

NC receives federal grant to build red wolf crossings

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Published December 25, 2024 at 1:38 PM EST



David Goldman / AP

FILE - A red wolf crosses a road on the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, Thursday, March 23, 2023, near Manns Harbor, N.C. The endangered red wolf can survive in the wild, but only with “significant additional management intervention,” according to a long-awaited population viability analysis released Friday, Sept. 29, 2023.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has received a \$25 million federal grant to build wildlife crossings to protect endangered red wolves.

There are only 16 known red wolves in the wild, after four were killed by vehicles since September 2023. The last wild red wolves live in rural northeastern North Carolina near the Outer Banks.

The grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation will fund 13 wildlife underpasses along U.S. Highway 64 within the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in Dare County. U.S. 64 is one of only two major routes to the Outer Banks. Nearly 12,000 vehicles cross

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Environmental advocates say collisions along U.S. 64 have had ripple effects on the fragile red wolf population. Red wolves live in tight knit family groups, and both male and female wolves care for their young in pairs. This past summer, a male red wolf died in a collision along U.S. 64 just two weeks after siring pups, leaving the mother alone with her first litter.

"After the father died she wasn't able to care for them all by herself, and five of the puppies died as a result of the vehicle collision killing their father," said Emily Mason, an advocate with Environment North Carolina.

Mason says this funding is significant because the crossings are being strategically placed. The funds will be used to construct underpasses with fencing to guide wildlife to tunnels below the highway.

"It's super important that we get these crossing built where they need to be built — where we know the wildlife is dying and where we know people are having accidents," Mason said.

The underpasses will also help protect dozens of other species killed along the highway, including river otters, bobcats, white-tailed deer, spotted turtles, and black bears.

A campaign to raise an additional \$4 million for the construction of wildlife underpasses has been supported by the Center for Biological Diversity, the Wildlands Network, and a private donor. The Tuscarora Nation also supported the federal grant application.

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