

NORTH CASCADES WOLVERINE STUDY – Project Update May 16, 2012

Greetings once again from the North Cascades Wolverine project in British Columbia and Washington. In our last update (March 9, 2012), we had live-captured 5 wolverines since the beginning of the year and attached satellite radio-collars to 4: 3 females (Mallory, Kendyl, and Xena) and 1 male (Rocky). Our live-trapping season continued until the end of March (British Columbia) and the beginning of April (Washington), but we did not capture any additional wolverines. Because of the heavy late-winter snows in March, many of our live traps were closed for extended periods due to high avalanche conditions or access issues. Regardless, we captured more wolverines this year than in any other year since the beginning of the study in 2006. This year also marks another first – we now have evidence that reproduction is occurring in our study population and we have found the first wolverine reproductive dens ever documented for the state of Washington.

WOLVERINE ACTIVITY AREAS

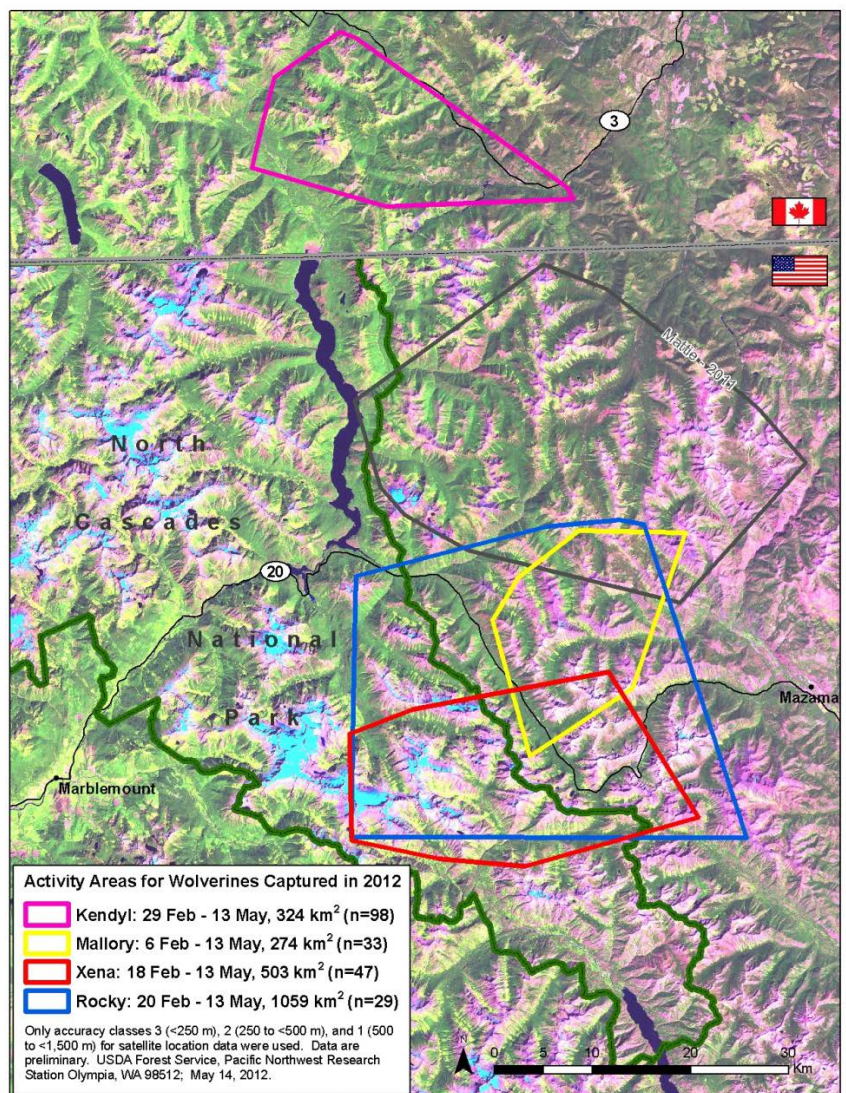
Although the data are still preliminary, we are beginning to get a sense of the areas currently being used by Kendyl, Mallory, Xena, and Rocky (see map on right). Thus far, Rocky's activity area almost completely encompasses the activity areas for Mallory and Xena. Both Mallory and Xena are denning this year, and Rocky's movements indicate that he is likely the father of their kits.

The area south of Kendyl's activity area but north of those for Rocky, Mallory, and Xena, was occupied in 2011 by Mattie – her 2011 activity area is the polygon outlined in gray. Although we did not recapture Mattie this year, we suspect that she is still somewhere in this vicinity.

We will continue to monitor the movements of these 4 wolverines throughout the summer and into early fall (the battery in the satellite collars should operate for about 8 months).

DOCUMENTING REPRODUCTION

In early March, we began to suspect that both Mallory and Xena were denning. Both the quantity and quality of their satellite telemetry data were



Activity areas of wolverines live-captured and collared during 2012 (colored polygons) and the activity area for Mattie (gray polygon) who, in addition to Mallory and Rocky, was collared and monitored during 2011.

less than what we would normally expect to see, suggesting that these 2 females were spending much of their time in locations where the satellite signals from their collars were being blocked – such as in a den under rocks or downed wood. Based on their satellite telemetry data, we identified potential denning areas and then in late April and early May we searched those areas by helicopter for wolverine activity and potential den sites (i.e., wolverine tracks going to and from a hole in the snow). The helicopter flights were successful and we located Xena’s den in North Cascades National Park (photos on right) and Mallory’s den on the Methow Valley Ranger District of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. We were able to land near both den sites, and we deployed remote cameras to document wolverine activity and hopefully the number of kits.

We will continue to monitor these females and their den sites, including returning to the dens after the females and kits have abandon them to collect habitat data, locate potential latrine sites, and collect any scats or prey remains that we find.



Funding for these and future helicopter flights to locate wolverine reproductive dens and conduct associated research activities was provided by: Seattle Foundation/Tom and Sonya Campion Fund; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; USDA Forest Service, National Carnivore Program; and the Wolverine Foundation.



Please contact Keith Aubry to learn more about our study (kaubry@fs.fed.us; 360-753-7685). Please contact Cathy Raley (craley@fs.fed.us; 360-753-7686) if you would like to be added to or removed from our project-update mailing list.

LEAD PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Keith Aubry (USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Olympia, WA).

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: John Rohrer (USDA Forest Service, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, Winthrop, WA); Cathy Raley (USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Olympia, WA); Rich Weir (British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Victoria, BC); Scott Fitkin (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Winthrop, WA).