

Press Release from Red Wolf Coalition
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New Fish and Wildlife Service Rule is a Recipe for Wild Red Wolf Extinction

Columbia, NC – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) today announced its plan to restrict the world’s only wild red wolves to federal lands in just one northeastern North Carolina county. The proposed rule also eliminates protections for wolves that leave this newly-designated area (Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge and Dare County Bombing Range) and venture onto private lands. Thus, red wolf survival in 90 percent of the present 5-county restoration region will depend entirely on “landowner tolerance and cooperation without regulation.” In short, the USFWS is leaving the fate of wild red wolves that venture out of the protected area in the hands of local landowners who, thanks to the proposed rule, are no longer prohibited from killing or trapping wolves at will. Wolves are far-ranging animals, and the Service admits that “. . . some red wolves would leave the NWR and Bombing Range on a fairly regular basis.” Killing red wolves that leave the protected area, the Service says “. . . would be explicitly permissible under the regulations.”

The USFWS is charged with using all measures possible to recover a species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The new rule confining red wolves to a fraction of their former habitat—and allowing landowners to decide the fate of any wolves that leave that much smaller territory—is not only unworkable but is, in fact, a plan that will likely lead to the disappearance of the species in the wild. Maintaining a token population of vulnerable red wolves in a very limited habitat area is not restoration or recovery. It is a recipe for extinction.

Represented by the Southern Environmental Law Center, three conservation organizations including the Red Wolf Coalition are currently in federal court over the Fish and Wildlife Service’s recent failures to protect the world’s only wild population of red wolves. After years of slow but steady growth, the wild red wolf population has plummeted from an estimated 130 animals to fewer than 30. This is due in large part to the agency’s termination of conservation actions successfully used by field biologists to grow the population.

Statement from Red Wolf Coalition Executive Director Kim Wheeler:

This proposal is worse than we imagined. The agency's decision to abrogate its responsibility to protect and conserve these animals no matter whose land they happen to be standing on is reprehensible. The USFWS rightly notes that landowner support is critical to the future of red

wolf recovery. But that support can't be achieved through the unregulated hunting and trapping of red wolves that happen to wander onto private land. This claim, offered without any evidence to uphold it, defies both history and common sense and ignores the fact that humans are the root cause of most red wolf mortalities. The fact that the USFWS can envision no incentive, other than a license to kill, to satisfy landowners whose land is used by red wolves shows a complete breakdown of the agency's attention to its mission.

The Red Wolf at a Glance

After habitat loss and predator extermination programs pushed the red wolf to the edge of extinction, a captive breeding program was started in 1969. Red wolves bred in captivity were reintroduced on the Albemarle Peninsula in northeastern NC in 1987. The pioneering Red Wolf Recovery Program served as a model for wolf reintroduction efforts in the northern Rockies and was widely celebrated as a major conservation achievement. Then in 2015, the USFWS announced it was suspending the reintroduction of red wolves in the red wolf restoration region in northeastern NC. The agency also stopped measures that had successfully limited the potential of coyote/red wolf hybridization and also terminated the proven strategy of inserting captive-born pups into the dens of wild red wolf parents. The agency also began issuing lethal take permits to some private landowners. Additionally, starting in the mid-2000s, gunshot mortality increased sharply, but no offenders were ever arrested or prosecuted.

A 30-day public comment period opens June 28, 2018 and continues through July 30, 2018. The Red Wolf Coalition urges all red wolf advocates to submit a comment in the Federal Register at <http://tinyurl.com/ybkskudp>. Additional information and relevant documents are posted at <http://tinyurl.com/ybjn77sk>.

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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.