

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Joe Madison

NC Program Manager/Wildlife Biologist

Eastern North Carolina Red Wolf Population

Red Wolf Recovery Program

joseph_madison@fws.gov

(252) 475-8259

October 19, 2023

Update on the Eastern North Carolina Red Wolf Population (ENC RWP)

- Population

- The current known population of wild Red Wolves (e.g., radio-collared individuals) in the ENC RWP is 11, with the estimated total population of approximately 21-23 Red Wolves, including 8 pups that are currently too small to collar. All collared red wolves have orange collars, 6 of the 11 are GPS collars.
- There has been 1 mortality of a wild Red Wolf since the August PCC and it's a significant one. On September 26th, the breeding male (2323) of the Milltail Pack on Alligator River NWR was a mortality. As many of you know, 2323 was born in the wild on St. Vincent NWR in 2019 and translocated and released onto Alligator River NWR in early 2021. There he paired with a resident wild female Red Wolf (2225) and successfully produced two litters of Red Wolves over the past two years, the first in the wild in North Carolina since 2018. Although the cause of death has not been officially determined pending necropsy results, it is a suspected vehicle strike on Highway 64. About a month his death, the Milltail Pack had been drawn to a roadkill bear carcass on Highway 64. Prior to that, the Milltail pack was very rarely near that highway based on extensive monitoring with radio telemetry and remote sensing cameras. However, since they found the roadkill, they have been traveling to that area periodically. His mortality and the specifics surrounding it have highlighted the need for a more coordinated protocol among the agencies involved regarding the reporting and removal of roadkill, particularly in areas where we have active Red Wolf packs.
- There were also 2 mortalities of significance that occurred in mid-July that were briefly mentioned on the August PCC. On July 11th, a Red Wolf pup (2522F) was reported injured on Pocosin Lakes NWR. The pup later died as a result of her injuries, despite extensive efforts to save her, including at the NCSU Veterinary Hospital. Later that same day a mortality notification was received for her father also on Pocosin Lakes NWR, who was the breeding male (2132M) of the family group released from the SAFE population on central Pocosin Lakes in late May. Necropsy results are pending and both mortalities are part of an ongoing law

enforcement investigation. Shortly after these mortalities, the breeding female (2287F) from that family group dispersed from the refuge, which was the first time any of the Red Wolves from that family group left the refuge. Unfortunately, she later became involved with the depredation of chickens on multiple occasions and was hanging out near houses during the day. Consequently, the Red Wolf field team captured her on September 29th and she was placed back into the SAFE population. Extensive monitoring over the last 3 months indicates that the remaining pups from this family group were likely abandoned after the mortalities and the breeding female moved off the refuge.

- In early August, USFWS law enforcement issued a press release requesting information and offering a \$5,000 reward for information regarding the mortality that occurred on private land on 5/18/23 of a newly released male (2326M), which was confirmed to be a gunshot mortality. The reward was later raised to \$15,000 after outside groups added to the amount.
- Family Groups
 - The breeding female (2225F), 5 yearlings (2410M, 2411M, 2412F, 2413F and 2414F) and 6 pups (as of September 2023) remain within their expected area of use on Alligator River NWR. One of the male yearlings has shown early signs of dispersing.
 - The breeding pair (2361F and 2307M) and 2 pups (as of October 2023) remain within their expected area of use on and adjacent to Pocosin Lakes NWR.
- There is a pair remaining in the wild on St. Vincent NWR, but there were no signs of a successful litter this year.

- Management

- Ground telemetry conducted several days a week in order to monitor all collared red wolves on a regularly basis and sterilized coyotes periodically. There are currently 26 sterilized coyotes with active radio collars.
- Over 45 remote sensing cameras deployed and monitored on a weekly basis throughout the ENC RWP on refuges and private land with landowner permission.
- USFWS has drafted the 2023-2024 release plan. It will be posted on the Red Wolf Recovery Program website no later than December 1st. The release plan will generally follow the same priorities as this year including taking advantage of all pup fostering opportunities and attempting to pair wild red wolves with red

wolves from SAFE population and leaving them in acclimation pens through whelping. There will be up to 5 acclimation pens in use this winter depending on what occurs with the wild population out on the landscape and capture success.

- Trapping season will generally start around the beginning of November and go through March with efforts geared towards capturing unpaired wild red wolves to place in acclimation pens, collar pups born in 2023 starting in January and to sterilize coyotes in as many areas as possible with a priority focus on areas in close proximity to where we are trying to establish new red wolf pairs and adjacent to existing red wolves.
- Road closures implemented on Alligator River NWR starting in mid-April were lifted on September 1st, but there has been a high degree of public activity and pressure on the red wolves and other wildlife in that area since the lifting of the closure. The roads will go back to being closed around October 23rd. Based on the current Refuge management plan, those roads cannot remain closed indefinitely.
- The road closure implemented on Pocosin Lakes NWR at the beginning of August remains in effect because of people repeatedly getting and staying too close to the red wolf family group in that area.
- Meet with WRC multiple times a month on a set schedule, and as needed, to coordinate canid management within the ENC RWP.
- Received the final red wolf road ecology report from the Western Transportation Institute titled *“Impacts of Roads and Traffic on the Red Wolf: Potential Avoidance, Mitigation and Compensation Strategies”*. The report will be used to inform and support funding and projects to reduce the likelihood of vehicle strike mortalities within the ENC RWP.
- A project proposal submitted as a collaboration between USGS, Clemson University and the Red Wolf Recovery Program through USFWS’s regional Science Support Partnership has been approved. The project is titled *“Quantifying Socio-environmental Landscape Conditions for Red Wolf Translocation, Movement and Connectivity”*. It is a multi-year project involving PhD student research and will serve to help inform management decisions within the ENC RWP and beyond, as applicable.
- Two Student Conservation Association interns start their 6 month paid internships with the Red Wolf Recovery Program on October 23rd. One local student is also doing an internship with the Program from October through January as part of a high school internship program.

Outreach

- We are continuing to contact private landowners where we know red wolves are spending time based on tracking/monitoring to make them aware of the presence of red wolves on their property and to address any potential concerns or issues.
- Red Wolf Recovery Program staff are promptly responded to all calls, texts or emails received from landowners and members of the public regarding their questions, concerns, sightings and potential issues, including addressing time sensitive calls 24/7.
- Continuing to work towards multiple Prey for the Pack and other agreements geared toward providing access, monitoring and tolerance of red wolves on private lands, as well as potentially allowing pup fostering and releases on their lands. A few new agreements signed recently including one with an ownership group with red wolf use on their lands in the past and excellent habitat for red wolves. Continuing to explore ways to expand the program, develop companion programs or see if it would fit under existing programs through other Federal agencies, that may also potentially include the ability to have some sort of pay for presence program.
- Kat Ramos, with North Carolina Wildlife Federation, is currently spending multiple mornings and evenings a week out on Alligator River NWR speaking with visitors about Red Wolves to provide outreach and to keep them behaving more appropriately, including keeping safer distances and moving along.