

CHANGING STATUS OF MONTANA'S WOLVERINE POPULATION WITH THE PAST CENTURY IN REVIEW^{TWS}

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In the early 1900s wolverine (*Gulo luscus*) were considered to be a vanishing species in the western U.S. and near extinction in Montana. Changes in wildlife management philosophies and a reduction in predator control programs are believed to have allowed wolverine to re-colonize parts of Montana during the next 50 years. Population expansion continued through the 1970s when the state gave wolverine protection as a furbearer with a regulated harvest and a requirement to collect harvest data. Species distribution data accumulated since 1977 indicated that wolverine now occupy >35,000 mi² of montane forest habitat in the western portion of the state. Harvest distribution has remained relatively stable over the past 25 years with evidence that population expansions have occurred into central and southwest mountain ranges. Harvest data also indicate a stable annual average harvest of 10 wolverine, stable to increasing species distribution, a 50/50 sex ratio, and an

appropriate age distribution of over 50 percent juveniles and yearlings represented in the harvest sample. Since 1990-1991, FWP has supplemented harvest information with snow track survey based data and collection of species occurrence records to monitor long-term trends in distribution and population size. The harvest sample continues to provide accurate sex and age data, distribution, reproductive data, food habits information, and genetic samples. Based on harvest-generated data, new wolverine management strategies may be considered in the future.