

Croatan National Forest Management Plan

In 2002, the U.S. Forest Service adopted a new management plan for the Croatan National Forest. This new plan is radically different from previous plans; its major emphasis is on the preservation of native biodiversity. Further, it emphasizes a top-down, Nature Conservancy approach to preserving biodiversity, i.e. by focusing on maintenance of the natural community types on which the various species are dependent. A major component of the Croatan Plan is a focus on the maintenance and restoration of the longleaf ecosystem; this is considered integral to the recovery of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker.

While most ecologists would applaud the general focus of the plan, some would point out that “the devil is in the details”. Some ecologists have expressed concern that some management proposed as a way to restore natural habitat conditions may in fact have the opposite effect (see the “Major Issues..” section that follows).

Recently, an evaluation of the first 5 years under the new plan has been released. Among its findings is the fact that no recovery of the red-cockaded woodpecker has occurred during this period. To acquire a copy of the Croatan Plan and a copy of the 5-year evaluation, see the “Getting Involved” section.