

Questions and Answers on West Coast Fisher DPS Proposed Listing

Q. What is a fisher?

A. Fishers are forest-dwelling mammals in a family that includes weasels, mink, martens and otters. They are about the size of a large house cat and are light brown to dark blackish-brown. The fisher has a long body with short legs and a long bushy tail. Male fishers are about twice the size of females and range in size from about 7 to 12 pounds. Fishers can live up to 10 years. The fisher is an opportunistic predator with a diverse diet that includes birds, rodents, reptiles, insects and vegetation. Fishers are one of the few known predators of porcupines.

The fisher's range was reduced dramatically in the 1800s and early 1900s through trapping, predator and pest control, and alterations of forested habitats brought about by logging, fire, urbanization and farming. Fishers search for trees that have cavities for adequate shelter in the trunks of larger/older trees, snags and hollow logs, and platforms formed by mistletoe ("witches brooms") or large or deformed branches. Cavities in large-diameter live or dead trees are selected by females for denning and raising young. Litter size is on average between one and three kits.

Q. What action is the Service taking regarding the fisher?

The Service is proposing to list the West Coast Distinct Population Segment of fisher under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as threatened. We are seeking information on fisher biology and threats to assist in our evaluation. The final determination on listing the fisher will come within one year. Critical habitat is not being proposed at this time.

Q. What are the threats to fisher in the West Coast population?

A. The major threats to the fisher West Coast population are toxicants associated with anti-coagulant rodenticides, and habitat loss and habitat change associated with wildfire and some timber harvest practices. Currently, West Coast populations of fishers are relatively isolated leaving them especially vulnerable to unpredictable events such as wildfires and the relatively recent threat of rodenticide use at illegal marijuana growing operations. Rodenticide use has been verified at illegal marijuana cultivation sites within occupied fisher habitat on public, private and tribal lands in California. To date, published research indicates that of the 58 fisher carcasses analyzed for the toxin associated with anti-coagulant rodenticides, 79 percent tested positive in California, and 75 percent tested positive in Washington. The Washington fisher population is reintroduced, and it is not known where exposure occurred for these translocated animals.

Q: Do the threats impact the entire range or specific parts of the range?

A. Although climate change models for different parts of the fisher's range in the Pacific states vary, during the next century each state is expected to have hotter and drier summers, larger wildfires and increased risk of fire in some areas of fisher habitat. With regard to anti-coagulant rodenticide impacts, the Service is seeking more information via the public comment period, but existing data suggest the threat is widespread in parts of California and southern Oregon.

Q. Do you anticipate major impacts on rural communities, particularly timber jobs and recreational activities, if this proposal to list becomes final?

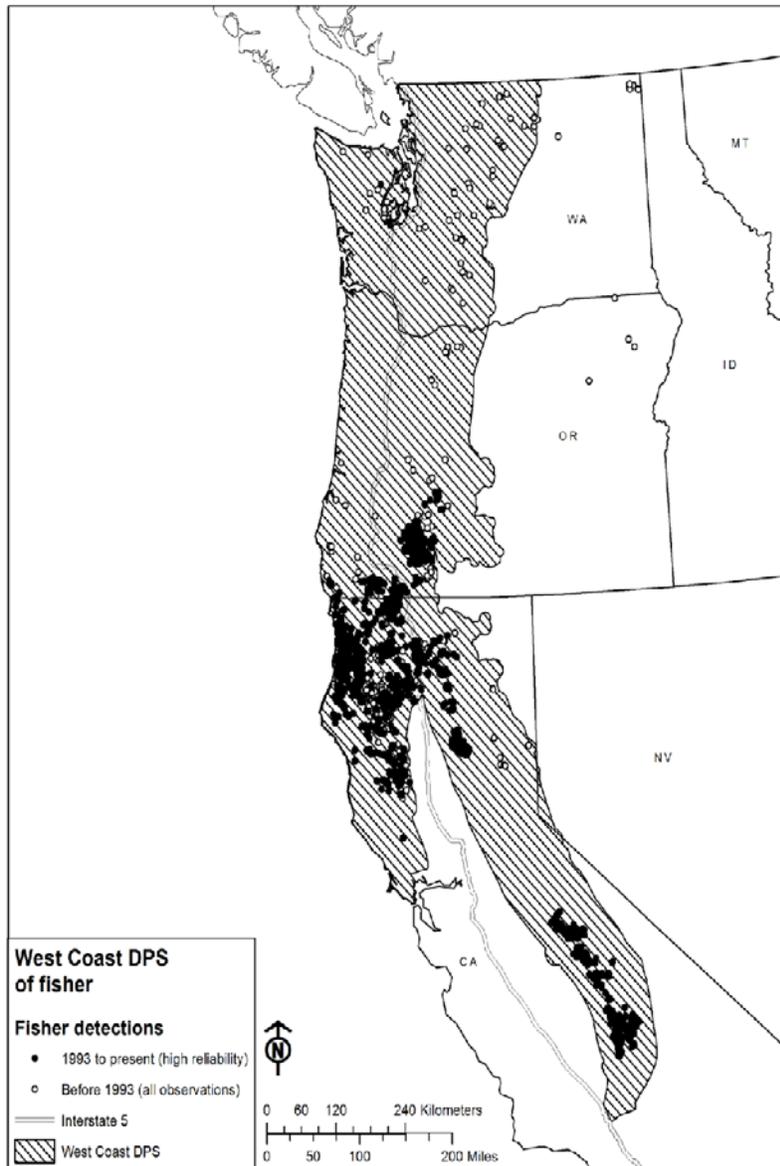
A. We consider the timber industry to be a conservation partner and have a good track record of working together on fisher conservation. Several years ago, the Service partnered with a private timber company to reintroduce fishers onto managed timber lands in the northern Sierra Nevada Mountains to learn more about how fishers respond to and use these lands. Although the project is still in early stages of data-gathering, we are encouraged by the survival and reproduction of fishers on lands where they hadn't been found for a long time. Researchers working on this partnership are making updates available to the public via <http://frinsproject.wordpress.com/>. We hope this reintroduction will become a sustaining population of fishers. We will continue working with timber interests to reduce and manage threats so that the best and most ideal fisher habitat is protected. The Service is also hoping to work with federal, state and industry partners to manage threats.

Although we are not proposing a 4(d) rule concurrent with the proposed listing rule, we are soliciting comments and information regarding the applicability of such a rule for the species. Under section 4(d) of the ESA, the Secretary may publish a rule that modifies the standard protections for threatened species with measures tailored to the conservation of the species that are determined to be necessary and advisable.

We do not anticipate changes to recreational activities if this proposed rule is finalized.

Q. What is the Fisher West Coast DPS, and can you give a description of what areas it includes?

A. A Distinct Population Segment (DPS) is a vertebrate population or group of populations that is discrete from other populations of the species and significant in relation to the species as a whole. Fishers are native only to North America. Although fishers are found throughout the country, the West Coast DPS has been reduced in size to the point where they occur only in scattered pockets within their historic range. Historically, fishers were present in most of the forested landscapes of California, Oregon and Washington. The West Coast DPS of fisher proposed for listing by the Service encompasses the area where fisher historically occurred (see map). Within the DPS, fishers occur in two original native populations in the Southern Sierra Nevada of California (~300 individuals) and the Klamath Mountains of Northern California and Southwestern Oregon (~a few hundred to 4,000 individuals). Fishers are also found in three reintroduced populations, one in the Northern Sierra Nevada of California, one in the Southern Cascades of Oregon, and one on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington.



Q. What is being and can be done to recover the fisher?

A. The Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP), implemented since 1994, has provided substantial protection to late successional forest species such as the fisher. These NWFP protections have advanced fisher conservation through: 1) consistent management across federal lands, 2) establishment of a reserve network of old growth forest, and 3) retention of important structural features within allocations identified for timber harvest to provide connectivity between the reserves.

Federal, state and local agencies must continue to combat the threat of anti-coagulant rodenticides, which are believed to be widely used to protect the marijuana grown illegally in remote forests. The environmental devastation associated with these grow sites continues to take a heavy toll on fish and wildlife as well as human communities, especially tribes and rural neighborhoods.

In addition, we plan to work with the timber industry to minimize its impacts on fisher and with federal and private landowners to promote fisher conservation. There are three reintroduction efforts underway to help establish fishers in areas of their historical range. We hope these efforts and the establishment of multiple self-sustaining populations will allow fishers to be more resilient to threats such as wildfire and the added stress of climate change.

Q. What are the immediate next steps with regard to the proposed listing?

A. We are providing 90 days for public comment. During this same timeframe, we will be conducting peer review of the proposed rule and the draft species report. Under section 4(b)(6)(A) of the Act and 16 U.S.C. § 1533(b)(6)(A), we must publish a final listing determination within one year of publishing a proposed listing. The Service will also host a series of informational meetings and one public hearing. The public hearing is scheduled for Nov. 17, 2014, at the Red Lion Inn, 1830 Hilltop Dr., Redding, Calif. from 6 to 8 p.m.

Informal informational meetings will be held at the following venues for complete details):

- **November 13, 2014** -- Best Western Miner's Inn, 122 E. Miner Street, Yreka, California, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
- **November 17, 2014** -- Rogue Regency Inn, 2300 Biddle Road, Medford, Oregon, from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
- **November 20, 2014** -- Arcata Public Library, 500 7th Street, Arcata, California, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- **November 20, 2014** -- Lacey Community Center, 6729 Pacific Ave SE, Olympia, WA 98503 Lacey, Washington, from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- **November 20, 2014** -- Lacey Community Center, Lacey, Washington, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- **December 3, 2014** -- Visalia Convention Center, 303 E., Acequia, Visalia, California, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- **December 4, 2014** -- CSUS Stanislaus, Faculty Development Center, Room 118, 1 University Circle, Turlock, California, from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Q. What types of information are you seeking from the public comment period?

A. Specific information can be found in the Federal Register notice at www.fws.gov/cno/es/fisher. The Service is seeking information related to fisher biology, populations, genetics, alternative DPS configurations, anti-coagulant rodenticide use and its impacts, habitat loss from wildfire, and other scientific and commercial information.