

Project Expands in 2012

The wolverine-winter recreation project was initiated with aerial surveys across the Payette, Boise and Sawtooth National Forests in 2009 to examine the distribution and potential overlap between winter recreation and wolverine presence. Finding this overlap in several areas, the ground-based research effort began in January 2010 on the Payette National Forest outside of McCall, Idaho.

That first season was truly an experiment. Could we successfully capture and collar wolverines within these recreated landscapes using new GPS collar designs? And, while we felt relatively confident about this, even more uncertain was the reception we might receive from the recreating public as we asked for their help and cooperation. That first season was remarkably successful, due to the hard work of a committed team of field technicians, an open-minded and supportive recreation community and state and federal agency cooperation. We collected excellent information on winter recreation and monitored 6 wolverines that reside in the landscapes used by this public.

In 2011, we returned to McCall for a second year of data collection, and expanded the scope of the study to include the Warm Lake area east of Cascade. We also undertook a preliminary study on the Sawtooth National Forest on wolverine presence and recreation distribution. Again, the second season went better than we dared hope, with wolverines and recreationists critically assisting in our successful data collection efforts. We invite you to read prior Project Updates at www.forestcarnivores.org.

For the project to be able to understand the potential responses of wolverines to recreation, we need to look at a minimum of three landscapes with different and diverse recreation use patterns to monitor wolverines under a variety of conditions. Therefore, the work in our new study areas on the Sawtooth and Boise National Forests are as important as our initial work on the Payette National Forest has been.



A wolverine at one of our 2011 pre-baited log-style traps on the Sawtooth National Forest. The lid is locked open, so he was free to come and go as he pleased last winter. He was certainly surprised this winter when the lid closed. He is now wearing a GPS collar for 3 months as one of our Stanley study area animals.

Thus, this year – the winter of 2012 – is our most ambitious season yet. We have continued wolverine monitoring and selected winter recreation monitoring across our 2011 study area on the Payette and Boise National Forests. We have initiated a full wolverine and winter recreation study on the Sawtooth National Forest, with crews in Stanley and Fairfield, Idaho. And we are conducting preliminary data collection in the Trinity Mountains of the Boise National Forest, with a crew based in Featherville. So far, the season is going well – we provide some updates for the season here.

Early trapping success bodes well for another great season

One of our challenges is to capture wolverines fairly quickly in January and February so we can begin collecting the GPS location and activity information provided by the fitted collars before denning season. Battery life on the collars is limited, so we cannot start earlier than January else risk not having data during the most critical time: mid-February through April, when animals are potentially denning.

We have been fortunate over the last 2 years in having that critical early trapping success. This 2012 season,

Idaho Public TV filmed our project for a segment of the Outdoor Idaho program “Working for Wildlife”:

<http://idahoptv.org/outdoors/shows/workingforwildlife/>

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Project Partners and Collaborators

- USFS Rocky Mountain Research Station
- Payette, Boise and Sawtooth National Forests
- Round River Conservation Studies
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game
- Resource Advisory Committees of Southwest and South Central Idaho
- Idaho State Snowmobile Association
- Central Idaho Recreation Coalition
- Brundage Mountain Resort
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Sawtooth Society
- Valley County Commissioners
- The Wolverine Foundation
- University of Montana
- The Wolverine Network

Early Trapping Success, continued

have also had good early trap success. We have captured 4 animals in the McCall area – all are animals we have monitored since our first 2010 season. We are thrilled they are still alive and resident in the area, and we have put collars on 2 of them. We will continue trapping efforts in the McCall and Warm Lake area, focusing on recapturing females for an additional season of monitoring reproductive success.

We have also had good early trapping success in the Stanley study area and have captured 3 wolverines to date. These 2 adult males and 1 subadult male are now wearing our GPS collars and helping us collect important information on wolverine movements and behaviors in our new study area.

A series of storms passed through the study areas during the 3rd week of January. In anticipation of difficult and potentially dangerous conditions, we shut down many of our traps across the study areas. Traps are now re-opened and we hope to be able to report additional wolverine captures soon. Keep your fingers crossed for a few adult female wolverines in our Sawtooth traps!

Recreationists Are Critical to Success of Research

We have a very ambitious recreation monitoring effort underway this year in the Stanley, Fairfield and Featherville areas where we are asking recreationists to voluntarily and anonymously carry small GPS data loggers. These data loggers provide us with a path the recreationist took that day, time-stamped so that we can match it with where our collared wolverines were at the same time. The data collected will help in various modeling and analyses we hope to complete as part of the study looking at wolverine responses and interactions with recreation of all types.

We cannot overstate how valuable the participation of the recreation community is in these efforts. Because of the cooperation of the recreating community in McCall, we have collected excellent information in that study area on both recreation and wolverines over the last two winters. From this we have found that wolverines in this area are permanently residing even in some of the most highly recreated portions of the study area. This is excellent news, but we still need further information that will allow us to look at reproduction and other indicators of health in the wolverine population – in McCall and in other recreated landscapes.

Again this year, we are really pleased at the interest and willingness to participate that folks have shown when approached by our technicians. This winter is proving to be another example of how team work, collaboration and transparency are a winning combination for all of us invested in ensuring that winter recreation and wolverines both continue to use our beautiful Idaho landscapes. Thank you!

We would like to express our deepest sympathy to the family, friends and colleagues of David Gaillard, who died in an avalanche on New Year's Eve. David co-founded The Wolverine Network to disperse scientific, natural history and conservation information on a species he was passionate about. David was an enthusiastic supporter of our research project, and through David's work, The Wolverine Network and its participating organizations are partners on our project. We will miss David and his commitment to wolverines and their brethren.

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Local Businesses Support the Project

We want to thank the many businesses in Stanley, Ketchum, Hailey, Fairfield, Featherville and Mountain Home who are collaborating with the project by accepting GPS data loggers in exchange for a discount. This is a great partnership that rewards recreationists, provides incentives to visit local businesses and makes it easy and rewarding to return the GPS data logger.

In addition, recreation guiding and rental services in the Sawtooth region are also collaborating with the project by equipping their guides or asking their clients to carry a data logger for us. These sources of recreation use are critical aspects to understanding the highly diverse recreation opportunities provided in the Sawtooth region. The following businesses are collaborating on the project in this way:

Sun Valley Heli Ski

Sun Valley Trekking

Sawtooth Mountain Guides

Smiley Creek Snowmobile Rentals

Thank you!

In Ketchum, return a GPS Datalogger and receive:

Backwoods Mountain Sports

10% off one item

The Elephants Perch

\$10 gift certificate for first return per person only

Sawtooth Brewery

\$1 off any drink

In Hailey, return a GPS Datalogger and receive:

Backwoods Mountain Sports

10% off one item

The Elephants Perch

\$10 gift certificate for first return per person only

In Featherville, return a GPS Datalogger and receive:

Featherville Saloon

Buy 1, get 1 free domestic beer or bloody mary

Cyndie's Featherville Café

\$2.00 off any breakfast, lunch or dinner

In Fairfield, return a GPS Datalogger and receive:

Soldier Creek Brewery

Buy 1, get 1 free beer, wine, soda or coffee

Jim Dandy's Pizza

\$1 off any item

Claude's Sport

25% off one in-store item

Camas Creek Store

\$2 off one in-store item

The Cliff

Buy 1 beer or wine and get 50% of second one

In Stanley, return a GPS Datalogger and receive:

Smiley Creek Lodge

Buy 1 drink and get the 2nd one free

Papa Brunee's

10% off any order

Bridge St Grill

10% off one food item

Sawtooth Hotel

10% off any order

Papa Brunee's

Free cup of coffee or 2 for 1 pint of beer

Kasino Club

10% off your meal

Mountain Village Express

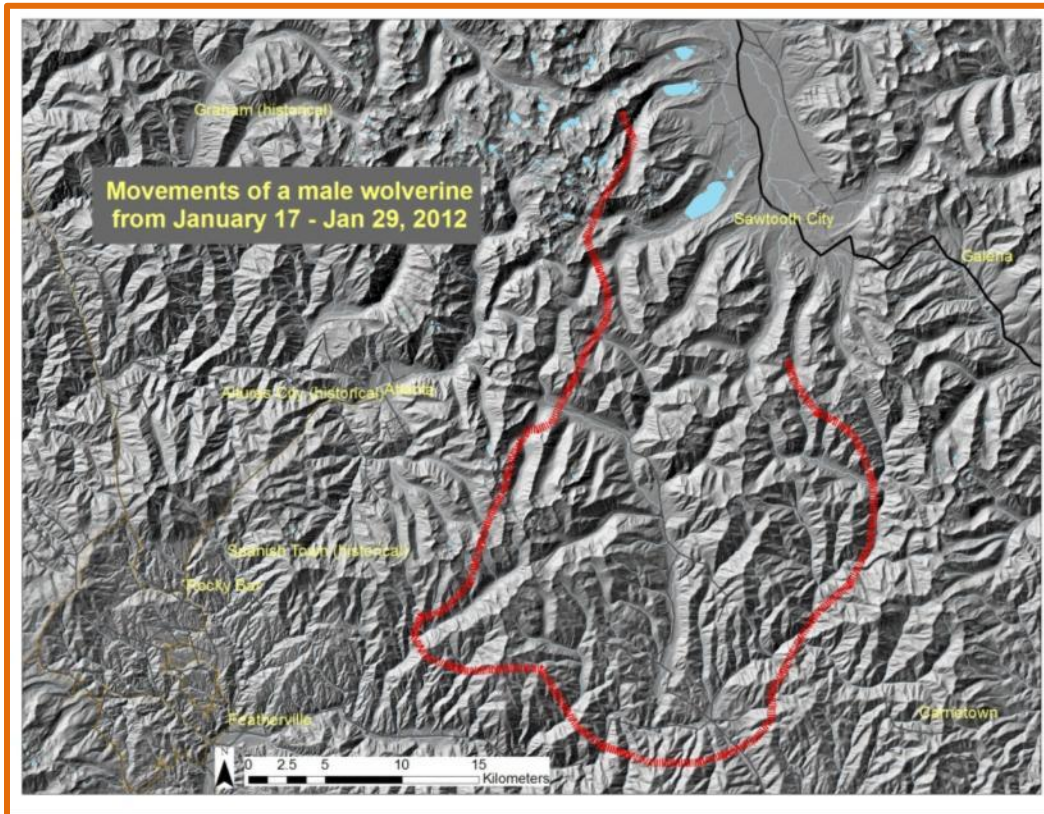
10% off your meal and free cup of coffee

In Challis, return a GPS Datalogger and receive:

Wild Side Sports

10% off any purchase

Notes from the Field



One of the new male wolverines from the Stanley area has made some impressive movements already. Even the feet of bottomless powder snow we received during the big storms in mid-January, didn't seem to bother him. He traveled south from the Stanley area to cross the South Fork of the Boise River and back again to the Salmon River drainage system. At an average of 10 km per day, this 24 lb winter specialist covered all types of terrain, including several mountain passes. Impressive.



This past summer, Ana Egnew, Payette NF Wildlife Biologist and Kim Heinemeyer visited the denning sites of female F5 ("Tess"), who used these reproductive dens during the winter and spring of 2011.

The dens are abandoned by early summer. Tess's dens were located in large piles of fallen logs within a recent burn. Dens are typically in areas with lots of physical structure – boulders, talus or downed logs. We visit these sites after the females have left to gather further information on denning habitats for wolverines.

For more information or to receive future updates, contact:

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More information on the project is also available at:
www.forestcarnivores.org