

Press Release from the Southern Environmental Law Center

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on Notice for Failures to Protect the World's Only Wild Red Wolves

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. – Conservation groups today notified the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of their intent to sue the agency for its failure to protect the world's only wild population of red wolves and illegal action in authorizing the killing of a breeding female red wolf, one of only 50-75 red wolves in the wild. The conservation groups are the [Red Wolf Coalition](#), [Defenders of Wildlife](#), The [Animal Welfare Institute](#) (AWI) represented by the [Southern Environmental Law Center](#). According to the Service's estimates, the world's only wild population of red wolves has declined by as much as half of what it was only a year ago when an estimated 100 red wolves lived within the five county red wolf recovery area in North Carolina.

“The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has violated the law and its responsibility to protect the world's only wild population of red wolves which now numbers only 50-75 animals,” said Sierra Weaver, senior attorney for the Southern Environmental Law Center who represents conservation groups in the 60-day notice of intent to sue the agency. “U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must rededicate itself to ensuring the survival of America's rarest wolf and restore the former successful recovery of this endangered species.”

Following the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's announcement in June of its authorization of the kill and termination of reintroductions, the notice letter details the agency's failure to investigate the recent decline of the wild wolves and status, actions or management that harm the survival of red wolves, and how best to recover wild red wolves as required by law.

“The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service needs to step up work to help this species get back on the road to recovery, not stop releasing wolves,” said Jason Rylander, senior attorney for Defenders of Wildlife, said. “Red wolves are endangered because they need protection and effective management to thrive. Allowing the killing of a breeding female wolf is the exact opposite of managing red wolves for recovery.”

Earlier this year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service illegally authorized the killing of a critically endangered female red wolf within the Red Wolf Recovery Area in eastern North Carolina. Tracking data showed the collared female red wolf was exhibiting denning behavior. The loss of any breeding adult red wolf is a significant setback to recovery of this critically endangered species.

“As the USFWS moves forward with its assessment of the Red Wolf Recovery Program, they should not forget their commitment and obligation to the health and welfare of the wild red wolves that live in northeastern North Carolina,” said Red Wolf Coalition executive director Kim Wheeler.

Since 2007, the USFWS has not conducted the five-year status review required by the ESA to inform recovery and management efforts. Despite its failure to conduct such a review, the USFWS announced in June that it would suspend the reintroduction of red wolves into eastern North Carolina, a practice that has been critical to maintaining the population and an integral part of the agency’s own adaptive management plan.

“It is nonsensical for the USFWS to haphazardly authorize the killing of a mother red wolf when the population is on the precipice and in serious danger,” said Tara Zuardo, wildlife attorney at AWI. “There is no evidence that this wolf was causing any harm, or that the agency previously tried to humanely move her off the property. At this point, there appears to be no difference between being able to kill a coyote or a red wolf—just which agency you request a permit from.”

Under the Endangered Species Act, it is unlawful for anyone to “take” (i.e., harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct) a red wolf, except in limited circumstances. Federal regulations authorize the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to issue permits to take red wolves on private property after a property owner requests that wolves be removed from property and the Service abandons efforts to capture them. No removal effort was made before the agency authorized the killing of the female red wolf exhibiting denning behavior.

North Carolina is home to the only wild population of red wolves. Red wolves bred in captivity were reintroduced on a North Carolina peninsula within their native range in the late 1980’s after red wolves were declared extinct in the wild. Once common throughout the Southeast, intensive predator control programs and loss of habitat decimated wild red wolf populations.

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Note to Editors:

- Photographs of red wolves in North Carolina are available for use with appropriate photo credit from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service at <http://www.fws.gov/redwolf/>

About the Red Wolf Coalition

The Red Wolf Coalition (www.redwolves.com) advocates for the long-term survival of red wolf populations by teaching about the red wolf and by fostering public involvement in red wolf conservation.

About the Animal Welfare Institute

The Animal Welfare Institute (awionline.org) is a non-profit charitable organization founded in 1951 and dedicated to reducing animal suffering caused by people. AWI engages policymakers, scientists, industry, and the public to achieve better treatment of animals everywhere—in the laboratory, on the farm, in commerce, at home, and in the wild.

About Defenders of Wildlife

Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities. With more than 1 million members and activists, Defenders of Wildlife is a leading advocate for innovative solutions to safeguard our wildlife heritage for generations to come. For more information, visit www.defenders.org.

About the Southern Environmental Law Center

The Southern Environmental Law Center is a regional nonprofit using the power of the law to protect the health and environment of the Southeast (Virginia, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama). Founded in 1986, SELC's team of nearly 60 legal and policy experts represent more than 100 partner groups on issues of climate change and energy, air and water quality, forests, the coast and wetlands, transportation, and land use. www.SouthernEnvironment.org