

# Pocosin Lakes

## NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

### N O R T H C A R O L I N A

**R**ecognized internationally as an important waterfowl area, Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge hosts the largest concentration of migratory waterfowl on the eastern seaboard. As many as 25,000 tundra swans, 65,000 snow geese and tens of thousands of ducks, including green-winged teal, pintails, widgeon and wood ducks, concentrate in its expansive wetland during winter. But the 113,000-acre wilderness is better known as one of the four national wildlife refuges that played a significant role in helping to return one of the world's most endangered canids into the wild. Red wolves—declared extinct in the wild in 1980—survived only in captivity until a reintroduction program successfully returned them to a portion of their ancestral home in Pocosin Lakes.



RED WOLF: © STOUFFER PRODUCTIONS/ANIMALSANIMALS.COM (CAPTIVE)

within 3.5 miles of the refuge—that would see 31,000 landings and departures each year, approximately one every 15 minutes. This round-the-clock barrage of noise from takeoffs, landings and low-level holding patterns would disturb resting and feeding waterfowl and could cause them to eventually abandon the sanctuary. The possibility that birds will collide with the jets is another real danger—and not just for the birds. The Navy's own assessment rates the likelihood of catastrophic bird collisions that compromise pilot safety as "severe" during no less than six months of the year. Although Defenders and a coalition of other conservation groups won a temporary injunction against construction of the landing field in 2004, the Navy continues to push forward with the project.

## THE THREAT

Although it's an integral part of the Atlantic flyway, the refuge will soon see another sort of flight pattern should military officials get their way. The U.S. Navy is proposing the construction of a fighter jet landing field—a training runway positioned

## THE SOLUTION

Defenders is a plaintiff in a lawsuit that has so far stalled the project. A U.S. District Court ruling in February found that the Navy's Environmental Impact Statement was flawed and filled with inaccurate assessments on how the landing field would affect surrounding wetlands. The court also stated that, despite the

Navy's utterances to the contrary, both national security and environmental responsibility could be achieved from an alternate site. The Navy had sought a stay after the injunction was ordered but was denied by the 4th Circuit Court in May. The Navy is currently appealing the ruling and the fate of the landing field and Pocosin Lakes refuge is far from certain. Defenders will continue to exhaust all legal action to block the site. In addition, the Bush administration and members of Congress should ensure that the Navy pursues alternative sites for the landing field—far enough away from the refuge to keep its wildlife protected.



SCUPPERNON RIVER, POCOSIN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE: © GEORGE OSTERTAG