

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 18, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has indicated that it is considering the termination of management for the North Carolina red wolf population, essentially abandoning the species and any recovery efforts in the wild.<sup>1</sup> Instead of giving up on the recovery of red wolves, the FWS should take proactive measures to prevent permanent extinction of the species, fully implement the Red Wolf Adaptive Management Plan, reintroduce captive wolves into the wild, and reinstate an effective landowner outreach program.

Once a common sight across the southeastern United States, the red wolf was nearly extirpated by the 1970s due to hunting pressures and habitat loss. To bring the species back from the brink of extinction, the FWS successfully reintroduced an experimental colony of captive red wolves into a five-county area of eastern North Carolina in the 1980s. The population peaked at an estimated 130 wolves in 2006,<sup>2</sup> however, the 2018 status review by the FWS alarmingly estimates that the current population is only about 40 individuals and could completely disappear within eight years.<sup>3</sup>

This drastic decline is in part due to the lack of management by the FWS. Fueled by local political pressures, the agency stopped releasing captive wolves into the wild in 2015, and in the same year, suspended its efforts to prevent wolf-coyote hybridization.<sup>4</sup> In 2016, the FWS issued a proposed rule, which has not yet been finalized, to slash the territory of the red wolf by approximately 88 percent, confining the population to only federal lands in one county and effectively extinguishing what remains of the wolf's historic range.<sup>5</sup> According to agency officials, the FWS also ceased its once-robust landowner outreach initiatives.

In addition, there are some questions within the scientific community about the precise genetic identity of the red wolf, sparking a long-running debate over whether they should be treated as a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fws.gov/southeast/news/2018/04/red-wolf-remains-endangered-and-work-continues-on-future-management-of-non-essential-experimental-population-in-eastern-north-carolina/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fws.gov/southeast/wildlife/mammal/red-wolf/>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "5-Year Review: Red Wolf (*Canis rufus*)." April 23, 2018. <https://www.fws.gov/southeast/pdf/five-year-reviews/red-wolf-2018.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://wildlandsnetwork.org/blog/usfws-red-wolves-on-the-verge-of-extinction-only-40-left-in-the-wild/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://defenders.org/red-wolf/threats>

separate species.<sup>6</sup> To address these questions, Congress ordered the Department of the Interior to conduct a definitive study of the red wolf's taxonomy. Although the origin of the red wolf remains ambiguous, a recent scientific panel concluded that the species remains a listable entity under the Endangered Species Act.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, at the very least, decisions undermining the conservation status of this species should not be made until the new study is complete.

As the premier wildlife conservation agency, the FWS should be doing everything in its power to protect our endangered species and ensure their long-term survival for future generations. The FWS should reverse course and aid the red wolf in its recovery in the wild before it is too late.

Furthermore, I ask that you please provide me with answers to the following questions:

1. Does the FWS intend to file a notice of termination for the wild red wolf population in North Carolina?
2. Why did the FWS cease critical red wolf reintroduction efforts, including pup fostering and reintroducing wolves from the captive breeding population?
3. When will the FWS begin the analysis for other potential reintroduction sites?
4. Does the FWS intend to implement a public outreach and education program to increase private landowner support for the red wolf?
5. If the FWS issues a notice of termination for the wild population, what will happen to the wolves in captivity?
6. Are there current efforts to reduce hybridization with coyotes?
7. Does the FWS intend to develop a new Red Wolf Recovery Plan? When will the plan be completed?

Thank you, and I look forward to your responses.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Natural Resources

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/animalia/wp/2018/04/25/the-effort-to-save-red-wolves-in-the-wild-is-failing-a-five-year-review-says/?utm\\_term=.4ba6354ad307](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/animalia/wp/2018/04/25/the-effort-to-save-red-wolves-in-the-wild-is-failing-a-five-year-review-says/?utm_term=.4ba6354ad307)

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "5-Year Review: Red Wolf (*Canis rufus*)," April 23, 2018. <https://www.fws.gov/southeast/pdf/five-year-reviews/red-wolf-2018.pdf>