
WESTERN STATES WOLVERINE CONSERVATION PROJECT BASELINE SURVEY

Alex Welander*, representing the Western States Wolverine Working Group which consists of numerous individuals within Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Wyoming Game and Fish, Idaho Fish and Game, Washington Fish and Wildlife, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Forest Service, National Park Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes; University of Montana, Montana State University, Colorado State University, and Woodland Park Zoo

The wolverine is a naturally uncommon species whose conservation and management requires collaboration across a large geography. Conservation priorities for wolverines in the western U.S. have been identified as 1) Connectivity, 2) Restorations, and 3) Monitoring. The Western States Wolverine Working Group is a collaborative effort among state, federal, tribal, university, and private organizations that are actively working on these priorities. One element of the conservation program is baseline survey for wolverine occupancy across the 4-states where the species currently occurs – Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, and Washington. The survey uses a grid of 15 x 15 km cells. All cells >50% modelled wolverine habitat were

considered for sampling, and a GRTS sample of 180 cells was selected to be surveyed using a standard protocol across the 4-state area during winter 2016-17. A single camera/DNA station was established during November 2016 in each cell and will be run through April 2017. To date, stations in all states are successfully detecting wolverines and other species. This effort will provide the first estimate of wolverine distribution across the species range in the lower 48 and an estimate of occupancy. It will also allow investigations into a variety of genetic-based questions at the population scale, including identification of current and future areas of importance for connectivity. The survey is designed so that it can be repeated as a monitoring program and can determine changes in wolverine status (stable, increasing, or decreasing distribution via occupancy), and genetic composition over time. Results will also be used to identify potential population restoration areas if there are large areas with suitable habitat that have not yet been recolonized after historical lows.