

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Red Wolf Recovery Program

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Update on the North Carolina Nonessential Experimental Population (NEP)

October 15, 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 7 red wolves with the estimated total population approximately 17 - 20 red wolves.
- There have been 2 mortalities in 2020, both as a result of gunshot on private lands. The most recent occurred in August and was a 3 year old female red wolf that had dispersed from Alligator River NWR to the south about a year ago. Law enforcement was involved with both cases.
- Tracking
 - o Tracking continues to be limited from the air due to COVID-19 measures. We are hopeful that as tourist season slows down that we can implement protective measures that will allow us to safely resume routine monitoring flights with the local pilot.
 - o Ground telemetry is occurring multiple days a week throughout the NEP and we have been successful at locating all radio collared red wolves at least once a week, with one exception.
 - o The male red wolf translocated from St. Vincent NWR to Alligator River NWR this past winter has not been located since the end of June. In September we brought in a FWS pilot and plane and over a two week period he flew grids throughout the NEP, then west to Greenville and south through the Croatan NF. However, no signal was located.

- Population Dynamics
 - 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 up to three of those red wolves into the NC NEP in additional attempts to create new red wolf breeding pairs. Weather permitting we are starting capture operations in the NC NEP and St. Vincent earlier this year by about a month and hope to have the potential new pairs in acclimation pens on Alligator River NWR earlier and potentially longer than was possible last year. All translocated red wolves will be fitted with orange GPS collars before release onto Federal lands.

- Management
 - We are continuing to work with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission through the Albemarle Peninsula Collaborative Canid Conservation (AP3C) team on general canid management on the AP, the radio collaring of canids and the sterilization of coyotes.
 - In September, FWS brought on Luke Lokies as a Fish and Wildlife Biologist who will work largely as the liaison with private landowners regarding habitat improvement/restoration through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, and particularly on the Prey for the Pack Program for the benefit of red wolf conservation. He will also be assisting with red wolf field work. Luke comes to us from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission where he did similar work regarding habitat improvement on private lands in eastern North Carolina, so we are excited to have him and his local habitat knowledge on our team.
 - Just this week the FWS was also able to bring on Morgan Lewis as a Biological Technician through the Pathways Program, which is a program designed for hiring students working on their post-graduate coursework with the intent of potentially transition them into permanent positions with FWS upon completion of their coursework. Morgan has been working with us in various capacities for over a year now so we know what she is capable of and very glad to be able to continue to have her on our team in a more long term capacity.

Outreach

- Prey of the Pack (P4P)
 - In early October we started contacting individual landowners that we believe may be interested in the P4P program. Discussions are ongoing and we hope to create some word of mouth opportunities and also potentially mail informative postcards through our NCWF partner regarding the program to landowners in areas where red wolves are currently located or previously located to generate more interest and sign up landowners.

- North Carolina Wildlife Federation
 - NCWF has hired Katerina Ramos as the new Program and Volunteer Coordinator locating at Pocosin Lakes NWR, replacing Sarah Leoffler in that position. Among other things Katerina will oversee the day to day operations of the educational and outreach side of the Red Wolf Center in Columbia and will be actively involved in the Prey for the Pack Program, as well as many other education and outreach programs regarding red wolves and other local species.
 - We are also working with NCWF and Pocosin Lakes NWR on placing web cameras showing the enclosure and the den at the Red Wolf Center. NCWF is providing the majority of the funding and installation work. The live feed will be on their website and linked to from the Red Wolf Center webpage as well. The hope is to have it up and running by mid-November. Thanks to the partners on this call that have provided useful information regarding their web cameras.
 - FWS is also partnering with NCWF on a habitat enhancement project on Pocosin Lakes NWR. The project will enhance and sustain management of early successional habitat along established fire breaks on Pocosin Lakes NWR. This will result in an improved prey base for red wolves (deer and small mammals) and improved year-round habitat for priority grassland migratory birds. Funds would be used for site preparation, plantings and annual maintenance of site-appropriate early successional vegetation along the fire-breaks.
- Media
 - FWS has provided information and interviews for several articles over the last quarter regarding red wolves, including but not limited to, National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Magazine, North Carolina Wildlife Federation, local media outlets, etc.
- Other Partners
 - Met with folks from the Museum of Life and Science in Durham to discuss red wolf life history and management as they work on updating their interpretation displays.
 - Provided video footage of FWS personnel answering red wolf questions to the Fresno Zoo for an online science lesson they created.

Questions Asked:

1. What is the age structure of remaining wild red wolves and their average life span in the wild?

During the call I indicated that there are two somewhat distinct groups of age classes of the remaining wild red wolves with about half in the 3-4 year old range and about half in the 9-10 year range. In looking at the numbers afterwards, that is largely true, but we do also have a few in the 7 year old range so it is a bit more evenly distributed than I originally suggested.

Based on previous research, the average life span of a wild red wolf that dies of natural causes is around 9-10 years old, but when human-caused mortality is factored in the average life span is less than 4 years old.

2. Is FWS going to use GPS collars on red wolves released into the NC NEP from Florida and are red wolves from Florida more likely to disperse?

All red wolves translocated from St. Vincent NWR into the NC NEP will be fitted with orange GPS collars before release.

All red wolves, and wolves in general, that are moved from one geographic area to another are likely to make exploratory movements once they are released in a new location. Some more than others depending on the individual nature of that red wolf. Placing an animal in an acclimation pen can reduce the extent to which they move after release, particularly if they are in an acclimation pen with a red wolf from that area. The red wolves from Florida are no more likely to leave the area they are moved to than any other red wolf moved to a different area, even those that are moved to different locations within the NC NEP.

3. Was the female that got shot in August the Milltail daughter?

Yes and no. It was not the three year old female we typically refer to as the "Milltail daughter". She is still alive and living in the Milltail territory with her mother. However, the three year old female that was shot was her sister and litter mate and had dispersed from the Milltail territory and Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge over a year ago.