

# Red Wolf

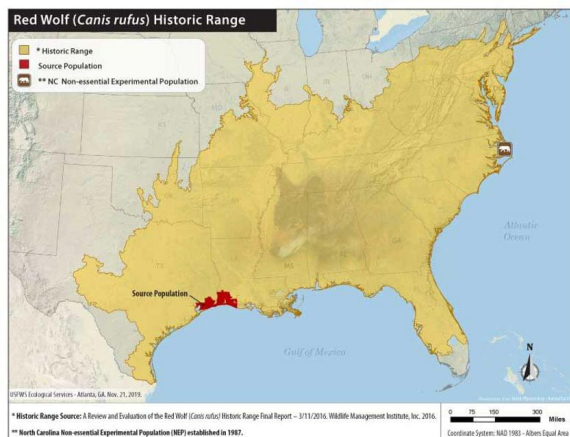
## (*Canis Rufus*)



One of two wolf species native to the United States, the red wolf is easily distinguished from its close relative, the gray wolf, by its **red fur and smaller stature**. The red wolf population once spanned from parts of New York to the U.S. Gulf Coast, but today, the **only wild population of red wolves live in the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge** in North Carolina. The red wolf is carnivorous with a diet consisting of white-tailed deer, raccoons, and other small mammals.

### Escaping Extinction

- After intensive **hunting and habitat loss** during the early 20th century, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services **recognized the red wolf as a critically endangered species in 1973**.



- Between 1974 and 1980, fourteen individuals were taken from a population of red wolves found in Eastern Texas and **moved to a captive breeding habitat** at the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium in Washington state.
- Unfortunately, the wild red wolf population was unable to recover, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services declared the species **extinct in the wild in 1980**.

### Restoration Efforts

- In 1987, four breeding pairs were moved from the captive population to the wildlife preservation in North Carolina under the guidance of the Red Wolf Species Survival Plan.

- By 2011, this reintroduction effort demonstrated great success by reaching an estimated 130 individuals, the **first time that any carnivore previously declared extinct in North America had returned to the wild**. The restoration of the red wolf has been used as a model for reintroducing many other carnivores including the efforts that returned the gray wolf to Yellowstone National Park.



### Threats

- The red wolf population still has yet to remain fully stable in the wild. There are only an estimated **20 red wolves remaining in the wild**, with no known pups being born in 2019.
- **Human-caused mortality** is the primary cause of death in red wolves. Red wolves are commonly shot after straying onto private property.
- Red wolves continue to be **out-competed by coyote populations** where restoration efforts are in place.

### Next Steps

- More than 250 red wolves still exist in **captive breeding programs** across the country. These programs will continue to be vital to ensure survival of the species.
- In 2018, a federal judge ruled that the USFWS had violated their duty to protect the red wolves by allowing land owners to shoot individuals that roam onto their property. **Similar rulings and policy will be necessary** to allow the wild red wolf population to rebound to historic levels.