

Fish & Wildlife Service—National Conservation Training Center
Endangered Species Overview
Safe Harbor

[audio start]

NARRATOR: A Presentation of the United States Fish & Wildlife Service.

BARBARA SIMPSON: It's very common for landowners to not want it be known that they had endangered species on their property.

JULIAN JOHNSON: Not sure what the government would do once they got their foot in the door, so to speak. We certainly didn't want to lose control of everything.

JERRY HOLDER: Red-cockaded woodpecker really affected the way Ft. Bragg does business. It affected the way that landowners do business.

JEAN POWELL: I'm with the Federal government and I'm here to help you.

[Singing]

Hey, mister...

won't you lend me a land?

Hey, mister...

won't you lend me a hand?

Safe Harbor for me...

is just the use of your land.

JULIAN JOHNSON: The bird you're seeing up there is kind of the core of what Safe Harbor is all about, certainly for me. I'm Julian Johnson, a landowner here in Hope County in Southeastern North Carolina. Been in the Safe Harbor Program now about five years, and it's been a very good program for us. We've enjoyed being part of it.

NARRATOR: They're called Safe Harbors. 10 years ago, it was a new idea for endangered species conservation. Safe Harbor is a unique agreement where private landowners volunteer to work in partnership with government and non-government agencies to help ensure the survival of imperiled wildlife. Biologists from Environmental Defense, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Ft. Bragg and scientists at North Carolina State University joined conservationists in the Sand Hills of North Carolina to see if the idea of a Safe Harbor could really work.

DAVID WILSON: I was a little apprehensive about getting tied up with the Federal Government because of the things we'd heard about the owls out in the Pacific area

and different things, but the more I looked into it, I was better off getting in the program than staying out of the program.

JULIAN JOHNSON: We had all the fears that everybody has always had that if you have endangered species you're going to lose control of your land and the government is going to tell you what to do.

BARBARA SIMPSON: Our family shared many of the concerns that landowners in our area had about having endangered species on our property. Although we wanted to protect the endangered species, we also need to do protect the economic asset of our property.

NARRATOR: In the Sand Hills region of North Carolina in the 1980s and '90s, the distinctive call of the red-cockaded woodpecker meant one thing to many within earshot... trouble. The red-cockaded woodpecker was listed as an endangered species, and landowners felt threatened by the potential of Federal restrictions on their land uses, particularly the harvest of mature pine timber. **JERRY HOLDER:** Landowners were cutting their long-leaf pines at a rapid pace because they didn't want to lose the management capabilities on that land.

NARRATOR: More than 95% of the long-leaf pine ecosystem in the Southeast had been lost to agriculture, timber management and development. It was clear the support and involvement of private conservation was essential for the survival of this woodpecker.

ROBERT BONNIE: In order to make this work, to make it possible to protect endangered species on private lands, we both had to work with the government agency to be able to provide the assurances necessary to bring landowners to the table, and then to gain the trust of landowners as well. And a lot of it was just sitting down with both parties and working this out in a way that worked not only for landowners and the agencies but ultimately for the endangered species as well.

NARRATOR: Initially, working with private landowners for conservation of the red-cockaded woodpecker was a challenge.

RALPH COSTA: It was a challenge for me. It was a challenge for conservation groups. And, frankly, it was a challenge for the landowners. They saw the Endangered Species Act as kind of onerous without a lot of flexibility. I didn't believe that. I believe we had could find some common ground with good partners.

NARRATOR: Most landowners support restoration efforts, but there's little regulatory incentive for them to volunteer.

MICHAEL BEAN: Trust is a critical part of Safe Harbor and other agreements for

conservation. Landowners have to believe that the entity that they're dealing with it, be it the Fish~&~Wildlife Service, Environmental Defense, or any other conservation organization, understands their objectives, understands their point of view, and is sensitive to those objectives and that point of view.

JEAN POWELL: That's one thing that's really great about the Safe Harbor Program, that it has made it appealing to a landowner. It's made it advantageous. The carrot is mightier than the stick in this case.

NARRATOR: This shared dilemma of the wildlife biologists who needed habitat for an endangered woodpecker and landowners who want assurances that making their land attractive for an endangered species would not become a liability led to a shared resolution, a Safe Harbor for both species and landowners.

BRAD KOCHER: The Pinehurst Resort was the first property in the Safe Harbor Program for red-cockaded woodpeckers. It really hasn't changed a whole lot of what we do in our daily operation. I think it's made us more aware that if we do certain things on the golf courses with understory, and if we perhaps even encourage some artificial cavities to be built, that we will enhance the species, and that has been the case here.

MICHAEL BEAN: Most of these agreements involve landowners restoring habitat for rare species, and they can do so with the assurance that they will not incur any new regulatory restrictions on their property.

TONY CREED: It actually gives the landowner protection of his property. It allows you to harvest the pine needles or timber or whatever it may bring down the road.

JERRY HOLDER: Safe Harbor has eliminated the fear of many landowners, you know, and it encourages them to keep their stands of long-leaf pine and longer rotations. That's a good thing for the pine needle industry. It's a good thing for timber. And it's a good thing for the landowner.

BARBARA SIMPSON: It's been a great asset to us. It's been a great help for the management of our property and really helped us know that we can meet our conservation and recreation and aesthetic goals for our property as well as protect the economic value of our property.

NARRATOR: Safe Harbor is a great tool, but at its core is a renewed trust between landowners and conservationists. In the last 10 years, we've found that conservationists and landowners have a lot more in common than either group thought, and thoughtful, honest personal relationships were the key to finding that out and establishing trust.

SUSAN MILLER: Getting the community leaders involved in the program and getting them to understand how the program works and getting them enrolled and signed up and working with us has been very valuable.

MICHAEL BEAN: The long-term success of this program depends upon the Fish~&~Wildlife Service maintaining a commitment to this program, providing the staff to make these things work on the ground, providing the staff to have the outreach to landowners and be able to follow through, and to complete agreements quickly.

PETER CAMPBELL: We've been doing that for 10 years in the North Carolina Sand Hills, and our program, which was the prototype for Safe Harbor, has shown what works and what really doesn't work.

JAY CARTER: Things that we could have done better... the main one would have been to have secured more funding to share with the folks and corporations that are signed up in Safe Harbor.

ROBERT BONNIE: Part of our challenge is going to be making sure that those lands are managed for endangered species over the long term so that those lands can begin to really contribute to recovering endangered species and eventually taking them off the list.

MICHAEL BEAN: The two biggest advantages to enrolling in Safe Harbor for landowners are economic predictability and legal predictability.

NARRATOR: Safe Harbors will continue to play a critical role in engaging landowners. And Safe Harbor is proof that we can find innovative, constructive and cooperative ways to make conservation a more attractive option for landowners. Safe Harbor should be viewed as the beginning of the next stage of American conservation, not the end. We have a lot more to do, and Safe Harbor has been a great first step.

[Singing]

Hey, sister...

won't you lend me a hand?

Hey, sister...

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Safe Harbor for me...

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