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DATE: December 1, 1998

United States Government
MEMORANDUM

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF : Brian T. Kelly, Red Wolf Field Projects Coordinator, Manteo,
NC BTK

SUBJECT: Take provision of our rules

TO: V. Gary Henry, Red Wolf Recovery Coordinator, Asheville, NC

After discussing the issue with the field crew and consulting with Jack Baker, I have, at this time, decided not to issue a letter giving permission to Lux Farms to take (trap) wolves off of their land. The primary reason for this is a concern over what such a letter may mean for red wolf recovery in NENC. Once we issue a letter to Lux Farms, I am concerned that others who have requested wolves be removed will want similar permission. Furthermore, I am concerned how landowners who are "on the fence" with respect to our program will react to the potential to be granted such permission. While it is true the issuance of such a letter is up to us and is not guaranteed, a set of defensible criteria for who is granted permission and who is not is problematic. Also, once the "cat is out of the bag" it is certainly possible that we will get more requests for removal. I cannot justify the potential risk this represents to what we have accomplished in NENC the past 11 years. On one hand, granting permission to landowners to take wolves would allow the field crew to focus on recovery. However, on the other hand, I am troubled by the potential impact such removals will have on hybridization and on the stability and sustainability of the only free ranging red wolf population.

I have attached a memo I recently wrote to the field crew that elaborates on my concerns about the effect such removals may have on our ability to recover this species. This morning Art and Michael caught a coyote on Lux Farms. Although not proof of the effect of such removals, the occurrence of a coyote in an area that we removed several wolves from last year, and traditionally had not caught coyotes in, is consistent with the idea that such removals contribute to the colonization of coyotes in NENC which then contributes to hybridization between coyotes and red wolves. Therefore, our current rules as they relate to removing wolves from private land simply because they are present is likely contributing to what we all agree is the biggest threat to red wolf recovery—hybridization. We need to resolve to change our regulations to reflect that we will remove wolves only when there is an associated problem such as a depredation.

We need to change our rules. Our program has evolved dramatically since the time of the original reintroduction. The paradigm by which we operate needs to change if we are to move forward effectively with recovery. We all agreed that there are several major issues facing recovery (hybridization, new site, and monitoring . . . among others). We cannot adequately address such issues while at the same time responding to requests to remove wolves from private land that are not causing a problem; and should not issue letters for take given the detrimental effect it may have on the red wolf recovery.

cc: M. Bryant, Manager, Alligator River NWR, Manteo, NC
Chris Lucash, Red Wolf Recovery, Townsend, TN
Red Wolf Crew, Alligator River NWR, Manteo, NC