

Group eyes Fort Bragg for conservation effort

February 17, 2012

By Henry Cuningham

Military editor

The big problem for endangered species is the loss of habitat, and a solution is reconnecting landscapes where those animals live, a biologist said Thursday at Fort Bragg.

Wildlife corridors can provide "superhighways for plants and animals," biologist Nick Haddad said at a meeting of the Regional Land-Use Commission at the Fort Bragg Club.

Haddad is a professor in the biology department at N.C. State University. The commission brings together military, state and local officials and planners to discuss how the civilian community and military training can best coexist.

Biologists are looking for places that give "the biggest bang for the buck in conservation," he said.

Fort Bragg's sandhills and longleaf pine areas are home to federally protected animal species such as the red-cockaded woodpecker and St. Francis Saytr butterfly. Federally endangered plants on the 160,000-acre Army post include rough-leaved loosestrife, Michaux's sumac and American chaffseed.

"There are key areas that are known, like the area between Camp Mackall and Fort Bragg, but then there are key areas that are emerging, like in the eastern part of Fort Bragg, the Carvers Creek State Park area," Haddad said after the meeting.

Carvers Creek State Park, which is north of Fayetteville, has more than 4,000 acres in Cumberland and Harnett counties.

"Carvers Creek is separated into two parts," Haddad said. "Connecting that piece is a key place."

In an attempt to restore the vanishing longleaf pine areas, the N.C. Sandhills Conservation Partnership planted its 500,000th longleaf seedling this month at Carvers Creek State Park.

A key to protecting the endangered species would be to link the populations of the red-cockaded woodpecker in Southern Pines and on Fort Bragg, he said.

"One of the surprising areas that emerged is opportunities for creating these connections in the areas around Southern Pines," he said. "We might have thought that Southern Pines already has took much urbanization and development for successful conservation, but what we are finding is there are opportunities where conservation can be compatible, even with a place that is as developed as Southern Pines."

The red-cockaded woodpecker creates cavities in live pine trees, usually more than 80 years old.

"The general conservation approach is to do conservation, where possible, by purchasing land, but that's not always possible," Haddad said. "One of our successful models is to engage people in 'safe harbor' and other agreements where they can become stewards and keep ownership and use of their land for the things that they are using their land for now."

Military editor Henry Cuninghame can be reached at cuninghamh@fayobserver.com or 486-3585.