

RED WOLF RELEASE PLAN  
POCOSIN LAKES NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE  
JUNE 1993

Introduction

In 1987 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) initiated a dramatic experiment to restore a population of red wolves to the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge (ARNWR). (See attached references). By almost every measure the experiment was successful and generated benefits that extended beyond the immediate preservation of red wolves, to positively affect local citizens and communities, and other imperiled wildlife species.

During the experiment it became clear that the current reintroduction area, which encompasses about 250,000 acres, probably could not support the present population (30 wolves) for an extended period of time. Indeed, dispersal outside the reintroduction area by wild-born wolves has occurred and will continue. In addition to dispersal, the future of the wolf population is threatened by its smallness; many events (e.g. disease outbreaks) can cause extinction to the small population.

Release Plan

Increasing the size of the wolf population will minimize threats to its survival. The primary factor limiting population size is the size of the reintroduction area. A larger reintroduction area would provide habitat for dispersing wolves and provide the USFWS opportunities to release additional wolves. Fortunately, the reintroduction area can easily be enlarged by adding to the project the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (PLNWR) (Figure 1). Pocosin Lakes is ideal for probably 15 to 25 wolves because of its large size, remoteness, abundant prey populations, and proximity to ARNWR.

At present, the USFWS is scheduled to release onto PLNWR 1 or 2 red wolf families (adult pair and 3 to 5 pups) during summer/fall 1993 and 1 or 2 families during summer/fall 1994.

Prior to release each wolf will be outfitted with a radio collar or abdominal implant. Wolves will be located approximately three times per week and those locations will be filed for future use.

Landowner Coordination

If livestock depredations occur, they will be dealt with on a case by case basis. A compensation fund is available if reimbursement for losses is necessary. Good relations with landowners is of paramount importance to the expansion as wolves will undoubtedly wander from PLNWR to private land.

In an effort to involve private landowners in Red Wolf Restoration, the Fish and Wildlife Service has three mechanisms which would allow wolves to range on habitat not owned by government agencies.

1. Memorandum of Understanding - agreement which must intimately involve the regional office and must be periodically reviewed for legal "correctness".
2. Lease - land acquisition for lease involvement must get approval from Service realty at the regional level.
3. Partner's Agreement - already proofed for legal "correctness", stays at the local level alleviating unnecessary levels of administration.

These mechanisms are of crucial importance to the future of wolf recovery in eastern North Carolina because although the government owns about 300,000 acres, more land is needed to accommodate the burgeoning wolf population. During the last two years, several wolves have dispersed from natal home ranges on ARNWR to lands outside the current reintroduction area.

At the present time there are 3 signed agreements with private landowners totaling 57,000 acres, 4 functional agreements totaling 27,500 acres and 11 actively negotiating Partners Agreements totaling 139,000+ acres.

### Public Input

Throughout August 1992, Fish and Wildlife personnel hosted public meetings (see schedule below) to present the results of the 5-year reintroduction experiment and to present a Fish and Wildlife Service in-house consideration to release 1 to 2 families of wolves in the Pocosin Lakes NWR during August 1993.

### Schedule of Public Meetings

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Attendees</u>
08/03/92	Plymouth	Washington County Commissioners
08/03/92	Manteo	Dare County Commissioners
08/04/92	Washington	Beaufort County Commissioners
08/05/92	Columbia	Tyrrell County Commissioners
08/12/92	Engelhard	14 people
08/13/92	Manteo	7 people
08/14/92	Stumpy Point	8 people
08/14/92	East Lake	3 people
08/17/92	Swan Quarter	Hyde County Commissioners
08/17/92	Columbia	13 people
08/18/92	Swan Quarter	90 people
08/19/92	Washington	5 people
08/20/92	Plymouth	9 people

Most people who commented supported the restoration project although some expressed concern about the effect of red wolves on activities on private land. We assured them that because free-ranging wolves are legally classified as members of an experimental non-essential population, the wolves would not negatively impact legal activities on private or federal land. They were assured that the legal designation of experimental non-essential was not going to be changed and some aspects were hoped to be further relaxed.

Many private landowners were still, even after being briefed, were concerned about further land use and development regulations that the red wolf would bring with it. To help ease this fear, the Fish and Wildlife Service is working toward adding two counties adjacent to the experimental population area to ensure that dispersing wolves have the same provisions applied to them as those within the present boundaries. In addition, agreements with private landowners are being written so that any designation other than experimental non-essential nullifies the document and the USFWS is required to immediately remove the wolves if the landowner wishes.

Some citizens used the meetings to express frustration about other matters involving the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Public use and wetland regulations were common topics which do not at all involve the red wolf. However, Hyde and Washington Counties did pass resolutions opposing red wolf project expansion.

**POCOSIN LAKES  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**  
TYRRELL, HYDE AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES  
NORTH CAROLINA

**LEGEND**

- Refuge Lands
- Frying Pan Unit
- Pungo Unit

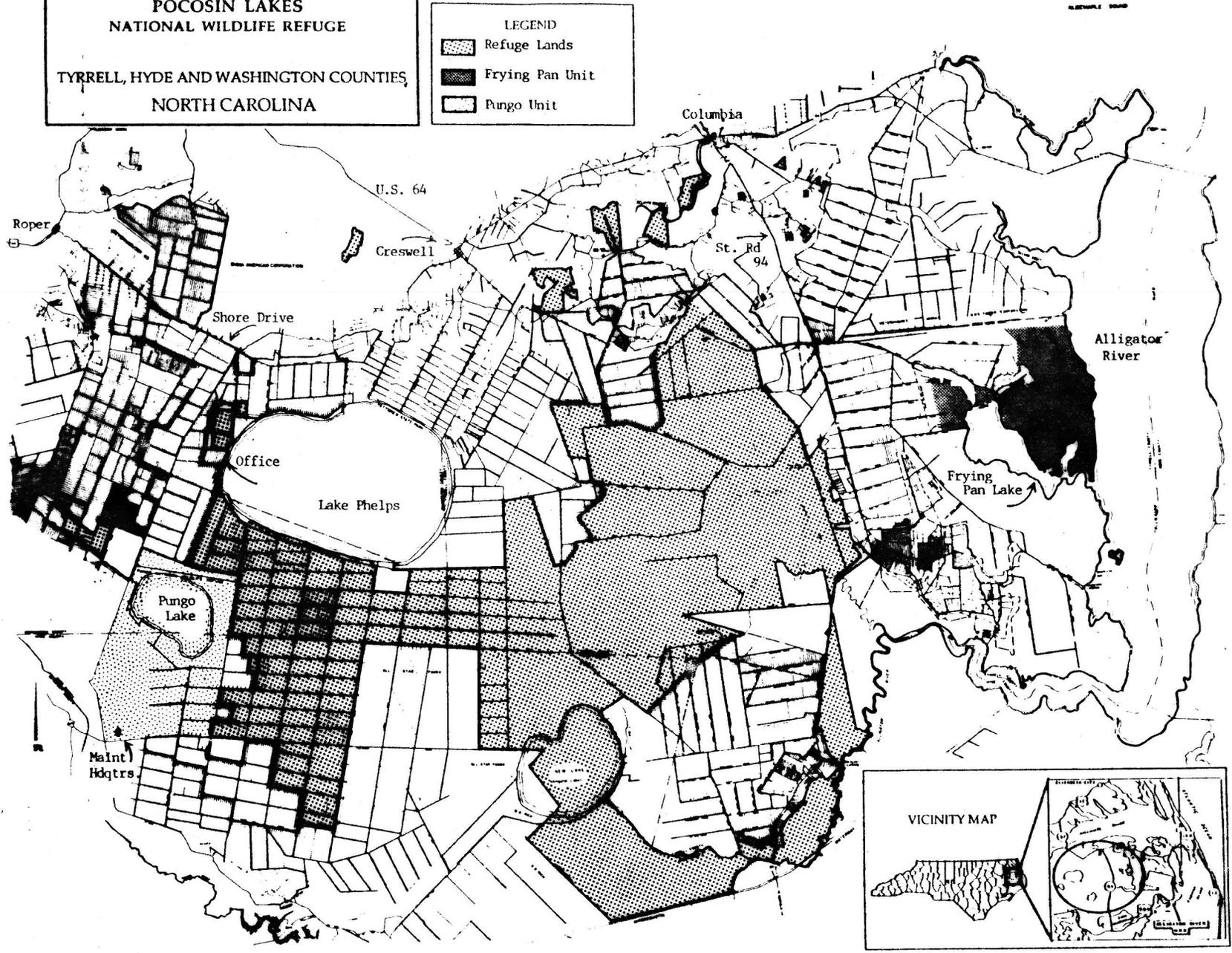


FIGURE 1

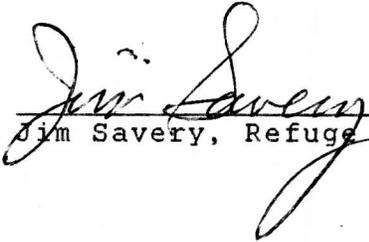
CONSISTENCY DETERMINATION

PROPOSED ACTION: Expand the release of red wolves (canis rufus) from Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in Dare County to Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in Washington, Tyrrell and Hyde Counties.

PROPONENT: U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 4, Atlanta, GA

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to release 2 - 4 red wolf families on Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. The schedule for release is 1 or 2 adult pairs with 3 - 5 pups during summer - fall 1993 and the same number during summer - fall 1994. Each released wolf will be outfitted with a radio collar or abdominal implant for future radio locations. Tracking red wolves will be from vehicles on refuge roads and aircraft.

CONSISTENCY DETERMINATION: No areas of environmental concern (AECs) will be impacted by the proposed project. In accordance with the Federal consistency requirements of Section 307 of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, the project has been reviewed for consistency with the North Carolina Coastal Management Program. Based on that review, it has been determined that the project is consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the program.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jim Savery, Refuge Manager

6-18-93  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

COMPATIBILITY AND FUNDING STATEMENT

FOR

RELEASE OF RED WOLVES ON POCOSIN LAKES NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE  
CRESWELL, NORTH CAROLINA

The Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1990 under authority contained in the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, 16 USC 742(a)-754, 742f(a)(4), 742f(b)(1).

The reintroduction of the endangered red wolf onto Pocosin Lakes NWR will be an "experimental" nonessential population. The experimental population status is designated because section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act authorizes more discretion in devising an active management program for an experimental population than for a regularly listed species. Endangered species evaluations have been conducted in plans for the introduction of red wolves. Therefore, the program will be integrated with the management of other wildlife species and programs on the refuge.

Endangered species management is also the number one management objective for the refuge. All refuge programs will be monitored to minimize problem areas. No conflicts are envisioned between the red wolf reintroduction and any existing or anticipated Federal agency actions or traditional public uses of the refuge or surrounding lands. Therefore, the reintroduction of the red wolf to Pocosin Lakes Refuge is compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established, and is in compliance with the Refuge Administration Act. The cost of the reintroduction program will be \$175,000 for the first year. Approximately 99% of the cost will be charged to the Endangered Species Program. The remainder of the cost is well within the budget of the refuge.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jim Savery, Refuge Manager

6-18-93  
Date

## SECTION 7 EVALUATION

REGION: 4 (Southeast Region)

LOCATION (ATTACHED MAP): Pocosin Lakes NWR, Washington, Tyrrell, and Hyde Counties, North Carolina.

LISTED SPECIES OR CRITICAL HABITAT CONSIDERED: Alligator, bald eagle, red-cockaded woodpecker, and peregrine falcon.

NAME AND DESCRIPTION OF ACTION: To expand the eastern North Carolina red wolf reintroduction project westward to encompass Pocosin Lakes NWR, thereby providing habitat for releases of additional red wolves and for red wolves dispersing from Alligator River NWR.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTION: To recover the endangered red wolf via reintroductions into the species' historic range. The recovery potential will be enhanced by increasing the size of the eastern North Carolina reintroduction area to a size capable of supporting a viable population large enough to prevent extirpation by natural catastrophes.

### EXPLANATION OF IMPACT OF ACTION ON LISTED SPECIES OR CRITICAL HABITAT:

The reintroduction and establishment of a population of red wolves that would utilize the Pocosin Lakes NWR and adjacent areas would not impact any endangered or threatened species or their critical habitats except the red wolf itself. It would have a beneficial effect on the red wolf by increasing the numbers of wild animals, thus moving toward recovery.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO AVOID ADVERSE IMPACTS OR ENHANCE SPECIES CONSERVATION:

None.

REVISED: 7/88

SECTION 7 EVALUATION

PAGE 2

PROJECT LEADER V. Mary Henry DATE May 19, 1993

MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT: \_\_\_\_\_ NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT: X

COMMENTS:

FWE FIELD SUPERVISOR: W. M. Gault DATE 6/10/93

MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT: \_\_\_\_\_ NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT: X

COMMENTS:

ARD \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT: \_\_\_\_\_ NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS:

ARD-FWE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT: \_\_\_\_\_ NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS:

REGIONAL DIRECTOR \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS:

BIOLOGICAL OPINION: \_\_\_\_\_

## PROPOSAL TO EXPAND THE ALLIGATOR RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE RED WOLF REINTRODUCTION PROJECT

### BACKGROUND

Between September 1987 and August 1991, 36 captive-born red wolves were released at the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Additionally, approximately 15 wolves were born in the wild during that period. Thus, 51 wolves have been involved in the Service's attempt to restore a wolf population to the refuge. As of August 21, 1991, the population included 28 to 31 wolves. They inhabit a reintroduction area encompassing approximately 250,000 acres (200,000 acres of Federal land and 50,000 acres of private land).

Unfortunately, the reintroduction area probably cannot support all these wolves; some young animals will disperse outside the area. Dispersal has already begun and will continue well into the future as 14 of the wolves (70 percent of the population) are less than 16 months of age. In addition to dispersal, the wolf population is threatened by various stochastic events (e.g., disease outbreaks).

Threats to the wolf population can be minimized by increasing its size. The size of the reintroduction area limits the size of the wolf population. Fortunately, the reintroduction area can be enlarged by integrating Federal, state, and private lands to the south and west of the Alligator River NWR into the program. For example, Pocosin Lakes NWR is an ideal addition because of its remoteness, proximity to Alligator River NWR, and healthy prey populations. Inclusion of Pocosin Lakes NWR would provide the Service the impetus and justification to query citizens about allowing wolves to inhabit remote private land adjacent to or near Pocosin Lakes NWR. Additionally, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission could be queried about allowing wolves to inhabit state land in Hyde, Tyrrell, and Washington Counties (e.g., Gull Rock State Game Lands).

Through inclusion of Pocosin Lakes NWR, and with cooperation from private citizens and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, the reintroduction area could come to encompass over 500,000 acres of ideal wolf habitat. With adequate funding (approximately \$250,000 per year), it is reasonable to expect that 50 to 100 wolves could be restored to such an area within 5 to 10 years.

The significance of such a population is three fold. First, an important objective of the Red Wolf Recovery Plan is to maintain 225 animals in the wild. The "northeastern North Carolina red wolf project" could singlehandedly assume responsibility for 25 to 50 percent of that objective. Since such a project would utilize the infrastructure that the Service created for the Alligator River NWR reintroduction, a significant monetary savings would be realized over a 5- to 10-year period compared with the cost of developing a similar population elsewhere in the Southeast.

Second, at the species level, a population of 50 to 100 wolves would provide significant protection to the already limited genetic diversity of the red wolf. Third, at the population level, a group of 50 to 100 wolves would be able to withstand many stochastic events that threaten smaller populations.

Because of the controversial nature of wolf programs, expansion of the reintroduction onto lands in Hyde, Tyrrell, and Washington Counties should proceed slowly. The former and present red wolf coordinators and the Alligator River NWR red wolf biologist met with Mr. Tom Ellis, special assistant to Agriculture Commissioner Jim Graham, in March 1991 regarding expansion westward. Mr. Ellis expressed no objections to the Service's initiating an information and education effort and making contact with local officials and constituents to determine support for such an expansion. Mr. Ellis was very helpful in identifying key contacts and problems to be addressed.

Listed below is a tentative expansion schedule that was developed in consultation with the managers of Alligator River, Pocosin Lakes, and Mattamuskeet NWRs. It is planned to use the next 2 years to establish the foundation needed to release one to two families of red wolves at Pocosin Lakes NWR during August 1993.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE**

September to October 1991: The red wolf species coordinator and the Alligator River NWR manager will present the proposal to expand the red wolf project in eastern North Carolina to Regional Office personnel.

December 1991 to February 1992: Alligator River NWR field personnel and North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission personnel will conduct canid surveys on Pocosin Lakes NWR and adjacent private land.

February 1992: The red wolf species coordinator and the managers of the Alligator River, Pocosin Lakes, and Mattamuskeet NWRs will host informal meetings with the commissioners of Dare, Hyde, Tyrrell, and Washington Counties to discuss the possibility of releasing wolves on Pocosin Lakes NWR. These meetings will give the Service the opportunity to test the "political waters" and give the commissioners the opportunity to participate in the early stages of planning.

March 1992: The Alligator River NWR manager will initiate the paperwork to purchase a four-wheel-drive vehicle.

August 1992: The Alligator River NWR manager will initiate the paperwork to hire two permanent GS-455-5/6/7 range technicians who will be assigned to the red wolf project.

September 1992: The red wolf species coordinator and Alligator River NWR personnel will brief congressional delegations, the North Carolina

Wildlife Resources Commission, and the North Carolina Agriculture Commission.

October 1-15, 1992: The red wolf species coordinator and the managers of the Alligator River, Pocosin Lakes, and Mattamuskeet NWRs will host formal public meetings in Dare, Hyde, Tyrrell, and Washington Counties to:

1. Discuss the results of and solicit views about the 5-year experiment to reintroduce red wolves at the Alligator River NWR.
2. Present the proposal to expand the red wolf project to include Pocosin Lakes NWR.

November 1992: The red wolf species coordinator will present a summary of the 5-year experiment, along with public views about the proposal to expand the red wolf program, to the Regional Director.

December 1992: The red wolf species coordinator will submit a proposed rule package and an environmental assessment concerning expansion of the red wolf project to include Pocosin Lakes NWR.

December 1992: Alligator River NWR field personnel will construct four breeding/acclimation pens at remote sites on Pocosin Lakes NWR.

December 1992 to February 1993: Alligator River NWR field personnel and North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission personnel will conduct canid surveys on Pocosin Lakes NWR and adjacent private land.

January 1993: Alligator River NWR field personnel will transport four breeding pairs to breeding/acclimation pens at Pocosin Lakes NWR.

April to May 1993: The red wolf species coordinator will submit the final rule package and environmental assessment concerning expansion of the red wolf program to include Pocosin Lakes NWR.

August 1993: Alligator River NWR field personnel will release and monitor one to two families of red wolves at Pocosin Lakes NWR.

#### **BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS**

The effects of the proposed expansion on the FY 1992 and FY 1993 budgets are not profound. No significant additions will be needed to carry out scheduled activities during FY 1992. Approximately \$55,000 will be needed to carry out scheduled activities during FY 1993 (\$25,000 for a biologist's salary; \$20,000 for a vehicle; \$10,000 for acclimation, vet services, and transmitters; \$2,000 for aerial monitoring). The additional funding will be provided through the endangered species recovery program and will be dependent on a congressional add-on specifically for the red wolf.