

Northern California and Oregon Fisher Working Group
Sierra Pacific Industries Headquarters, Anderson, California.
Minutes for Meeting of the 6 June 2006

Attendees:

Jennifer Carlson – CDFG
Steve Criss – Criss and Co. Consultants
Cindy Donegan – USFWS
Laura Finley - USFWS
Carole Jorgensen - BLM
Rich Klug – Roseburg Resource Company
Camryn Lee – USFWS
Naomi Nichol – High Country Consulting
Steve Self – Sierra Pacific Industries
Scott Yaeger – USFWS
Kelly Wollcott – USFS

Meeting commenced at 1:00 p.m.

These minutes are organized according to the original agenda.

1. After brief introductions, we covered additional topics and comments from the previous meeting.
 - Steve Self showed a map of past surveys (1991-2004) in the Eastern Klamath and southern Cascades as compiled by those who attended the first meeting about a year and a half ago in Yreka. Due to recent surveys efforts we can already make changes to this map. This would be good to post on the Yreka FWS fisher website (see below) as it gets up and running.
 - A similar map survey effort and results of the Sierra would be helpful as it's hard to find what surveys have been conducted.
 - USGS site (<http://www.nbii.gov/>) has a variety of information available on the internet. It was questioned whether the USGS might be willing to add fisher survey information to their site.
 - The USFWS site (<http://www.fws.gov/yreka/fisher.htm>) is slowly making progress on posting information. One of the items desired is to have a graphic showing the location of current and past projects, reports, and other information (much simpler than Keith Aubrey's site), with links to reports and or contacts to head investigators of ongoing projects.
2. Discussion of the interagency fisher conservation and assessment threats worksheet
 - The threats worksheet (emailed prior to meeting) was essentially the earliest draft of a laundry list of potential threats that is the product of a brainstorming session by the Biology Team.

- The purpose of the list was to identify threats, threat mechanisms, and how each specifically may affect fisher. This list will be used to figure out which threats can and will be addressed in the formation of a conservation strategies (Federal, State, and Sierra).
- There was a lengthy discussion about how to organize threats, by magnitude, imminence, and severity, but also whether to split threats into subgroups, or keep them grouped.
- There was a consensus that items need to be grouped according to things that can be changed or influenced vs. items that are beyond our control.
- Question: What is the final product?

Response: The threats list is intended to be a tool to assist in writing a conservation strategy. It is supposed to give structure that can be ranked, tracked, and held accountable. This gives it legal defensibility, as opposed to one or two biologists making judgment calls. The more structure, background, and analysis that is provided initially the more strength the final document will have and better be able to withstand litigation.

- A suggestion was made to use a two-tier modified Delphi process to develop a matrix that can be analyzed and summarized. This would involve collecting comments from a large group on the threats list, then using a smaller subset of that group (not more than 8 people) to organize and prioritize the list.
- A rigorous approach is key, with outlined assumptions and literature citations.
- Task that group was left with is to add to or subtract from the list, as well as provide comments to Scott or Laura within the next two weeks, so that they can take the edits to the Biology Team in Portland at the end of this month. Then the fisher group can discuss the results of that meeting at our next meeting.

3. Keith Aubry's Central Data Repository.

- Keith Aubry is building a site containing fisher survey and detection information on all lands in WA, OR, and CA. It is meant to serve as clearinghouse for this type of information. WA and OR are complete, CA is not, and the site should be accessible very soon. Ric Schlexer will be doing the CA data screening.
- Scott gave a brief presentation using Keith's PowerPoint presentation that Keith used at the Coastal Martes Group meeting in May. I have included the notes from Keith's presentation at that meeting below (in blue).

Notes from Keith's Presentation 3 May 06

- "An Interactive Website for Archiving and Evaluating Results from Forest Carnivore Surveys". The site is being developed out of the USDA Forest Service PNW Research Station.

- Keith started the presentation by emphasizing that he welcomes any input on the website design or content.
- The goal of this website is to make use of surveys conducted based on the 4-mi² survey block, to make this information available to everyone without providing point locations for sensitive records.

Background

- The website is based on survey methods developed by Zielinski and Kucera 1995. Keith gave a brief summary of these methods, which use a 4-mi² survey block, and how these methods have been applied to the database. This is important as our understanding of carnivore distribution is based on these types of surveys.
- A map was displayed showing the discrepancy between distribution of fisher based on unscreened records, and the distribution based on verified records. The unscreened records show fisher distributed throughout their former range in WA, OR, and CA, while the verified records (track-plate and camera) show a much reduced range.

Q: Why the discrepancy between unscreened and verified records, and why do the unscreened records follow the historical distribution of the fisher so well?

A: People want to see things that are rare and exciting, and tend to report them. Sightings are often animals running across the road at night and I.D. is difficult. Looking at a field guide may lead someone to think fisher if they are within the right range as displayed in the guide.

Comment: Same dynamic occurs with wolverine records.

A: Again, verifiable records are important. Anecdotal data can be useful in directing us to survey in areas where there have been unverified sightings.

- Another risk with anecdotal data is that it leans towards erring in the wrong direction, as it appears that populations are doing better than they actually are. Part of the reason the fisher was denied listing under previous petitions is the occurrence records showed them to be well distributed.
- Genetic information supports current survey results showing gap between OR population (introduced) and northern CA - surveys and genetics agree.
- Reliability increases with more surveys over more years.
- Standard surveys have been conducted by many parties throughout WA, OR, and CA but there is no central point to gather information.
- Both positive and negative data very important to gather and archive – as important as museum specimens
- Important to show current carnivore distribution for posterity.

- Currently there are no means to avoid duplicating surveys, some areas are in need of increased survey effort in order to fill in gaps, and site will help to highlight these.

The Website

- The range does not include all survey efforts; it focuses mostly on public lands, but private land information shouldn't change overall picture of the current range of fisher.
- The website includes records for all forest carnivores, not just fisher and marten.
- Keith has developed a fixed 4-mi² grid system based on townships. This grid may not be the same blocks as researchers have used for their surveys.
- The website includes records for all forest carnivores, including verifiable records of four main carnivores of primary conservation concern: wolverine, lynx, fisher, and coastal marten.
- The website will also include physical evidence of records for the above four species only, which would include photos, trackplate images, tissue samples, etc. Only the four species are covered in the physical evidence as otherwise the site would become overloaded with photos. So, all carnivores detected will be recorded, with evidence supplied for the four species.
- WA and OR survey data compilation is near completion. USFWS has just provided partial funding to compile CA survey data.
- Website will allow individuals to log in and enter new information and data themselves.
- Contributors will be listed on site.
- Website includes query map feature.
- When individuals first log in, they will create a profile for themselves including affiliations and contact information, and will create a password so no one else can enter data under their name.
- Site will include museum records.
- Default query will be records from last 10 years, but can query on any timeframe.
- Can query trackplate surveys specifically, camera surveys, or both. You then choose an area to query, and species. Can navigate the area of query by the map (clicking and zooming) or by choosing county, range, township from a dropdown menu. Must use map to navigate for private land surveys, not available on the dropdown menu.
- Can access squares on grid for both positive and negative survey results.
- If a square on grid is highlighted as having a positive survey, table at the bottom of page will also show all negative surveys conducted in that block. Also, when you export the query results to Excel, ALL surveys and results will display, both positive and negative.

- You can start to enter data, and if you don't have all the information in front of you, you can save it as a draft and come back to complete it later.
- Site should be up and running this fall/winter.
- Website will be put up before all the California data is entered, with just WA and OR.
- A general discussion on point data vs. 4-mi² survey block data. Keith said that the website is NOT meant for point data, or habitat-use modeling.

Questions and Comments:

Q: What was the timeframe for the unscreened records?

A: They start 20-30 years prior to surveys.

Q: Does the survey data include point locations that could be useful to some?

A: Yes, but it's archived and not generally available on the website.

Q: If Green Diamond, for example, got all their survey results into the site, would all the physical evidence need to be scanned, or just a representation?

A: Each detection would have verifiable data (photo, scan of track) associated with it. This is going to require a lot of scanning. It would require one scan per sample effort. So one trackplate photo per 4-mi² survey block per survey. Otherwise there would be too much information.

Q: What would be the standard resolution of photos? What is too big?

A: Ideally JPEG, or anything that could be emailed. Site may be able to resize photos as individuals are entering their records, so it wouldn't be storing huge files.

Q: Are negative survey results wanted?

A: Yes.

Q: Where is the line between coastal martens and interior populations?

A: I-5 is the arbitrary line used to differentiate for the purposes of the website.

Q: Are the 4-mi² survey blocks on the site coded?

A: Yes. When you enter data, you'd pick a square that overlays your data point. Hoping that UTM coordinates can be entered in a field, and the corresponding survey block would be highlighted. If the data point or survey area falls between two or more survey blocks, one would need to be chosen.

Comment: It would be good to include a UTM to Township range converter on the database.

Comment: Should have a private land designation both on the map and in the legend. Not currently on there.

Comment: Should specify Dept. of Defense land ownership as they own large areas of land.

Q: How are data entries screened and verified?

A: Information entered into the website by individuals would go into a “holding pen” and wouldn’t appear on the site until it has been checked.

Q: How do you verify negative surveys as there is no evidence?

A: Have to accept it at face value. Since a login is required to enter information on the site, the individual entering the data is listed and can be contacted.

Q: PALCO length of survey efforts has varied. How is this accounted for?

A: Administrator of the site would determine if the surveys are satisfactory. Need to choose a minimum number of days/nights etc. for criteria. Data not used on the website will still be archived as it is still useful.

Q: Is there a potential for bias for records where we are unsure of the species detected.

A: Records where there is uncertainty should be submitted and will be reviewed. Could include a caveat that states that there is uncertainty.

Q: Is there funding to keep the website going?

A: It is administered by a company in Utah. Unsure what administrative cost will be. There are already a lot of volunteer hours involved, and we may need to seek out funding sources.

Q: What if data straddles the grid 4-mi² survey blocks?

A: May need to exclude that data, or include a note that says it was part of a survey that didn’t match the grid.

Q: As land ownerships change, how does the database change?

A: Site will be updated to show current ownerships, but ownership at time of survey will remain the same.

Q: Can we query based on ownership?

A: Some private landowners don’t want specific mention of ownership. Ownerships change often anyway, so calling it “private” is easiest.

Q: If we have a photo of a positive detection, can we attach it when we enter the data into the site?

A: Yes, and hopefully the photo will be automatically resized/converted to a resolution that will fit on the site.

Q: Will individuals have to enter their own data right now?

A: No, data can be compiled in an Excel sheet or photocopy of data sheets, and will be entered by Keith's team. BUT, once the site is up and running, keeping up records and entering data will be up to the individual.

Interior Group Discussion on website:

- Our group should provide feedback to Keith. His site is particularly useful as it includes negative survey data, and few other databases do this.
 - There is concern, as there was in the Coastal group, about the number of databases into which we need to enter data. However, most of the other databases are state-based, where this is a larger compilation of data, and is cross-agency.
 - Suggestion that Aubry have links to other databases. Problem is that firewalls on Federal sites prevent this. Even other Federal agencies can't access each others databases.
 - Discussion about what databases Aubry is researching to find all records and their contacts.
 - CDFG should be consulted as to their feelings that Aubry's website may get entries that then aren't entered into BIOS or CNDDDB, as people may only want to enter into one.
 - Comment that Aubry's website appears much like BIOS, and maybe they could be made to be compatible or linked somehow so that data entered into one would also be sent to the other. This would be helpful for many of the databases.
 - There was a discussion of information gathered from non-protocol or non-verified surveys. This information is useful to some. Aubry gave the impression that this information would be archived so that it was available, but wouldn't be included on the site itself.
4. We discussed logistics for the field trip the following day.
5. Additional General Discussion:
- Carole asked how to quickly and accurately assess fisher habitat. Asked how private lands/timber companies do this.
Response: There is no one way to do this, and it is time consuming. Method depends on what question you are asking. Steve Self and Rich Klug discussed some methods used by timber companies, which survey grids counting basal area, canopy cover, snags, logs, etc. It is important to measure the same variables that foresters are measuring, in addition to any others that are pertinent to wildlife. This way the information is meaningful to a larger group, and can be better communicated. Cindy mentioned a great modeling program called Fuels Management Analysis +, which is used for fire management but has USFS photo series in it and is a great tool to model habitat.

- Carole asked how to quantify habitat. Wanted a short list of variables to measure.
Response: There are three levels you need to measure: First is the structure itself, whether a rest site, maternal den, etc., second is a small area around it, usually an acre or hectare, and third is a larger landscape scale, whatever that area may be. Again, variables depend upon the questions.
 - Carole asked about scat dogs.
Response: Laura said has funded a scat-dog team and U of Washington researchers (Sam Wasser) to do genetic analysis on scat. Dogs detected ~700 scat samples in a month of survey in the Hoopa/Green Diamond area. Due to financial constraints only 200 of the 700 samples are being analyzed at U of W,. They are also testing if the dogs can detect individual fishers based on scat. They are also currently doing tests in the Sierra Nevada National Forest with scat dogs.
 The analysis is being held up now because they need to identify enough genetic markers to differentiate individuals.
 Hair-snare studies are also currently going on and will be genetically analyzed once the techniques are set.
 - Laura discussed other ongoing activities:
 - USFS in the southern Sierra is doing a baseline habitat analysis. It is on the fast-track and the report is due by the end of 2006. The purpose is to try to do a cumulative effects analysis.
 - Interagency Fisher Team is writing a draft assessment. Completion date is delayed until end of September. That section goes to the Fisher Steering Committee.
 - The Fisher Science Team met last week for the first time to decide where finances should be allotted. One topic of interest the Science team may address is why fisher are doing well in the east and not in the west.
 - The California Statewide Wildlife Plan (available at: <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/habitats/wdp/>) is out for public comment. Everyone is encouraged to comment by June 18th.
6. Next meeting date is tentatively set for 18 July in Yreka. Agenda was not established, but one suggestion was for another field trip.

June 7 Field Visit

The following day we spent the day on Sierra Pacific property on their Weaverville District looking at fisher habitat.

We visited several natal and maternal dens and one rest site to see what fisher were using in a heavily managed landscape.

All the dens we observed were in oak cavities.

Several discussions took place including:

- how to maintain these kinds of structures into the future
- how many of these kinds of structures are needed across a landscape
- what spatial scale should be analyzed when looking at impacts
- what is the relationship between denning and resting structures, if any
- how should these structures be distributed across the landscape
- how will changing silviculture (more intensive) effect future fisher habitat recruitment
- were these structures selected for their microclimatic characteristics (open, exposed, warm areas)