

theory behind the program is that original habitat will be protected, most of the new habitat will be maintained and landowners will participate because they will be able to manage all but the original habitat without fear of being charged with violations of the Endangered Species Act. A statewide Safe Harbor Plan is currently being developed. It will cover the entire remaining RCW habitat in North Carolina and the permit will be held by one of the state agencies.

USDI Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

Partners for Fish and Wildlife is a voluntary program which may provide technical and financial assistance to landowners who want to restore and enhance fish and wildlife habitats on their property. Projects must benefit Federal Trust Resources such as migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and anadromous (migratory) fish. Funds from this program may also be used for educational projects which benefit Federal Trust Resources. Projects in North Carolina include restoration of longleaf pine, bottomland hardwoods, southern Appalachian bogs, and streambank stabilization using bioengineering techniques. Generally, landowners sign an agreement promising to maintain their land in the restored state, usually with some restrictions, from 10 to 50 years. Support from landowners and other contributing partners is encouraged. For more information, visit the Partners for Fish and Wildlife website at www.fws.gov.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

The purpose of the WRP is to restore wetland functions and values to land altered for agriculture and contribute to the national goal of no net loss of wetlands. Previously converted or farmed wetlands are eligible if restoration to a functional wetland is possible. Forest land that was formerly wetland is eligible where the hydrology has been altered. Landowners sell a permanent easement or a 30-year easement to the Department of Agriculture. A new option is 10 year Restoration Cost-Share Agreements that do not require easements. Participating landowners agree to maintain or restore the wetland as directed by a Wetlands Reserve Plan of Operations (WRPO) prepared by the NRCS and approved by the USFWS. The landowner receives payment for the easement as well as cost-share assistance for approved projects. Forest management, including harvesting, can be allowed if specifically stated in the plan. The WRPO specifies the timing, amount, method, intensity, and duration of any permitted use, including timber harvesting. NRCS reserves the right to modify a particular use if conditions of the easement area change, and considers the management plan a living document that can be updated over time. No harvesting methods will be allowed that the NRCS feels are not consistent with long-term protection of the wetland functions and values. In North Carolina, the WRP program is well utilized. As of spring, 1999, there were 41 permanent easements on approximately 16,000 acres with approximately 10 more projects nearly completed.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program provides technical advice and cost-share assistance for improvement of wildlife habitat on private lands. Landowners desiring to participate create a Wildlife Habitat Development Plan with the help of the local conservation district and the local NRCS staff. Cooperating state wildlife agencies and private organizations may give technical assistance or additional funding for certain projects if the landowner agrees. Because WHIP is focused purely on wildlife benefits, it is applicable to any landowner, tenant, organization, club or business with land suitable for wildlife. The landowner must have a minimum of five acres with at least one acre to be managed under WHIP for wildlife habitat improvements.