

## **Withdrawal of Proposal to List the West Coast Fisher DPS under the ESA**

### **FAQ's**

**April 2016**

#### **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.

#### **Q. What is the West Coast distinct population segment (DPS) of the fisher?**

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, fishers in the west coast States are discrete from the rest of the species, and they have also 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. 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 in the west coast States 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), as well as one new reintroduction site in the south Washington Cascades.

#### **Q: What action is being taken today?**

**A.** We are withdrawing the proposal to list the West Coast DPS of fisher as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This means the West Coast DPS of fisher will not be listed as threatened under the ESA.

#### **Q. What potential threats did you evaluate and what were your conclusions?**

**A.** We looked at a number of stressors during the evaluation and found that impacts of these stressors – either singly or cumulatively – are not of the degree that would warrant federal protections at this time. Among the stressors we looked at include:

**Wildfire** - Data do not indicate habitat impacts from wildfire are significant at either the population or rangewide scales. We reached this conclusion for wildfire impacts after taking into consideration both the beneficial and negative aspects of wildfire, continued management activities that will help reduce future wildfire impacts, and the presence of suitable but unoccupied habitat present in the DPS's range (although to a greater extent in the

northern portion of the range), coupled with the extremely low likelihood that future wildfires would impact entire fisher population areas.

**Illegal marijuana gardens and rodenticides** - The best available information does not indicate that the level of exposure to toxicants (including anticoagulant rodenticides) is resulting in deleterious sublethal effects on fishers at either the population or range wide scales. We determined that although there was a small increase in the number of individuals killed by exposure to toxicants across the DPS's range as compared to the time of the proposed listing rule, those impacts are occurring at the individual scale, and not a threat on the fisher populations in the DPS as a whole. Our analysis revealed that, although the number of individuals across the proposed DPS's range known to be exposed to and killed by toxicants increased by 11 individuals, this level of impact is not considered a significant impact at either the population or range wide scales

**Climate change** – We found that it is possible that increasing temperatures and other consequences of climate change may have some direct effects on fishers. The most likely impact that has been described is the movement of fishers to remain within cooler microhabitats, as a consequence of possible physiological intolerance to heat. The best available scientific and commercial data at this time does not indicate that population or rangewide impacts from the direct effects of climate change are occurring, nor is there any indication that population or rangewide direct effects of climate change are likely to occur in the future. Thus, the direct effects of climate change on fisher are considered to be a low-level impact to fishers currently and in the future.

**Timber harvest** - We found that although timber harvest is still ongoing throughout the west coast States, habitat ingrowth is also occurring, offsetting some of those losses. For example, in the southern Sierra Nevada region specifically, ingrowth of fisher habitat actually replaced habitat lost by all disturbances (as opposed to just timber harvest) between 1990 and 2012, and although this analysis occurred before the 2013-14 large wildfires, a net increase in fisher habitat still resulted. Overall, we found no empirical evidence that either wildfire or vegetation management are manifesting themselves such that significant impacts are resulting in either population or range wide impacts, both currently and in the foreseeable future

**Small populations** -- We consider a stressor to rise to the level of a threat to a species if the magnitude of the stressor is such that it is resulting in significant impacts at either the population or rangewide scales. We also recognize that fishers in the west coast States have been exposed to multiple stressors, in some cases over many decades. However, we found that the best available data indicates impacts are occurring to fishers or their habitat at the individual scale. At this time, the best available data do not suggest that current fisher populations in the west coast States are experiencing population declines or further reductions in distribution, which would be indicative of population or rangewide scale impacts.

**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 are strongly recommended to continue to address the stressor of anti-coagulant rodenticides, which are believed to be widely used to protect the marijuana grown illegally in remote forests. Not addressing this stressor at marijuana grow sites has the potential increase impacts to many fish and wildlife species.

We are continuing to work with the timber industry to minimize its impacts on fisher and its habitat, as well as continuing to work with federal and private landowners to promote fisher conservation through development and/or implementation of Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA).

There are three reintroduction efforts underway to help re-establish fishers in areas of their historical range. For example in Washington, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the National Park Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, Conservation Northwest, the government of British Columbia, and other conservation partners have been working with us to restore fisher populations since 2008.

We hope that these efforts and the establishment of multiple self-sustaining populations will allow fishers to be more resilient to stressors such as wildfire and the added stress of climate change.