

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Joe Madison

Program Manager – NC NEP

Red Wolf Recovery Program

joseph_madison@fws.gov

October 21, 2021

Update on the North Carolina Nonessential Experimental Population (NC NEP)

- The current known population of wild red wolves (e.g. radio-collared individuals) in the NC NEP is eight with the estimated total population approximately 15-17 red wolves. Seven of the collared red wolves have orange collars, including one that is a GPS collar.
- There has been one known wild red wolf mortality since our last call Partners call in July. That brings the total mortalities of wild red wolves this year to seven, of which five are believed to be as a result of vehicle strikes. One is an unknown cause of death and one is a gunshot mortality.
- The following information is from the FWS declaration to the court regarding the mortality, but at the request of law enforcement, no additional information will be disclosed until the investigation is complete. The gunshot mortality occurred on October 3rd and was a male red wolf that released from captivity this past spring. The mortality occurred on private land in the general area where he had established a territory over the last several months. He was shot by a private landowner who indicated the red wolf was in the general vicinity of the landowner's chicken coop. The landowner self-reported the incident to North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission Law Enforcement as soon as it occurred. FWS Special Agents are currently investigating the incident.
- Tracking
 - o Aerial monitoring is currently not being conducted because the aviation company we use was abruptly sold and the new owners, though very interested in continuing to conduct aerial telemetry with us, have not made it through the contracting and certifications process yet.
 - o Ground telemetry is being conducted several days a week to get locations in general and more precise information on specific individuals or areas of interest.
 - o In addition, we receive GPS point locations for the one red wolf with a GPS collar on a schedule of about every 2.5 days.
 - o All collared red wolves remaining on the landscape are within their areas of expected use, including verification in late September that at least two, and possibly more, of the fostered red wolf pups have survived to this point.
 - o The red wolf pair created on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge this past winter that consists of a resident 4 year old female and a 2 year old male translocated from St.

Vincent NWR remain together and spend the majority of their time on the refuge and adjacent farmlands owned by the county. The hope is that they will produce their first of many litters next spring.

- Management

- Release plans for this coming winter/spring have not been finalized.
- However, a male red wolf was flown by LightHawk from the Wolf Conservation Center to St. Vincent NWR this morning. He will initially be placed in an acclimation pen with the hope eventually he will pair and breed with one of the female red wolves remaining on the island.
- Potential strategies to reduce vehicle mortalities are being discussed with multiple partners to include signage, aversive conditioning, wildlife crossings, road reflectors, etc. Some of the strategies we will be implementing in the short term include:
 - Any releases of captive-born red wolves in the short term would be done in the winter months when there is less traffic volume due to far less tourist traffic and less activity on farm roads since it is outside of the active growing season.
 - Through coordination with NC DOT, the USFWS and NCWF have purchased four portable electronic message boards that will be temporarily deployed when needed along roads in locations throughout the NC NEP when and where we know red wolves, particularly recently released captive-born red wolves, are crossing roads regularly or remaining in close proximity to roads. The wording used on the signs will be in line with NC DOT policy and be based on previous research. An example of such a message would be something like:

Frequent Wildlife Crossings
Next 2 Miles
Drive with Caution
 - The radio collars used on all red wolves to be released into the NC NEP will be modified to include strategically placed orange reflective material that will increase visibility of the animal along roadways at night, particularly when moving, and provide additional identification for hunters to potentially decrease gunshot mortality due to misidentification.
- The vegetation management project on Pocosin Lakes NWR designed to increase and support the prey base for red wolves begin implementation in September.
- Capture operations within the NC NEP will begin as early as November. Some of the focus will be on capturing and radio collaring the fostered pups (although that won't occur until January so they will be large enough for radio collars), catching the only known adult red wolf on the landscape that is not currently fitted with an orange collar and catching coyotes in certain areas for sterilization as part of the adaptive management plan.

- In St. Vincent NWR, there are two remaining female red wolves. They are often together, especially with the high water levels they have been experiencing lately, but they seem to be moving around the island well.

Outreach

- Looking at holding a virtual public information session sometime this fall/early winter.
- Prey for the Pack (P4P)
 - We are continuing to speak with multiple landowners regarding agreements under P4P, including site visits on their property. To date we have around 1,000 acres under agreements.
 - We are also continuing to work on the language for other categories within P4P, such as agreements where landowners do not want/need to FWS funds, but would like to do habitat work beneficial for red wolf prey and acknowledge allowing red wolves on their property without being harassed and allow monitoring, or landowners that do not want/need to do habitat work, but want to acknowledge that red wolves can be on their property unharrassed.
 - Working with NCWF on producing P4P mailers to landowners within 5 miles of current or recent red wolf territories.
 - Working on designing signs to provide to participants to display on their property, if they would like to.

Questions?