



PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes to List Wolverines as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act

*Proposed Rule would not affect recreation, timber harvest or
other activities if species is listed as threatened*

DENVER--The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today, in response to a court-ordered deadline, that it is seeking information from the scientific community and the public on a proposal to protect the North American wolverine as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Service is also seeking comment on two proposed special rules designed to facilitate management and recovery of the species should it receive protection.

An estimated 250 to 300 wolverines now occur in the lower 48 states, where the species has rebounded after broad-scale predator trapping and poisoning programs led to its near extinction in the early 1900s. This was in part due to the states protecting the species from unregulated trapping.

Extensive climate modeling indicates that the wolverine's snowpack habitat will be greatly reduced and fragmented in the coming years due to climate warming, thereby threatening the species with extinction. Wolverines are dependent on areas in high mountains, near the tree-line, where conditions are cold year-round and snow cover persists well into the month of May.

The Service does not consider most activities occurring within the high elevation habitat of the wolverine, including snowmobiling and backcountry skiing, and land management activities like timber harvesting and infrastructure development, to constitute significant threats to the wolverine. As a result, the Service is proposing a special rule under Section 4(d) of the ESA that, should the species be listed, would allow these types of activities to continue.

"This proposal would give us the flexibility to tailor the protections for the wolverine provided by the ESA to only those things that are necessary," said Noreen Walsh, Director of the Service's Mountain-

Prairie Region. “Scientific evidence suggests that a warming climate will greatly reduce the wolverine’s snowpack habitat. We look forward to hearing from our state and local partners and members of the public and scientific community on these proposals as we work to ensure the continued recovery of the species.”

Under the proposed 4(d) rule, take of wolverines associated with hunting and trapping would be prohibited if the species is listed. The Service is seeking input on the appropriateness of prohibiting incidental take of wolverine in the course of legal trapping activities directed at other species.

In support of ongoing federal and state agencies to protect the wolverine from extinction, the Service is simultaneously proposing a special rule under Section 10(j) of the ESA to facilitate potential reintroduction of the species its historical range in Colorado. The reintroduction effort, which is still under consideration, would be led by the Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife.

Currently, wolverines 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. Currently, one individual male wolverine is known to inhabit the Sierra Nevada and one male wolverine resides in the southern Rocky Mountains. Both are recent migrants to these areas.

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.

If the proposed listing rule is finalized, the Service will add the wolverine to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife. The listing would protect the wolverine as a threatened species in the contiguous (or lower 48) states as a distinct population segment (DPS) under the ESA. A DPS is a portion of a vertebrate species that is geographically discrete from the rest of its kind and also is significant to its survival.

The Service committed to publishing the proposed listing for the North American wolverine in Fiscal Year 2013 as part of the Service’s efforts to implement a court-approved work plan that resolves a series of lawsuits concerning the agency’s ESA listing duties. The intent of the agreement is to significantly reduce litigation and allow the agency to focus its resources on the species most in need of the ESA’s protections.

The Service will open a 90-day comment period beginning February 4, 2013, to allow the public and stakeholders an opportunity to provide information or comments regarding the proposed listing and 4(d) rule and the proposed 10(j) rule. A draft Recovery Outline will also be available for comments. During that time, the agency will also seek peer review of the proposed listing and proposed rules from the scientific community. Comments will be accepted until May 6, 2013.

Last year, the President directed that any future designations of critical habitat carefully consider all public comments on relevant science and economic impact, including those that suggest methods for minimizing regulatory burdens. If the listing is finalized, any potential critical habitat designation will include a full analysis of economic impact, including impact on jobs, and will strive, to the extent

permitted by law, to avoid unnecessary burdens and costs on states, tribes, localities and the private sector.

At this time, the Service finds that critical habitat is not determinable, as the agency needs additional time to assess the potential impact of a critical habitat designation and to identify specific areas that may be appropriate for critical habitat designation. The Service seeks comments on the reasons we should or should not designate critical habitat for the wolverine, and what specific areas might be considered for designation.

For more information about wolverine conservation, copies of the proposals, and details on public meetings and hearings, visit the Service's web site at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/wolverine/>. Copies of the *Federal Register* notices will also be available online or by contacting the Montana Field Office at 406-449-5225.

The Endangered Species Act provides an important safety net for America's native fish, wildlife, and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others. The Service is working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species Program, visit <http://www.fws.gov/angered/>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/>. Connect with our [Facebook](#) page, follow our [Twitter](#) feed, watch our [YouTube](#) channel and view our [Flickr](#) photo stream.

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