

The Red Wolves of North Carolina

Guardians of the Coastal Wild



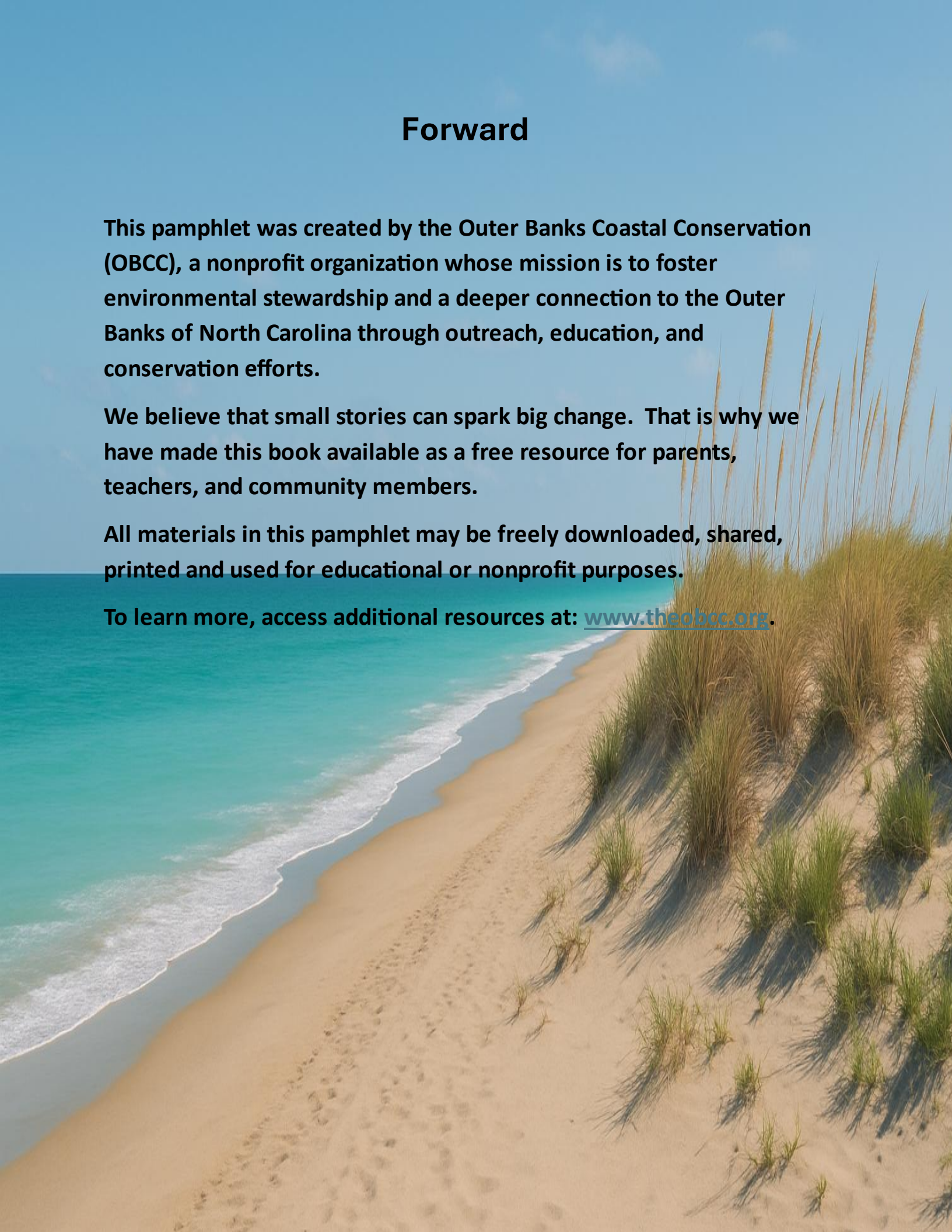
Forward

This pamphlet was created by the Outer Banks Coastal Conservation (OBCC), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster environmental stewardship and a deeper connection to the Outer Banks of North Carolina through outreach, education, and conservation efforts.

We believe that small stories can spark big change. That is why we have made this book available as a free resource for parents, teachers, and community members.

All materials in this pamphlet may be freely downloaded, shared, printed and used for educational or nonprofit purposes.

To learn more, access additional resources at: www.theobcc.org.



Introduction

Once roaming across the southeastern United States, Red Wolves (*Canis rufus*) are now among the world's most endangered wild canids. Today, North Carolina's Albemarle Peninsula — including parts of the Outer Banks and nearby mainland — is the only place where red wolves live in the wild.

Appearance and Behavior

Red wolves are smaller than gray wolves but larger than coyotes.

- Color: Reddish-brown fur mixed with gray and black tones
- Weight: 45–80 pounds
- Height: About 26 inches at the shoulder
- Lifespan: 6–8 years in the wild

They are shy, intelligent, and family-oriented animals that live in packs of five to eight members — typically a breeding pair and their offspring. They communicate using howls, body language, and scent marking.



RED WOLVES IN NORTH CAROLINA

Red wolves in North Carolina live almost entirely in one region — the Albemarle Peninsula of eastern NC — which includes parts of Dare, Hyde, Tyrrell, Washington, and Beaufort Counties.

This map contains a breakdown of where they are found today.

NORTH
CAROLINA



ALBAMARLE
PENINSULA

Alligator
River Natio
Wildlife Refuge

Pocosin Lakes
National Wildlife
Refuge

Red Wolf
Range

Atlan
Ocea

Habitat

Red wolves prefer a mix of:

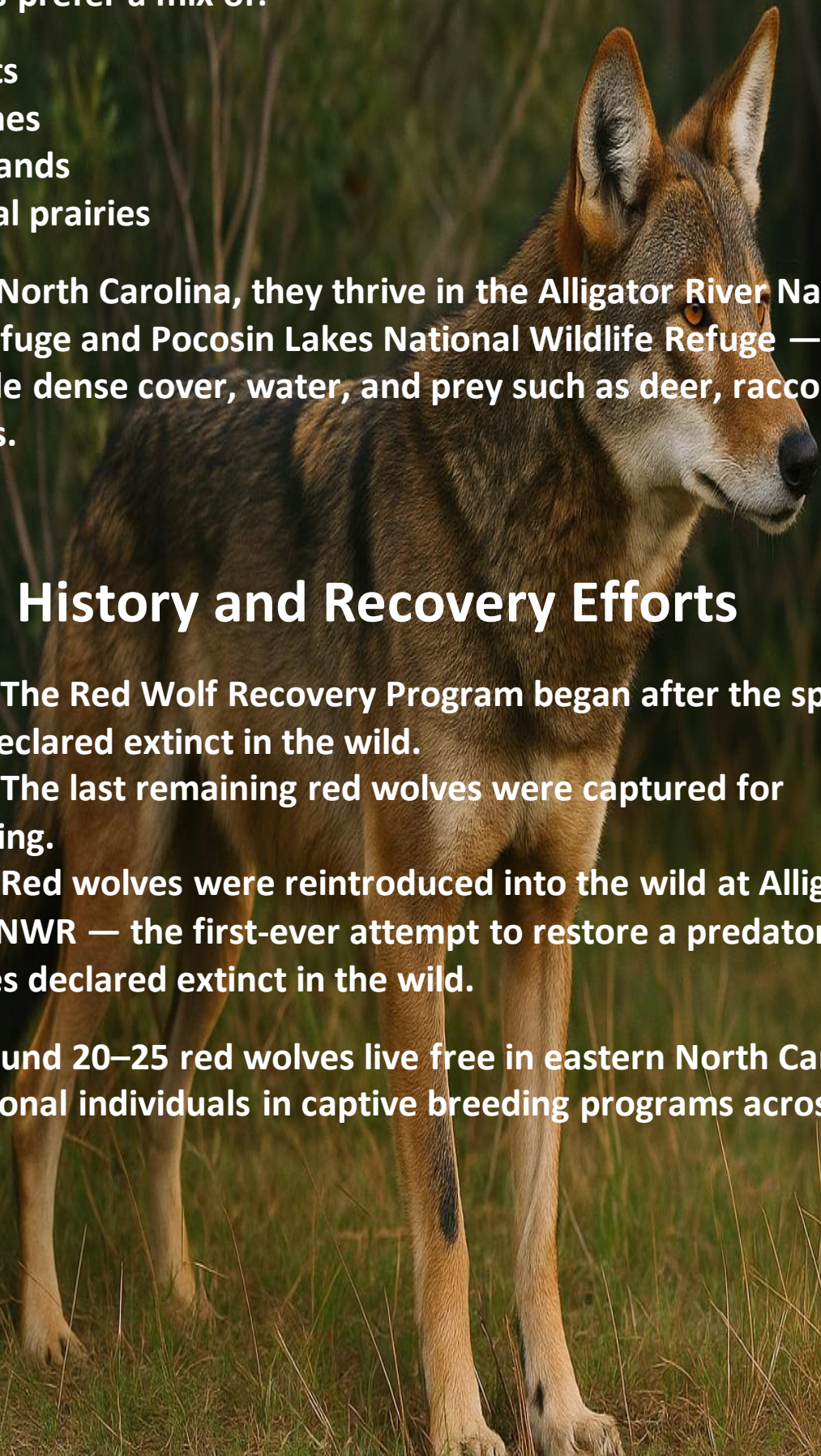
- Forests
- Marshes
- Farmlands
- Coastal prairies

In eastern North Carolina, they thrive in the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge and Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge — areas that provide dense cover, water, and prey such as deer, raccoons, and rabbits.

History and Recovery Efforts

- 1973: The Red Wolf Recovery Program began after the species was declared extinct in the wild.
- 1980: The last remaining red wolves were captured for breeding.
- 1987: Red wolves were reintroduced into the wild at Alligator River NWR — the first-ever attempt to restore a predator species declared extinct in the wild.

Today: Around 20–25 red wolves live free in eastern North Carolina, with additional individuals in captive breeding programs across the U.S.



Threats

Red wolves face many challenges:

- Hybridization with coyotes, which dilutes their genetics
- Vehicle collisions on rural roads
- Habitat loss from development and sea-level rise
- Human persecution, due to mistaken identity or fear

Conservation in Action

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partner organizations are working to:

- Reintroduce wolves into safe areas
- Vaccinate and track wolves with GPS collars
- Manage coyote populations to prevent hybridization
- Educate communities about coexistence

Several organizations — such as the Red Wolf Coalition, Defenders of Wildlife, and NC Wildlife Federation — support education and outreach to help the species recover.



How You Can Help

- Drive carefully in known red wolf zones
- Support local conservation programs
- Report wolf sightings to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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Did You Know?

- Red wolves once ranged from Texas to Pennsylvania!
- They are the only wolf species found solely in the United States.
- Their howl is higher-pitched and shorter than a gray wolf's — a haunting song of the coastal wild.
- Red wolves mate for life and both parents care for the pups.



References

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