U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Red Wolf News

Volume 1, Issue 3 | July through September 1999 | November 29, 1999

Hurricanes and Red Wolves

Wild wolf population in Northeastern North Carolina

- Wolf population is estimated at about 82, 42 of which are radio collared. Five hybrids and one coyote are also radio collared in the recovery area.
- Wolves range over about one million acres of public and private land.
- Known changes to the wolf population this quarter were: two deaths, both of unknown causes.

It has been a busy hurricane season for the Atlantic states so far this year. Although most of the giant storms were misses, two have hit very close to the red wolf recovery area in northeastern North Carolina.

On August 30th, Hurricane Dennis began with much rain and wind. The storm stayed nearly stationary for several days offshore. Wind damage was minimal, but some areas experienced flooding.

On September 15 , Hurricane Floyd came ashore in southern North Carolina at 115 mph and continued north just east of Raleigh. Four to nearly 20 inches of rain fell in some areas, many of them still drenched from Hurricane Dennis. The storm path was west of the red wolf recovery area, however we did suffer from some isolated flooding and wind damage.

Neither of the storms caused any known wolf injuries or deaths. Two enclosures at the captive facility on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge did suffer some damage when fallen trees landed on them. Fortunately, the wolves in the enclosures were not injured and did not escape. At the first threat of a local hurricane landfall, all of the members of the captive breeding facility are radio collared. They stay radio collared until the end of the hurricane season so their movements can be monitored in the event of an escape.

The only death of red wolf that can be associated with a hurricane was on Bull's Island, part of Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge off the coast of South Carolina. In September of 1989, Hurricane Hugo hit Bull's Island at 185 mph, creating an 18-20 foot storm surge. Nearly every tree on the

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Adult female red wolf at the SEEWEE Visitor's Center in Awendaw, South Carolina. Photo by Karen Beshears, Naturescapes Photography.

Red wolf at the SEEWEE Visitor's Center in Awendaw, South Carolina. Photo by Karen Beshears, Naturescapes Photography.

Red Wolf Hybridization with Coyotes: Initial Phase of the Management Plan

With the field season soon approaching, we have adopted the first phase of an adapt-as-we-learn strategy to understand and manage hybridization. This approach, often referred to as "adaptive management", is often preferred by resource managers when little is known about the phenomenon or system that needs to be managed. We know very little about hybridization between red wolves and coyotes.

Phase I of our plan will last from October through January and will focus on areas where we know, or suspect, known wolves had puppies last year. The goal will be to capture and attach radio

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Hurricanes and Red Wolves, continued

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island blew down. A family of 4 red wolf pups and their father were free-ranging on the island at the time. Amazingly, all of the wolves survived, but the father was found dead one month after the storm. He had probably been dead about two weeks, but access to the island had been limited and personnel were unable to collect the carcass. The cause of death was assumed to be related to the hurricane. The pups apparently suffered no long term injuries.

Given that northeastern North Carolina has the only wild population of red wolves, catastrophic events such as hurricanes or a disease outbreaks can pose a serious threat to the future of the population. We are fortunate not to have had a direct hit by a hurricane since the red wolf program began. As the Bull's Island Pack proved in 1989, wolves are strong swimmers. However, a direct hit by a strong hurricane will almost certainly have a negative effect on our only wild wolf population.

Fortunately, the red wolf recovery effort has a very active captive breeding program. The captive population is carefully managed with an SSP (Species Survival Plan.) If a catastrophic event were to occur, future releases would be possible with captive wolves.

The SEEWEE Visitor and Environmental Education Center in South Carolina!

This facility showcases the unique heritage and natural history of South Carolina's Lowcountry. Jointly operated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the USDA Forest Service, the 9,000 square foot facility features interpretive displays, **a live red wolf education area**, and a center for viewing birds of prey. The facility is located about 18 miles north of Charleston, in Awendaw, South Carolina. After visiting SEEWEE, enjoy exploring Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge and Francis Marion National Forest. Did you know that **the first red wolf releases took place on Bull's Island, part of Cape Romain NWR**? In 1978, wolves were released there to test release, tracking, and recapture techniques. SEEWEE is open Tuesday through Sunday from 9am to 5pm and entrance is free. For more information please call 843-928-3368.

Red Wolf Hybridization with Coyotes...Continued

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collars to all the wolves in each of these family groups. This includes puppies and other group members that are not radio collared. We will apply this management strategy from the east to the west across the recovery area.

There are several reasons we are focusing the initial phase of our plan on our known breeding groups of wolves. First, after approximately January 31st, red wolves can be pregnant and we don't want to disturb known groups of wolves during their breeding season. Second, our efforts will increase the known population of red wolves. Third, it will provide a source of collared wolves that we can monitor for a variety of information to help us manage hybridization.

As of now, the focus of the next phase of our plan will be to determine who (coyote, hybrid or wolf), if anyone, the wolves that did not breed last year are mated with this year.

Don't forget the interactive website for lesson plans and the latest field season activities!

www.
nczooredwolf.org

Hey Kids!

Why did the red wolf go extinct in the wild?

Answer: people killing them, loss of habitat, and hybridization with coyotes

This newsletter is a publication of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Comments or questions can be addressed to:

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