need to have RCWs currently residing on your property in order to qualify for participation in the program. If the birds are attracted to an enrolled property, the agreement allows the landowner to have the birds removed in the event of an unforeseen land use conflict.

## Myths & Truths

There's been a lot of misinformation circulating about the RCW and the Safe Harbor program. This article will attempt to clarify a few of the most common myths.

***Myth #1: Enrolling in an RCW Safe Harbor Agreement means I can no longer cut timber on my land.***

**This is false.** The window of time you can harvest is limited but you may legally harvest timber within occupied habitat as long as you follow certain standards that are designed to avoid harming RCWs. Those standards include:

- Not cutting down RCW cavity (nesting) trees.
- Conducting timber harvests from August through March when the birds are not nesting.
- Providing the RCW minimal foraging habitat by retaining some larger trees (at least 10 inches diameter breast height) for the bird's habitat. The quality and quantity for foraging habitat is clearly defined in your customized Safe Harbor agreement.
- Providing the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) the opportunity to review a proposed timber sale plan at least 60 days in advance to ensure the plan meets your agreement standards.

***Myth #2: RCWs are incompatible with recreation – I will have to eliminate hunting from my land.***

**This is false.** The first landowner to sign up under Florida's Safe Harbor agreement was Dixie Plantation, a 9,000-acre private quail hunting property in Jefferson County. RCWs are relatively human-tolerant birds when it comes to sharing the

land. They are also found on golf courses and forage in neighborhoods. What they need to survive are pinelands with old living trees and minimal shrubby mid-story vegetative growth. Their habitat is much like that of bobwhite quail: open pineland with a diverse herbaceous groundcover. Prescribed burning, roller chopping or even using herbicide treatments are common techniques used to control mid-story growth and yield an aesthetically pleasing park-like, productive pine forest. And that's good for both people and wildlife, including RCWs.



***Myth #3: If the government knows I have RCWs they will be traipsing all over my land.***

**This is false.** State and federal biologists and land management professionals will not enter your land except at the request of a landowner applying for a Safe Harbor permit. The

biologists may request access to your land to assist in or verify your baseline survey (to determine what you already have on your property) prior to you enrolling in the program. FWC biologists may visit your property on an annual basis to assess the status of any RCWs, and verify that the conditions of the agreement are being met. However, per the agreement, reasonable notice of these visits (generally 30 days) is required. Keep in mind that Safe Harbor is strictly a voluntary program. When you enroll in the program the FWC focuses on helping you manage your habitat. We are not there to search for ways to impose regulatory restrictions on your land.

### **Is Safe Harbor for you?**

It is if you own at least 75 acres and are interested in providing habitat for RCWs, but want some assurance that you will not become a good-intentioned recipient of the regulatory penalties associated with the Endangered Species Act. Safe Harbor takes some of the uncertainty out of managing your pinelands for rare species and is sensitive to landowners wanting to use their property for economic benefit and/or personal use. Managing habitat for RCWs can be compatible with timber harvesting, cattle production or quail management.

The first RCW Safe Harbor program was launched in North Carolina in 1995. Since then more than 62,000 acres have been enrolled in the program nationally. Florida became the seventh state to offer the program to private landowners. In 2006, the United States Fish & Wildlife Service and the FWC developed Florida's own RCW Safe Harbor program and entered into a statewide umbrella agreement.

This program meets both state and federal requirements while reducing the paperwork and time necessary to put the agreement into effect. Among the best candidates for enrollment are those who want to maintain old pines on their land for hunting or timber, and those whose property neighbors lands with RCWs already on them. FWC staff is eager to work with interested landowners to develop a plan to enhance habitat that is in line with the owner's land management objectives. We can also help you find financial assistance programs to offset costs of controlled burns or mid-story vegetation removal.

For more information go online to: <http://myfwc.com/safeharbor/>. To see testimonials from landowners who have already enrolled in safe harbor agreements nationally visit <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/newsarchives/2005.html>.

If you have questions or think your land may be a good Safe Harbor candidate, please contact Kristina Jackson, FWC's Safe Harbor Coordinator, at 352-732-1225 Ext. 101 or email [kristina.jackson@myfwc.com](mailto:kristina.jackson@myfwc.com).

## Congratulations Certified Forest Stewards and Tree Farmers!



Carol and Mike Candler, Forest Stewards, recognized for Outstanding Natural Resource Management Activities, Suwannee County



Gary Wisniewski, Forest Steward and Tree Farmer, "Bear A Dise", Volusia County



Ray Adams (L), Les Neese, Les' Daughter in center, Forest Stewards, Sumter County



L-R: David Holley, Rick Weigel, John Veasey, Ricky Hodges, Bruce Hill; Olde St. Mary's River Plantation, Forest Stewards, Nassau County



### Not shown:

**William Bryan,**  
Forest Steward, Marion County  
**Dr. Jim Stonestreet,**  
Forest Steward, Tree Farmer, Volusia County  
**Sam Walkup,**  
Tree Farmer, Volusia County  
**Tom and Katie Harzog,**  
Tree Farmers, Franklin County

**Joe Khan,**  
Tree Farmer, Wakulla County  
**Bill Anderson,**  
Tree Farmer, Volusia County  
**Michael Hansen,**  
Tree Farmer, Wakulla County

**Brent and Darcie Hume,**  
Tree Farmers, Volusia County  
**Chris Lewis,**  
Tree Farmer, Wakulla County  
**Wyatt Pope,**  
Tree Farmer, Wakulla County  
**Charles Rehwinkle,**  
Tree Farmer, Wakulla County

### More information about these programs is on-line:

Forest Stewardship Program: [http://www.fl-dof.com/forest\\_management/cfa\\_steward\\_index.html](http://www.fl-dof.com/forest_management/cfa_steward_index.html)

Tree Farm: [http://www.floridaforest.org/tree\\_farm.php](http://www.floridaforest.org/tree_farm.php)

## Timber Price Update

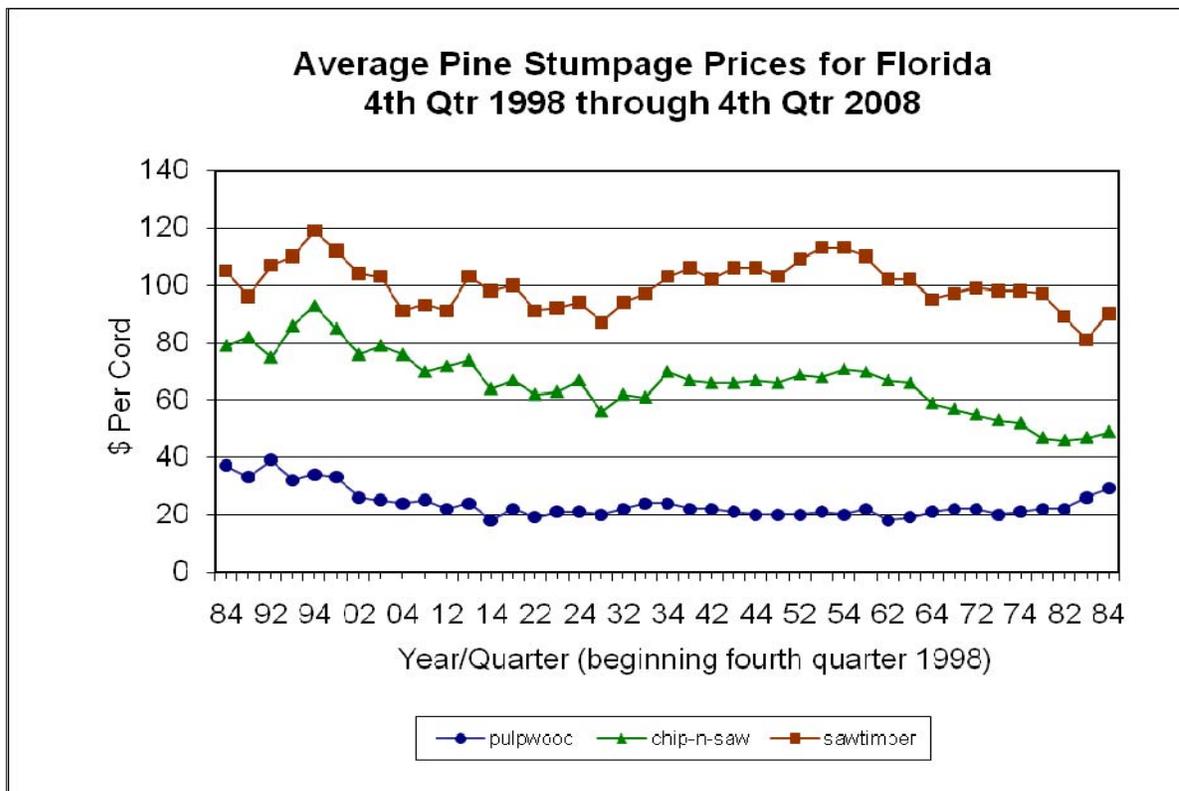
The timber pricing information below is useful for observing trends over time, but does not necessarily reflect current conditions at a particular location. Landowners considering a timber sale are advised to solicit the services of a consulting forester to obtain current local market conditions. Note that price ranges per ton for each product are also included.

Stumpage price ranges reported across Florida in the **4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2008** Timber Mart-South (TMS) report were:

- Pine pulpwood: \$23 - \$35/cord (\$8 - \$13/ton), ↑ (from average 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2008 prices)
- Pine C-N-S: \$42 - \$55/cord (\$16 - \$21/ton), ↑
- Pine sawtimber: \$72 - \$103/cord (\$27 - \$38/ton), ↑
- Pine plylogs: \$61 - \$98/cord (\$23 - \$37/ton), ↓
- Pine power poles: \$136 - \$175/cord (\$51 - \$65/ton), ↑
- Hardwood pulpwood: \$14 - \$23/cord (\$5 - \$8/ton), ↓

## Trend Report

Despite increased average stumpage prices for the 3 major timber products in Florida from last quarter, there is little good news to report on the state of South-wide timber markets. Pine pulpwood prices averaged the highest since 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 1998 at the beginning of the quarter but collapsed as mills closed or curtailed production due to unexpected drops in demand for paper and paperboard. The economic recession continues to drive the major market indicators for most sectors. The one light of hope, as of this report, is lower energy prices, which may have something to do with some upward shifts in some average prices reported.



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### UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Event, Location, Contacts
February 17	<i>Forest Stewardship Workshop: Use Prescribed Fire Safely and Effectively, 8 am – 4 pm CT, Black Water River State Forest. Contact the Santa Rosa County Extension Office at (850) 675-6654 to register.</i>
March 3	<i>Forest Stewardship Workshop / Field Day: Manage for Multiple Resources - Techniques and Demonstration, UF-IFAS North Florida Research and Education Center, Suwannee Valley at Live Oak. Contact Karen Hancock or Laurie Osborne at (386) 362-1725 x.101 or 102 to register.</i>
March 10	<i>Forest Stewardship Workshop / Field Day: Manage for Multiple Resources - Techniques and Demonstration, 8:30 am - 4:00 pm, UF-IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center at Balm. Contact Christine Cooley at (813) 634-0000 to register.</i>
March 24	<i>Forest Stewardship Workshop / Field Day: Manage for Multiple Resources - Techniques and Demonstration, 8:30 am – 4:00 pm CT, UF-IFAS West Florida Research and Education Center at Jay. Contact Robin Vickers at (850) 983-5216 x.113 to register.</i>
March 26	<i>Division of Forestry Workshop: Timber Market, Timber Sales and Alternative Opportunities for Landowners, 9:30am – 3:30pm, Trenton Community Center 214 SE 3rd Avenue, Trenton, FL 32693. For more information and to reserve a seat contact Greg Marshall, Senior Forester, Division of Forestry, ( 352) 463-3138, <a href="mailto:marshag@doacs.state.fl.us">marshag@doacs.state.fl.us</a></i>
April 15	<i>Forest Stewardship Silvopasture Tour at George C. Owens Farm, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm; meet at the UF-IFAS Washington County Extension Agriculture Center in Chipley. Call the UF-IFAS Washington County Extension Office at (850) 638-6180 to register. Please register by April 10 so we can plan accordingly.</i>

**For more information and events about Florida's Forest Stewardship Program and forest management visit:**  
[www.sfrc.ufl.edu/Extension/florida\\_forestry\\_information/index.html](http://www.sfrc.ufl.edu/Extension/florida_forestry_information/index.html)

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