



North Carolina General Assembly
House Of Representatives

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August 29, 2016

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The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell,

We are writing to you today because we have grave concerns regarding the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (the "Service") red wolf recovery program; the only existing wild population of the species has fallen to just 45 individuals.¹ Over the last three years, the Service has failed to follow the best available science as required by the Endangered Species Act and has taken a series of actions that undermined the recovery of the red wolf, causing the population to fall by 50 percent. It is essential that the Department redouble its efforts to prevent extinction and jumpstart the recovery of this iconic animal.

The red wolf (*Canis rufus*) is one of the most endangered animals in the world. The species was once widely distributed across eastern and southern states from the mid-Atlantic to Texas, but uncontrolled killing nearly extirpated it by the early 1970s. As a last resort, 14 red wolves were taken into captivity in 1976 to begin a captive breeding and reintroduction program, and in 1987, red wolves were released to the wild at the Alligator National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina. Over the following 25 years, the Service developed one of the most innovative carnivore restoration programs in the world, a program that was widely considered to be the gold standard for the reintroduction of a species to the wild. By 2012, the wild population of red wolves had reached 130 individuals.²

Unfortunately, 2012 proved to be the high water mark in red wolf recovery. The Service failed to use its authority to restrict North Carolina's recently authorized nighttime coyote hunt – a practice that clearly jeopardizes the continued existence of similar looking red wolves. After several red wolves died in the fall of 2013 as a result of this hunt, environmental organizations



successfully challenged and stopped night hunting in court, leading to an immediate drop in red wolf mortality. Instead of celebrating this as a positive development and advancing the national interest in conserving a critically endangered species, the Service eliminated the position of the red wolf recovery coordinator, redirected staff to other programs, ended its successful pup-fostering and coyote-sterilization activities, suspended red wolf reintroductions into the wild, and suspended the red wolf education program.

The Service sought out an independent review of the red wolf recovery program through the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) on August 11, 2014. The WMI review was completed on November 14, 2014, and concluded that while the program needed to make several changes, the recovery of the red wolf was possible if the Service invested more resources and expanded its recovery efforts.¹¹ Rather than taking steps to improve red wolf recovery based on the conclusions of the report, the Service commissioned its own "feasibility study" of the program. Although the Service predicted its review would be complete by the end of 2015, nearly a year has passed with no public report and the red wolf continues to teeter on the brink of extinction.¹²

The Service is not pursuing prosecution of suspected illegal takes, allowing local opponents of recovery to believe that they can kill wolves with impunity. Of the 17 wolves killed by gunshot since 2013, there has not been a single prosecution. In addition, the Service has been aggressively removing wolves from private land – despite the fact that they are causing no harm to livestock or property – and holding them in pens for unknown, extended periods of time. This has resulted in a drastic increase of wild wolves being held in captivity, disrupting pack dynamics and taking key breeding wolves from the population.

The situation for the red wolf is dire, yet there is still time to reverse course and recover this species in the wild. Because of the urgency of the situation, we ask that you:

1. Direct the Fish and Wildlife Service to immediately resume the recovery program activities that were being undertaken in 2012, including the landowner education program, and to dedicate additional personnel and resources to this effort.
2. Direct the Fish and Wildlife Service to update and improve the red wolf recovery program based on the conclusions of the 2014 WMI program review and evaluation, and to abandon the long overdue "feasibility study."

If you have any question, please have your staff contact Matt Strickler on the House Natural Resources Committee staff at (202) 225-6065.

Respectfully,

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