

## **STATUS OF SWIFT FOX IN NORTH EASTERN MONTANA; PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE 2005/2006 INTERNATIONAL SWIFT FOX CENSUS**

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Swift fox (*Vulpes velox*) historically ranged throughout eastern Montana. However, their numbers were substantially reduced in the early part of the twentieth century and the species was declared extinct in Montana in 1969. Captive raised and translocated wild-born foxes were released annually on the Canadian prairies adjacent to Montana from 1983 through 1997. Reports of swift fox south of the Canadian border and documented swift fox reproduction in Montana led to a cooperative census of the species between Canadian partners and Montana during the winter of 2000/01. The cooperative census was repeated in 2005-2006. The Montana study area included 80 townships and 104 townships north of the Milk River extending from Havre to Opheim in 2000-20001 and 2005-2006, respectively. A single transect consisting of six Tomahawk live traps placed at one-kilometer intervals was set in each township. Traps were set at dusk, checked at midnight and checked and tripped at dawn.

Each transect was run for three consecutive nights. Trapped foxes were transferred to handling bags, manually restrained, morphological data and hair samples collected. Trapping began in November and ended in February during both censuses. Sixty-six townships in 2000/01 census and 91 townships in 2005/06 were surveyed for swift fox. In 2000/01, a total of 1188 trapnights resulted in the capture of 38 different swift fox (31 trapnights/fox or 3.2 foxes/100 trapnights). The total population occupying the Montana study area was estimated at 221 swift