

Safe Harbor Agreements:

A TREASURE Concept for Landowners

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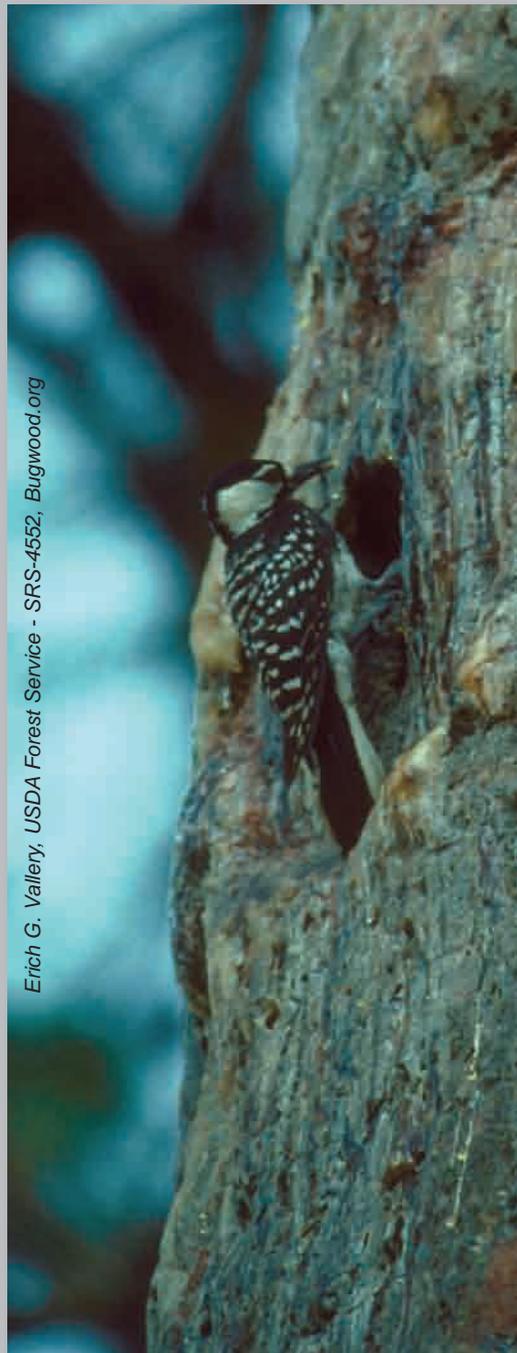
What are Safe Harbor Agreements? They help private landowners voluntarily conserve Threatened and Endangered Species and habitat, in exchange for legal assurances that no new Endangered Species Act restrictions will be placed on their land.

While the concept of “Safe Harbor” was being created, several points of interest became clear. First, most of the populations of Threatened and Endangered Species occur on private land. Second, most landowners are good stewards of their land and do not want additional legal restrictions placed on them. Last, the Endangered Species Act had no incentives for landowners that wanted to help. Sometimes they were rewarded with additional restrictions.

A Safe Harbor Agreement virtually freezes the landowner’s responsibility at current baseline conditions, when the agreement is signed. The landowner’s voluntary actions should result in net conservation benefits for the covered species. A permit is then issued that enables the return of the enrolled property to baseline conditions.

One advantage for landowners that have potential habitat for Threatened and Endangered Species is that if a basis of zero is the current basis, then under the agreement, zero is the basis to be maintained. If populations exist, then those populations can be relocated.

Before the Safe Harbor Program was implemented, landowners felt threatened by legal responsibilities and restrictions imposed by the



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Endangered Species Act. Landowners would sometimes purposely destroy potential habitat. Safe Harbors take away the fear of government intervention and replace it with assurances that no added restrictions will occur.

Safe Harbor for Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers in Alabama

Four properties in Bullock, Macon, and Russell counties have enrolled significant acreages in red-cockaded woodpecker habitat. The largest of these properties, Enon and Sehay Plantations, are owned by Cam Lanier. Lanier has enrolled 18,000 acres in conservation easements, of which 12,500 acres are enrolled in Safe Harbor for red-cockaded woodpecker. It was an easy decision for Lanier who stated, “In a landscape managed for quail, aesthetics, and timber, managing for woodpeckers was something I was already doing.”

Lanier is able to continue intensive management of his quail plantation. All private property rights are maintained with management flexibility. Prescribed fire, hardwood and mid-story control, pine thinning, and longleaf pine restoration is encouraged. These are all forest management activities he was already doing. He can manage his property for sawtimber, poles, bobwhite quail, aesthetics, and pine straw without fear of increasing red-cockaded populations and land use restrictions.

For more information on Safe Harbor Agreements, contact Bob Hastings with the Alabama Natural Heritage Program at (334) 324-1071. 