

Brian van Eerden, The Nature Conservancy

Sadly, we have a poor record of saving the red-cockaded woodpecker in the states on their northern range. They have been extirpated in New Jersey, Maryland, Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri. They hang on in Oklahoma and Virginia in very small numbers. Recently, we came very close to losing them in Virginia, the population dwindling to 8 birds. In 1998, The Nature Conservancy purchased the lands harboring 3 of the 5 remaining active clusters in Virginia and named the site Piney Grove Preserve. Then they hired Brian van Eerden, a recent graduate ecologist from University of Georgia to manage the preserve. Although Brian's formal training is in plant ecology he has taken on the task of red-cockaded woodpecker recovery with the spirit of an avian ecologist. He has established a timber management and prescribed fire program, applied for and received a safe harbor permit to enroll adjacent landowners, instituted an outreach program to educate local foresters, landowners and other constituents about the species, established a strong and effective cooperative relationship with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the Center for Conservation Biology, developed a long-term translocation partnership with the Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge which serves as Piney Grove's donor population and agreed to have Piney Grove designated as an essential support recovery population, meaning that it will be involved in downlisting and delisting the species. The results of all of his hard work and coordination have been immediate and significant. Today, we have 6 active clusters and 4 potential breeding groups on Piney Grove. For directing the efforts to save the red-cockaded woodpecker in the state of Virginia, we are pleased to present Brian this award. Thanks from all of us Brian.