Red Wolf Recovery Program Meeting Notes

Every quarter, the Service and its partners in red wolf recovery meet via a conference call to provide updates on the status of red wolf related actions. The purpose of these calls is to 1) provide a forum for regular and effective coordination on current actions and collaborative efforts among all partners in red wolf recovery and 2) provide other interested parties and the public with updates on the status of red wolf conservation efforts. The updates the Service provides on these calls can be found below.

January 16, 2020

GENERAL UPDATES

Red Wolf Recovery Program

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Red Wolf Recovery Program is focusing on:

1. Updating the Red Wolf Recovery Plan
2. Increasing the captive populations to maintain the genetic health of the population and support future reintroductions
3. Managing the nonessential experimental population in North Carolina

The updated recovery plan will follow FWS's fairly new Recovery Planning Implementation Process (RPI). RPI is a three-document approach consisting of:

1. Species Status Assessment (SSA) – this document evaluates species viability and provides the foundational biological information to develop and support a recovery plan.
    a. The red wolf SSA was completed in April 2018
2. Recovery Plan – this recovery plan is more concise than what recovery plans have traditionally been in the past. They contain the Endangered Species Act statutorily required elements: recovery criteria, recovery actions, and time and cost estimates.
3. Recovery Implementation Strategy – this document itemizes the prioritized on-the-ground activities needed to implement the actions identified in the recovery plan.

To help ensure a transparent, joint stakeholder/agency/partner process based on the best scientific information, we will be contracting out facilitation and modeling services.

WILD POPULATION

North Carolina Nonessential Experimental Population (NEP)

The management of the wild red wolf population in the NC NEP is being conducted under the 10(j) rule that was updated in 1995 and under the permanent injunction put in place by a Federal court in November 2018 regarding take.

The current known population of red wolves (e.g. radio-collared individuals) in the NC NEP is 12 red wolves and the estimated total population is approximately 20 red wolves.

2019 was the first year since the reintroduction of red wolves in North Carolina in 1987 that there were no documented red wolf pups born in the wild.

- Additionally, there are currently no breeding pairs of red wolves in the NC NEP.

There were 5 red wolf mortalities in 2019:

- 2 vehicle strikes
- 1 gunshot
- 1 suspected foul play
- 1 unknown cause of death

To increase the genetic diversity and sustain the wild red wolf population in the NC NEP, we are currently attempting to translocate red wolves to potentially create 3 new breeding pairs within the NC NEP. All activities associated with this action are being conducted on Federal lands. Those activities include:

- Building three acclimation pens (two on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and one on Pocosin Lakes NWR). Defenders of Wildlife paid for the majority of the materials to build the pens.
- Conducting capture operations on Alligator River NWR, Pocosin Lakes NWR and St. Vincent NWR (red wolf island propagation site off of the coast of Florida and key component to red wolf recovery) since the beginning of December.
- When the appropriate red wolves are captured they will be put in pens together for up to thirty days in pairs that include one red wolf from the territory where the pen is located and a red wolf new to that territory. The hope is that the pair will bond to each other during that time and the red wolf new to that territory will be more likely to remain there when released.
- Conducted a public meeting on December 10 to inform the public, particularly the local stakeholders, on what actions we were taking.

So far we have mixed success in capturing the specific red wolves and there is currently one red wolf in each of the three acclimation pens. Decisions on who to have where once they are captured are re-evaluated as additional red wolves are captured to try and attain the best possible

scenarios with regards to successful breeding pairs. Red wolves that have previously been captured are extremely trap savvy and difficult to re-capture.

In addition, the breeding male on St. Vincent NWR was killed in June 2019 so a male red wolf has been transferred from the North Carolina Zoo to St. Vincent NWR and will be released on the island when capture operations have concluded.

We are having two screenings of the film "Red Wolf Revival" free to the public in January. There was one screening on January 10, 2020 at the Pocosin Lakes NWR Visitor Center and there will be a second screening on January 24, 2020 at the Alligator River NWR Visitor Center, which will be followed by a Q & A and panel discussion with individuals associated with red wolf recovery from FWS, NGO's, WRC and a local landowner.

COMMUNICATION/OUTREACH/EDUCATION

Biomaterial Request Protocol

On occasion, remains of wolves may be used to create wolf mounts, pelts, skulls, and/or skeletons for educational purposes (i.e., biomaterial). To help FWS and Red Wolf Species Survival Plan (SSP) facilities track the location, availability and use of these materials, Craig Standridge (Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium, SSP Education Advisor) has developed a Biomaterial Inventory Form. Additionally, to help make the best use of the materials we have, Standridge developed a Biomaterial Request Form.

Facilities that want to have a biomaterial prepared or obtain an existing biomaterial for use in educational programs should submit a request to the SSP Education Advisor. The request form can be found at https://forms.gle/MywoZbJ7MofQY17j9

The Education Advisor will review the request, including whether the creation and/or use of the biomaterial benefits conservation of the species, and will forward his recommendation to the SSP Coordinator and Red Wolf Recovery Lead for approval and authorization.

Contact:

Craig Standridge, Red Wolf SSP Education Advisor

Craig.Standridge@pdza.org

253-404-3690

RESEARCH

NAS Taxonomic Studies

FWS contracted the National Academy of Sciences to assist with taxonomic studies of the red wolf. The project includes two activities: 1) a review of applications to clarify the taxonomy of unidentified wild canids in southern Louisiana and other geographical areas, and 2) the development of a research strategy to examine the evolutionary relationships between ancient red wolves and contemporary red wolves.

A request for proposals was published on November 14, 2019; applications were accepted through December 3, 2019. NAS received 3 proposals. NAS will be sending FWS their review and ranking of these proposals shortly. Based on its review and the report from NAS, the Service will select a project and request a full proposal.

Research Request Protocol

To ensure research involving red wolves or its parts (e.g., blood/tissue samples) is conducted in accordance with regulatory requirements, a new research request protocol has been developed. All research, whether on live wolves or blood/tissue, whether in your possession or located elsewhere, has to be authorized, or in some cases, permitted. The following protocol (see diagram below) will help track the use of specimens and ensure the correct authorization or permit is obtained.

All research requests are to be submitted to the Red Wolf Recovery Coordinator.

Proposals will first be reviewed by a committee consisting of: the FWS Red Wolf Recovery Lead and/or other Service employees with the Red Wolf Program, the American Red Wolf Species Survival Plan (SSP) Coordinator or delegate, and the Arkansas Center for Biodiversity Collections (ACBC) Collection Manager to determine if the proposed research is a benefit to the conservation of the species or a valid use of the specimen (i.e., enhances propagation or survival of the species). The committee will also ensure that the requested research will not result in unnecessary overlap or hardship on SSP institutions. ACBC will also weigh in on the availability of requested specimens to ensure rare specimens or all of a particular specimen/individual are not depleted.

If the proposed research benefits the conservation of the species, the FWS Red Wolf Recovery Lead will determine if a permit is needed to conduct the proposed research. If a permit is needed, the researcher will be contacted and directed to the application form and instructions for submitting the application to the FWS's Southeast Regional Office. The form can be found at https://www.fws.gov/forms/3-200-55.pdf. Note that application packages should be submitted at least three months prior to the start of your proposed activities. If you are renewing or amending a permit, packages should be received by at least 30 days prior to the expiration of the valid permit.

If the approved research does not require a permit, but does request use of specimens already banked, the FWS Red Wolf Recovery Lead will provide, in writing, authorization for the transfer and use of specimens. See diagram below for research request protocol.

GENERAL UPDATES

Red Wolf Recovery Program

As mentioned on the last call, one of the current focuses for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Red Wolf Recovery Program is updating the Red Wolf Recovery Plan. To help ensure a transparent, joint stakeholder/agency/partner process based on the best scientific information, we are contracting out facilitation and modeling services. That process has started. We received a couple of proposals this week which we are reviewing to determine next steps. We anticipate contracted services to begin in a couple of months.

WILD POPULATION

North Carolina Nonessential Experimental Population (NEP)

The management of the wild red wolf population in the NC NEP is being conducted under the 10(j) rule updated in 1995 along with the permanent injunction put in place by a Federal court in November 2018 regarding take.

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 18 - 20 red wolves.

- We lost the radio collar signal from a really old collar on one male red wolf in January. However, we also found tracks on the bombing range of a female whose old radio collar died over a year ago.

There has been one mortality in 2020 resulting from gunshot on private property. The law enforcement case is open so no other details can be shared.

During this past winter's trapping and translocation efforts, 7 red wolves were captured between the NC NEP and St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge (NWR).

- After their captures, one of the Milltail males was translocated to Pocosin Lakes NWR and placed in an acclimation pen with the female red wolf from the Pungo area until February 5th.
- After her capture, the previous Milltail breeding female was placed in the acclimation pen in the Milltail area of Alligator River NWR with the male red wolf translocated from St. Vincent NWR. They were released together February 18th. The daughter of the Milltail breeding female had also been captured and she was released at the same time and place as the pair from the acclimation pen.
- All red wolves captured were released wearing bright orange VHF radio collars to help the public distinguish them.

Tracking has been very limited because of the COVID-19 measures and we have not been able to conduct any aerial telemetry for several weeks.

- Some ground telemetry is occurring on the refuges and we have increased it this week to try and determine if any denning is occurring. No sign of denning yet.
- Based on limited tracking, there are no red wolf pairs currently together.
- The male translocated to Alligator River NWR from St. Vincent NWR remained with the Milltail female and/or her daughter for several weeks after release from the acclimation pen, but we have not located him in about three weeks. Both of those Milltail females remain on the refuge within the areas they are typically found.
- The female red wolf in the Pungo area of Pocosin Lakes NWR remains in her traditional territory and the male translocated there from Alligator River NWR is usually within or immediately adjacent to that territory, but not with her.
- We are hopeful that perhaps one or both of the pairs in acclimation pens mated before they separated, but there's no sign of that to this point.

The male translocated from NC Zoo to St. Vincent NWR was released onto the island on February 14th and was soon with the other red wolves.

- All five radio-collared red wolves (two adults, one juvenile and 2 yearlings) are remaining together at this point, but there has been no sign of denning yet.

Prey of the Pack

FWS, through its Partners for Fish and Wildlife program (PFW) in partnership with the North Carolina Wildlife Federation (NCWF) and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) will be initiating a program to help incentivize interested and willing private landowners to create/improve habitat for red wolf prey species on their lands (e.g. early successional forest). In general, the FWS PFW would pay for a portion of the cost for landowner's to do habitat work on their lands in exchange for agreeing to be tolerant of red wolves on their property and potentially allowing for some level of monitoring by FWS personnel.

We have old used radio collars that are no longer in use that we could provide to folks if they are interested in using them for educational purposes. Contact Morgan Lewis at (252) 475-8350 for more information.

There is a map of the historic range of red wolves on the Red Wolf Recovery Program website. If anyone is wanting to print of that map at a larger size for educational purposes, we have a higher resolution version we can send to you electronically. Contact Morgan Lewis at (252) 475-8350 for more information.

RESEARCH

<u>NAS Taxonomic Studies</u>

On the last call, FWS updated everyone on the status of work contracted with NAS to assist with taxonomic studies of unidentified wild canids in southern Louisiana and other geographical

areas. Applications were accepted through December 3, 2019. NAS received 3 proposals. FWS has received NAS's report on their review of the applications and their recommendations. In short, NAS's review found that two of the applications together could yield reliable conclusions about the identity of canids in southwestern LA and southeastern TX and recommended funding specific aspects of each of the two applications. FWS is currently working to finalize the work with the two applicants and anticipates finalizing contracts very soon.

The public report can be found online at https://www.nap.edu/read/25661/chapter/1