

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Update on the North Carolina Nonessential Experimental Population (NEP)

July 16, 2020

- The management of the wild red wolf population in the NC NEP is being conducted under the 10(j) rule updated in 1995 along with the permanent injunction put in place by a Federal court in November 2018 regarding take.
- The current known population of red wolves (e.g. radio-collared individuals) in the NC NEP is 9 red wolves with the estimated total population approximately 18 - 20 red wolves.
 - o In June, we lost the signal from a radio collar on a male red wolf that had been functioning for over 7 years so we suspect that animal is still on the landscape and the batteries on the collar just finally died.
- There has been 1 mortality in 2020 resulting from gunshot on private property. It is still an open case.
- Tracking
 - o Tracking has been limited at times because of the COVID-19 measures, particularly from the air, though we were able to conduct a few flights in May and June.
 - o Ground telemetry is occurring on a set schedule multiple days a week throughout the NEP and we have been pretty successful at locating almost all radio collared red wolves at least once a week.
 - o It does not appear based on our monitoring that there were any red wolf pairs or litters this breeding season.
 - o The male translocated from St. Vincent NWR to Alligator River NWR has moved southwest from his original release site.
 - o The male translocated from Alligator River NWR to Pocosin Lakes NWR remains in and around that refuge.

- Population Dynamics
 - o Although we definitely were not as successful as we hoped with regards to creating new red wolf pairs through the translocations and acclimation pens, we have been successful to this point in having introduced a new red wolf male into the NEP from St. Vincent NWR and we've introduced a new red wolf male onto Pocosin Lakes NWR, and we are hopeful both of those developments could be beneficial moving forward.
 - o There are 5 radio collared red wolves (two adults, one juvenile and 2 yearlings) remaining on St. Vincent NWR, and the general plan for this coming winter is to translocate the 3 younger red wolves into the NC NEP in additional attempts to create red wolf breeding pairs.
- Management
 - o We are continuing to work closely with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission through the Albemarle Peninsula Collaborative Canid Conservation (AP3C) team. We currently are working on the near term objectives for both agencies for canid management on the AP, as well as separate working groups discussing the radio collaring of canids (e.g. VHF vs. GPS) and the sterilization of coyotes.
 - o We've hired Morgan Lewis on as a Wildlife Technician through CWRS for at least the next year with the hope that she'll be converted to a permanent USFWS employee at some point. We've also just completed the selection process for a biologist positon that will largely be responsible for administering the Prey for the Pack program and working with private landowners, as well as working on other Partners for Fish and Wildlife projects and assisting on other aspects of the Red Wolf Recovery Program.

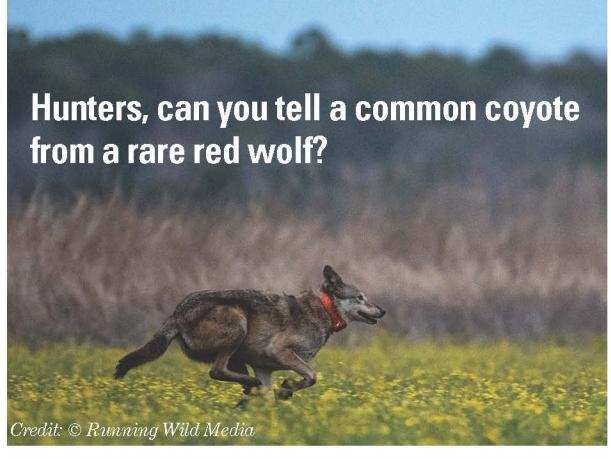
Outreach

- Prey of the Pack (P4P)
 - o The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, through its Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) program in close partnership with the North Carolina Wildlife Federation (NCWF) has initiating a program to help incentivize interested and willing private landowners to create/improve habitat for red wolf prey species on their lands (e.g. early successional forest). In general, P4P would provide technical assistance and pay for a portion of the cost for landowner's to do habitat work on their lands, in exchange for landowners agreeing to be tolerant of red wolves on their property and allowing monitoring by FWS personnel. The press release initiating the program went out statewide on Monday, July 13th.

- Hunter ID Cards

- We have revamped the hunter ID cards to make them a lot more up to date and visually more appealing and accurate, particularly the species comparison pictures. These cards are sent out with hunter licenses through WRC, as well as provided at visitor centers and public gatherings. If you would like an electronic version contact Morgan Lewis at (252) 475-8350.

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Hunters, can you tell a common coyote from a rare red wolf?

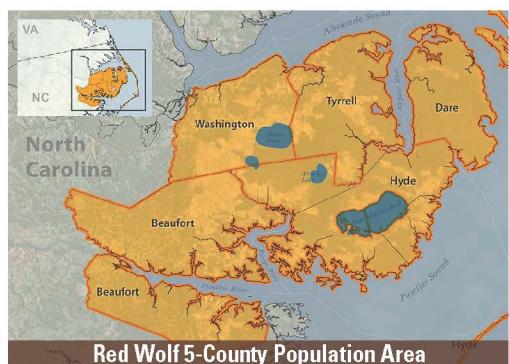
Credit: © Running Wild Media

To report a dead or injured red wolf, call the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at 1-855-4-WOLVES.

For additional information on red wolves, please visit <https://www.fws.gov/southeast/wildlife/mammals/red-wolf/>

Coyotes are fair game; red wolves, an endangered species restored to North Carolina, are not. Unfortunately, it can sometimes be tough to tell the two species apart—especially young animals—and red wolves are shot by mistake.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working toward collaring all red wolves with bright orange collars to help the public distinguish them. Currently fewer than half of the red wolves have orange collars.

Not all red wolves wear radio collars and, despite their name, they come in many of the same colors as coyotes: brown, buff, tan, gray, reddish brown and a variety of combinations. Adult red wolves are taller, longer, and heavier than coyotes, but in the summer and fall, their pups are similar in size to coyotes.

*Red wolves are federally protected under the Endangered Species Act. Killing or harming a red wolf can result in civil and/or criminal penalties that may include fines and forfeiture of any property used in the crime.

Credit: coyote: © Michael Klotz, red wolf: © Robert Ondriscik

- USFWS Red Wolf Recovery Program Website
 - o We have revamped and updated the USFWS Red Wolf Recovery Website to include the most recent information and add in links to more updated information, such as these notes. The updated version has not gone live quite yet, but it should be very soon.

Questions Asked

1. What is going to set off a red light or is there a trigger (e.g. population level) that indicates just how dire the situation is within the NC NEP that would allow for the release of adult red wolves from the SSP?

The red light has gone off long ago for us regarding concern for the red wolf population level in eastern NC and we are attempting to do as much as we can be done under the current 10(j) rule (e.g. management plan) to sustain the population and increase the genetic diversity. There is no specific trigger that will allow for the release of adult red wolves from the SSP. USFWS is not currently authorized to release additional red wolves into the NC NEP from the SSP under the existing 10(j) rule.

2. Can you describe the limitations that have been placed on monitoring due to COVID-19 restrictions?

During the initial stages of the COVID-19 stay at home restrictions, we were unable to conduct monitoring flights or ground monitoring. Once a USFWS risk assessment was completed we were able to conduct ground monitoring only. After Governor Cooper placed NC in Phase 2 of reopening, we were able to start conducting monitoring flights under specific sterilization and PPE protocols. However, once Dare County reopened to visitors, the pilot began to conduct several tourist flights a day and began getting more and more complacent regarding sterilization protocols. Consequently, for the health and safety of USFWS personnel we determined that unfortunately monitoring flights needed to be suspended once again. Ground monitoring has continued throughout, but without flights we are conducted more extensive ground monitoring both spatially and temporally on a set schedule.