

DISTRIBUTION OF FOREST CARNIVORES IN THE PIONEER, FLINT, AND ANACONDA-PINTLER MOUNTAINS, MONTANA™

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This project was initiated in the winter of 2000-2001 by the Rocky Mountain Research Station in cooperation with the Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD) of the Federal Highway Administration. The primary goal of this 3-year study is to assess the direct and indirect impacts of the proposed Pioneer Scenic Byway improvement on lynx, wolverine, and other forest carnivores in the Pioneer and adjacent mountain ranges. We began an intensive survey effort directed at meeting 2 primary objectives; 1.) Determine the distribution of lynx, wolverine, and other forest carnivores in the Pioneer, Flint and Anaconda-Pintler Mountain Ranges, and 2.) Determine the location and relative frequency that lynx, wolverine, and other wildlife (forest carnivores, elk, deer, mountain lions, coyotes, and bobcats) cross the Byway. Last winter (2000-01), we surveyed 1,313 km of intensive survey routes and >5000 km of less data intensive reconnaissance routes. We documented one lynx track in the Anaconda-Pintler range on 12 February 2001. We frequently encountered tracks of coyote ($n=1075$), marten ($n=205$), and wolverine ($n=36$) throughout the survey area. Bobcat ($n=10$), mountain lion ($n=5$), and wolf ($n=3$) were uncommon and were rarely encountered. During the current field season (in progress), we have completed 350 km of intensive surveys and 825 kilometers of recon surveys. Distribution trends continue to be similar, with frequent wolverine tracks ($n=15$) and no lynx tracks to date. We have surveyed the closed portion of the Byway 10 times over the course of two field seasons. Martens and coyotes are the most common carnivores using the road. Wolverine crossings have been documented 8 times, with crossings in 2002 more widely distributed than in 2001. Trapping for wolverine began on 10 February 2002 in the Pioneers with two individuals captured and implanted to date.