

STATUS OF THE WESTERN FENCE LIZARD IN MONTANA

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In Aug, 2002 a biology student at Salish Kootenai College found a dead adult specimen of the Western Fence Lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*) along the shore of the Lower Flathead River near Perma on the Flathead Indian Reservation. The discovery represented the first time this species had been reported in Montana. The closest known locality is 240 km to the west in eastern Washington. A survey of the area shortly after its discovery revealed the presence of two adults and two young-of-the-year scattered among eroded sandstone banks along the river. The area occupied by the lizards was ~ 25 m long by 15 m wide. From 2003 to 2006, I undertook repeated surveys of the known locality and surrounding environs. Usually I saw five or fewer individuals with most sightings in the discovery area. Each year, however, a few individuals were sighted outside of the area, including one young-of-the-year in 2006 that was ~ 100 m to the west. In 2007 a September survey resulted in the sighting of seven young-of-the-year and eight juveniles/adults with about half of them in a new area to the north of the existing range. This represented the apparent first major expansion of the population since it was discovered in 2002. Management alternatives for this species are discussed.