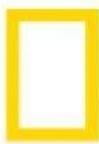


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The world's only wild population of red wolves just got eight more members. Four adult red wolves and four captive-born pups were released into a wildlife refuge in eastern North Carolina, raising hopes that this unique species can be pulled back from the brink of extinction—for the second time.

Red wolves are a critically endangered species, found nowhere else in the world but North Carolina, and their range includes two wildlife refuges and a patchwork of federal, state, and private lands. The total wild population is now estimated at around 20 to 25 animals, counting the eight animals just released.

The release of these eight red wolves was mandated by a court order. The Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC), on behalf of several conservation groups, sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in fall 2020 over its failure to release more red wolves into the wild. The SELC argued that the lack of action was a violation of the [Endangered Species Act](#). In January, a U.S. District Court Judge ordered the service to prepare a revised plan for imminent releases.

Ron Sutherland of the Wildlands Network, an environmental group, calls the most recent releases "a great step in the right direction," although his organization had advocated for even more wolves to be released. He hopes the Fish and Wildlife Service will "start standing up for their own program again [and] recommit to working on the ground with the people of North Carolina with the goal of rescuing this population of red wolves."

"Our goal is to work together to establish an implementation plan... to reach jointly established recovery goals for the red wolf," says John Tirpak, associate regional director of ecological services with the Fish and Wildlife Service.



A look at America's most endangered wolf, and how this news is "a step in the right direction" for the species.

PUBLISHED MAY 28, 2021 • 10 MIN READ

A red wolf named Ruby at Reflection Riding Arboretum & Nature Center in Tennessee. Each year biologists meet to discuss possible wolf matches for the upcoming breeding season. With a limited gene pool of 14 founders, it's critical to diversify the species' genetics.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESSICA SUAREZ

8 red wolves released into wild provide hope for critically endangered species

ANIMALS | NEWS

BY MEAGHAN MULHOLLAND