

Central Idaho Wolverine and Winter Recreation Research Study

November, 2011

Sawtooth National Forest Project Area

Project Moves to Sawtooth National Forest!

The Sawtooth National Forest was the site of the first Idaho wolverine study back in the 1990s, by Jeff Copeland. This study really started our recognition of the wolverine as a little-known species residing in the Rocky Mountains of the United States, and is still one of the premiere wolverine research efforts ever undertaken.

Beginning in January 2012, wildlife researchers, winter recreationists, and local and regional businesses in and near Fairfield, Ketchum, Stanley and Featherville will be cooperating in another research project on wolverine in the Sawtooths. This project is designed to investigate the relationship between winter recreation and wolverine behavior, and is a unique partnership between numerous agencies, recreationists, local and regional businesses and non-government organizations. The goal of this unique and collaborative effort is to replace anecdotal observation and opinion about how wolverines may or may not respond to winter recreation with good science-based information for partners to share and discuss.

The Sawtooth National Forest is the perfect location for the next step in the research, which has been on-going near McCall for the last couple winters. The high peaks, cold winters, and undisturbed landscapes attract both recreationalists and wolverines, and provide an ideal setting to better understand the interaction between the two. The project provides a great opportunity for skiers and snowmobilers to be a proactive force in the management of their National Forests, and it gives wildlife biologists a chance to better understand recreational interests and use.

Most importantly, this research is intended to provide good, science-based information for sound land use decisions. The partnerships built through collaboration on data gathering will continue after the research results are in, to provide a collaborative approach to management that supports continued coexistence of wolverine and recreation use of our public lands. We hope winter recreationists and local businesses will take ownership in the project by helping to collect data, spread the word, and engage in on-going outreach and discussions.

Idaho Public TV filmed our project for a segment of the Outdoor Idaho program "Working for Wildlife". It can be viewed at: <http://idahoptv.org/outdoors/shows/workingforwildlife/>



A wolverine at one of our pre-baited log-style traps on the Sawtooth National Forest. The lid is locked open, so he is free to come and go as he pleases.

How You Can Help

Here are a few really valuable ways that you can contribute to making the wolverine-winter recreation project a success in the Sawtooths:

If you are a winter recreationist, you may be approached at a trailhead by one of our research technicians with a request to carry a small GPS data logger. Please consider doing so. And, if you do, please return the data logger to the parking area drop box or to one of the participating businesses listed in the information package you will receive from the technician.

Tell your fellow recreationists and your friends that you support the project as an important effort to inform management based on good science.

If you come across one of our traps, please do not go near it or disturb it.

If you see a wolverine or its tracks, report it to us with a date, time and as exact a location as possible. If it is tracks, a picture is invaluable for confirming the species identification.

If you own or work in a local or regional business, consider becoming a project collaborator by accepting the return of GPS data loggers at your business and encourage recreationists to visit your business by offering a discount for a returned GPS datalogger. This is a win-win-win situation for all: your business, the recreationist and the project!

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Project Partners

- 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



In 2010, we baited log-style traps near Stanley, but locked the traps open, so wolverines were rewarded with a free meal for leaving a hair sample. We collected hair at four different sites over the winter.

McCall Study Area, 2010-2011

The first 2 winters of the research project were based in McCall, Idaho, where wildlife biologists and recreationalists; skiers and snowmobilers, private organizations and government employees; and various other stakeholders cooperated to create a recreation and wildlife study with unprecedented success. Over 80% of snowmobilers and skiers that were approached by researchers agreed to carry a small GPS unit to help map the footprint of winter recreation in the region. The Idaho State Snowmobile Association, the Central Idaho Recreation Coalition, Brundage Cat Skiing, and numerous local businesses were extremely generous with their time and cooperation, helping to spread the word about the project, collect and return GPS units, and lend their support to ensure the best possible research.

Through this collaboration, we have collected hundreds of GPS tracks from volunteer recreationists, while simultaneously monitoring the movements of up to 10 different wolverines over 2 years.

The research over the 2 winters has shown that, in the McCall area, wolverines have set up permanent home ranges even within the most highly recreated landscapes. We need to know if this happens elsewhere, and continue to gather additional information on how resident animals respond to winter recreation within their home ranges and during the late winter reproductive season.

Sawtooth Study, Winter 2010-11

During last winter, we undertook preliminary data collection near Stanley to explore the opportunities to undertake the research in the Sawtooths. To provide us with information on wolverine presence, we baited potential future trap sites and set up remote cameras and small hair collection sets that non-invasively take a sample of hair from visiting animals. Over the winter, we documented 4 wolverines visiting 5 sites using the cameras. This winter, bait stations will be established on the Fairfield Ranger District.

We also installed a series of trail use counters along major motorized and non-motorized recreation access points to provide initial information on the relative popularity and use of different regions of the study area. In addition, we conducted parking lot counts several times a week through the winter to provide us insights into the distribution of recreation across the area. This information will be invaluable in helping us identifying the diversity of areas used by both backcountry skiers and snowmobilers.

Presentations are being scheduled for the Fairfield and Featherville areas. Watch for those announcements!

For more information or questions, contact:

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or visit the website: www.forestcarnivores.org