

For Immediate Release May 6, 2010

Contact Sandra Allred - 919-856-4786 or Bonnie Strawser - 252-216-8667

Reward Offered for Investigation Assistance Relating to Red Wolf Deaths

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is requesting assistance with an investigation involving the suspected illegal take of two radio-collared red wolves that were recently found dead in two different locations in Hyde County, NC. The first wolf was located on April 23, 2010, near Englehard, NC, in the eastern part of Hyde County. The second wolf was located on April 27, 2010, near Scranton, NC, in the western part of Hyde County. Anyone who has essential information that directly leads to an arrest, a criminal conviction, a civil penalty assessment, or forfeiture of property on the subject or subjects responsible for the suspected unlawful take of these red wolves may be eligible for a reward of up to \$2,500. The red wolf is protected under The Endangered Species Act. The maximum criminal penalties for the unlawful taking of a red wolf are one year imprisonment and \$100,000 fine per individual. Anyone with information on the deaths of these red wolves or any others, past or future, is urged to contact Special Agent Sandra Allred at (919) 856-4786, Refuge Officer Chris Smith at (252) 926-4021 or North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission Officer Robert Wayne at (252) 216-8225.

The red wolf (*Canis rufus*) is one of the world's most endangered wild canids. Once common throughout the southeastern United States, red wolf populations were decimated by the 1960's due to intensive predator control programs and loss of habitat. A remnant population of red wolves was found along the Gulf Coast of Texas and Louisiana. After being declared an endangered species in 1973, efforts were initiated to locate and capture as many wild red wolves as possible. Of the 17 remaining wolves captured by biologists, 14 became the founders of a successful captive breeding program. Consequently, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service declared red wolves extinct in the wild in 1980.

The first litter of red wolves born in captivity occurred in 1977. By 1987, enough red wolves were bred in captivity to begin a restoration program on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern North Carolina. Since then, the experimental population area has expanded to include three national wildlife refuges, a Department of Defense bombing range, state-owned lands, and private property, spanning a total of 1.5 million acres.

Over 100 red wolves roam their native habitats in five northeastern North Carolina Counties and approximately 200 comprise the Species Survival Plan captive breeding program in sites across the United States, still an essential element of red wolf recovery. Interbreeding with the coyote (an exotic species not native to North Carolina) has been recognized as the most significant and detrimental threat affecting restoration of red wolves in this section of their historical home range. Currently, adaptive management efforts are making good progress in reducing the threat of coyotes while building the wild red wolf population in northeastern North Carolina.

The red wolf is one of two species of wolves in North America, the other being the gray wolf, (Canis lupis.) As their name suggests, red wolves are known for the characteristic reddish color of their fur most apparent behind the ears and along the neck and legs, but are mostly brown and buff colored with some black along their backs. Intermediate in size to gray wolves and coyotes, the average adult red wolf weighs 45-80 pounds, stands about 26 inches at the shoulder and is about 4 feet long from the tip of the nose to the end of the tail.

Red wolves are social animals that live in packs consisting of a breeding pair and their offspring of different years, typically five to eight animals. Red wolves prey on a variety of wild mammals such as raccoon, rabbit, white-tailed deer, nutria, and other rodents. Most active at dusk and dawn, red wolves are elusive and generally avoid humans and human activity.

For learn more about red wolves, please visit our website at www.fws.gov/redwolf.

Contact:

**Bonnie W. Strawser
Visitor Services Manager
Alligator River/Pea Island
National Wildlife Refuges
P. O. Box 1969
Manteo, NC 27954
tel 252-473-1131 ext 230
fax 252-473-1668**