

MEMORANDUM

To: Leopoldo Miranda, ARD Ecological Services, USFWS, Region 4

From: Dallas Miner, Program Specialist, USFWS

Subject: Structure of a Program Evaluation of the Red Wolf Recovery project on the Albemarle Peninsula, North Carolina (AP).

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) has requested “an immediate programmatic evaluation using the abundance of existing data to determine feasibility of achieving a stable ‘self-sustaining’ red wolf population on federal lands as prescribed in the Red Wolf Recovery Plan.”

The USFWS has agreed to conduct a program evaluation of the Non-essential, Experimental Red Wolf Reintroduction Program based at the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge and including a five county red wolf recovery area on the AP. The WRC is a key collaborator in the red wolf recovery program and, therefore, should have substantial involvement in the design, guidance and analysis of the program evaluation.

I have completed an extensive literature review and conducted numerous personal interviews with stakeholders regarding the Red Wolf recovery project and have concluded that the Program Evaluation of the project should be structured around three components: 1) Science 2) Management and 3) Human Dimensions affecting the non-essential, experimental, red wolf reintroduction project on the AP.

Science

The Service advocates that management decisions should be based on the best scientific information available. Given the need to proceed with the Program Evaluation within a reasonable timeframe, it is unlikely that the Service has the time or resources to conduct “new science.” However, considerable science-based literature exists that is relevant to this project and the Service has extensive data on the population dynamics of the experimental Red Wolf recovery effort. According to the WRC, “The results of this evaluation should be used to determine the appropriateness of continuing the experimental program..” Questions that should be addressed:

- What does today’s science tell us about the likelihood of success for this project? Are the project goals outlined in the original Red Wolf Recovery Plan still attainable? Are there science-based recommendations that can be offered to improve the prospects of success for this project? Or, from a science viewpoint, are there impediments to achieving the goals that cannot be overcome? Perhaps the central question is whether or not the current coyote/hybrid “swarm” occurring in the AP that threatens red wolf genetic integrity can be overcome? A science based assessment of the viability of the “place-holder” management tool as a means of successfully containing hybridization with coyotes is required. The relevant scientific literature contains a near-consensus view that unless hybridization is contained, no red wolf

reintroduction program will succeed in developing a sustainable, genetically true red wolf population in the wild.

- Are the habitat conditions on public lands within the AP conducive to holding a sustainable red wolf population overtime? Or, are the wolves destined to occupy other habitat which may be on private lands?
- How will climate change and sea level rise affect the current recovery area on the AP in the next 50 to 100 years?
- While this program evaluation will focus on the North Carolina Non- essential, Experimental red wolf population, there is considerable reference in the scientific literature that ultimately for the red wolf recovery to fully succeed, sustainable populations in at least three distinct locations will be required. What progress been made in identifying at least two other sites?

Management

This part of the Program Evaluation should focus on how the Service has managed this project. It should not focus on individuals but completely on management decisions made by the Service especially on relevant rules or other formal guidance or statements of policy issued by the Service.

- Have the rules/policies/guidance issued by the Service been followed by the Service?
- Did the Service in issuing the rules governing the program offer the public expectations for red wolf removal from private property that cannot be fully met?
- What level of management-related support has this project been given by the Service? The Alligator River NWR is managed primarily for migratory birds. Has this been an impediment to habitat management of benefit to red wolves?
- The scientific literature often refers to the need for “intensive” management of reintroduced species for successful recovery. Has the project received adequate funding and institutional support to meet its goals? Based on science-based recommendations, how much future funding will be required to achieve success on the AP?
- Is the current management structure equipped to handle an increasing number of requests for red wolf removal from private property. Does it have adequate facilities to handle captured wolves? Do the financial and institutional resources exist to meet the evolving environmental, social and management challenges to meet the recovery goals.

Human Dimensions

This portion of the evaluation should address a basic question...is there enough institutional and public support to justify continuation of the project and/or are there changes to the project that will strengthen its position institutionally and in the eyes of stakeholders? It is well known that there are strong supporters of this project within the Service and among stakeholders. There are others, especially among stakeholders, that have become firmly opposed to the project and would prefer to see it terminated. As always, there are individuals who are in the middle on this issue. Future management decisions on this project by the Service should be based on the best science available. However, institutional, political, and financial considerations will surely influence those decisions. By example, the

Service's future, long-term relationship with the NC Wildlife Commission, as well as, the Governor's office, state legislature and Congressional delegation could be influenced by future management decisions on this project. The Service has legislated responsibilities to follow and its own conservation mission, goals and strategies. The Service also recognizes the critical importance of public/private partnerships in reaching its conservation goals and respecting the rights of landowners who are affected by its actions. The impacts of this project on affected landowners in the five counties surrounding the Red Wolf recovery area should be explored along with landowner attitudes toward the project. In my discussions with affected landowners there were varying attitudes toward Red Wolves, the Service and the project. It was also apparent that most landowners knew very little about how or if the wolves were affecting them and whether or not the project had value to them.

The Program Evaluation will be carefully scrutinized by a variety of institutions, organizations and individuals and could be a factor in future legal actions. It is highly improbable that any form of consensus will be reached on future management decisions on the Red Wolf project so it is imperative that the Service conduct the evaluation in as transparent a manner as possible with as much credibility as it can offer.