

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)

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- The current known population of red wolves (e.g. radio-collared individuals) in the NC NEP is 10 red wolves with the estimated total population approximately 17-20 red wolves. Nine of the collared red wolves now have orange collars.
- There has been one known red wolf mortality since our last call in January as a result of a vehicle collision on Highway 64. It is the only known red wolf mortality in 2021. There have been a few collared coyote mortalities.
- Tracking
 - o Aerial monitoring resumed this month and we've been conducted 1-2 flights a week. All collared red wolves have remained within their respective territories.
 - o Ground telemetry continues as well to get more precise locations on specific individuals or areas of interest. Right now we are closely monitoring the females to see if they localize their movements indicating that they're denning. No denning has been detected yet, but it's just a little early for that yet.
- Management
 - o As discussed on the call in January, we translocated two male red wolves from St. Vincent NWR to Alligator River NWR in December and they were placed in acclimation pens with older, resident female red wolves.
 - On February 9th, the older female red wolf from the Milltail Pack and a translocated male were released from the acclimation pen. The male pretty quickly incorporated into the norm use area of the Milltail Pack with the resident red wolves. Over a period of about the first three weeks after release, he appears to have permanently displaced a sterilized coyote that had been hanging close to the younger female red wolf female from the Milltail Pack, which is who we wanted in the acclimation pen with him all along. Since that time they have been paired and we are hopeful they were together soon enough to produce a litter this spring.
 - On February 10th, the older female red wolf that spent the majority of her life on the bombing range and the other translocated male were released from their acclimation pen. They did not stay together despite photographic evidence of bonding in the pen. The female has gone back and forth between the southern end of the Milltail territory and the bombing range since her release.

Unfortunately, immediately after his release the male began bouncing around the refuge in areas not typically utilized by red wolves, including frequently being in close proximity to the highways running through the refuge, and he was ultimately hit and killed by a vehicle 11 days after being released.

- In February, a private trapping captured a 7-year old male red wolf on private land that was microchipped as a pup, but never captured and collared as an adult. He was fitted with an orange collar and re-released where he was captured.
- During this winter's capture operations, we captured, sterilized and released two additional coyotes on Alligator River NWR.
- The vegetation management project on Pocosin Lakes NWR designed to support the prey base for red wolves is moving forward in the planning stages and work on the ground will begin in early summer. This project is being done in collaboration with the North Carolina Wildlife Federation.
- In St. Vincent NWR, the new male transferred from NC Zoo this winter was released onto the island with the resident breeding female on February 7th. To date he has remained largely in an area of the island used less frequently by the other red wolves, but he does integrate with them when they come to that area. He tends to be more visible so we are hoping over time he'll move more with the resident red wolves to other areas of the island.
- Per a court order, on March 1st the FWS submitted a plan outlining a strategy for the release of captive red wolves into the NC NEP this year. That plan is still pending and because it's part of ongoing litigation we can't really discuss much about it beyond that.

Outreach

- Prey for the Pack (P4P)
 - We continue to have dialogue with several individuals regarding signing up for this program, and Luke Lories, the local Partners Biologist working for the Red Wolf Recovery Program, has been doing lots of site visits with private landowners and we've seen a bit of an increase in the word of mouth, so we are hopeful with those efforts the number of participants will begin to grow.
 - After much delay, the webcams in the red wolf enclosure at the Red Wolf Center in Columbia are scheduled to be installed next week. This is a joint project being led by the North Carolina Wildlife Federation. The reopening of this facility to the public will be determined based on FWS and local guidance regarding COVID restrictions.
- Media
 - The Red Wolf Recovery Program participated in several media pieces including Running Wild Media, the BBC, American University, National Geographic to continue to try and get the word out regarding red wolves, their conservation and management.