

Fact Sheet - Wolverine

The wolverine is an iconic species of the American mountain west, inhabiting arctic, boreal, and alpine habitats in Alaska, western Canada, and the western contiguous United States. South of the Canadian border, wolverines are restricted to areas in high mountains, near the tree-line, where conditions are cold year-round and snow cover persists well into the month of May. Most wolverine habitat in the contiguous U.S. – more than 90 percent – is located on federally-owned land, with the remainder being state, private or tribally owned.

The wolverine is a resilient species, which was likely extirpated from the lower 48 states during the early 20th century and has re-established populations by moving down from Canada into the North Cascades Range of Washington and the Northern Rocky Mountains of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. In the past 50 years, the wolverine has made a remarkable recovery, with little human assistance. However, climate modeling indicates that Wolverines in the lower 48 States are threatened with extinction in the future due to the loss of snowpack in the wolverine's snowy, high-elevation habitat.

Currently, wolverine populations occur within the North Cascades Range in Washington and the Northern Rockies of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and a small portion of Oregon (Wallowa Range). Populations once existed in the Sierra Nevada of California and the southern Rocky Mountains in the states of Colorado, Wyoming, and New Mexico. Only one individual wolverine is known to inhabit the Sierra Nevada and one in the southern Rocky Mountains. Both are thought to be recent migrants to these areas.

Deep, persistent spring snow is required for successful wolverine reproduction because female wolverines dig elaborate dens in the snow for their offspring. These den structures are thought to protect wolverine kits from predators as well as harsh alpine winters. The area is covered by deep persistent snow also defines wolverines' year-round habitat, probably because they prefer the coldest areas they can find here in the southernmost part of their range.

Scientific publications from multiple research groups predict a reduction of wolverine's cold and snowy habitat and our best estimate is that wolverine habitat will be reduced by 31 percent by 2045 and 63 percent by 2085. As wolverine habitat is reduced, the Service expects the remaining habitat will become more fragmented, with distances growing between habitat "islands". Evidence suggests this diminished and fragmented habitat will support fewer wolverines with reduced connectivity between populations.

Scientific information regarding the proposed listing and 4(d) rule and the proposed 10(j) rule will be accepted until May 6, 2013. Comments can also be submitted on the draft Recovery Outline. See the Addresses section of each proposed rule for how to submit comments to <http://www.regulations.gov>. Information can also be mailed or hand delivered to the Fish and Wildlife Service, Montana Field Office, 585 Shepard Way, Suite 1, Helena, Montana, 59601.

The Service will conduct three public informational sessions and public hearings to provide information and allow the public an opportunity to comment and enter testimony into the public record. The first is scheduled on March 13, 2013, at the Boise Centre on the Grove, 850 West Front Street, Boise, ID 83702. The second is scheduled on March 19, 2013, at the Hampton Inn, 137 Union Boulevard, Lakewood, CO 80228. The third is scheduled on March 27, 2013, at the Red Lion Colonial Inn, 2301 Colonial Drive, Helena, MT 59601. At all three locations the public informational session will run from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM, followed by public speaker registration at 6:00 PM, and then the public hearing for oral testimony from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM.