

DISTRIBUTION OF FOREST CARNIVORES IN THE PIONEER MOUNTAINS, MONTANA ^{TWS}

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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. Survey efforts are directed at meeting 2 primary objectives; 1.) Determine the distribution of lynx and other forest carnivores in the Pioneer Mountain Range, and 2.) Determine the location and relative frequency that lynx and other wildlife (forest carnivores, elk, deer, mountain lions, coyotes, and bobcats) cross the Polaris Road. To address the first objective we overlaid suitable habitat within the mountain range with an 8-km grid in order to systematically and quantifiably conduct the large scale surveys. The approach is to cover a minimum of 10 km of survey route within each 8-km pixel. To address the 2nd objective we surveyed the closed portion of the Polaris Road a minimum of 1 time per 10 days. Surveys are conducted only between 48 and 72 hours after significant snowfall. All track data is GPSed and stored in a GIS upon return from the field. Between 1 January 2001 and 20 February 2001 a total of 764 km of GPS logged survey have been conducted in the 8-km pixels. Mammalian carnivore track crossings and data pertaining to habitat and prey species are recorded along these routes. In addition to the intensive surveys, approximately 4000 km has been covered in which observers record locations of lynx, wolverine, fisher, and wolves. To date we have not summarized all location data. Wolverine tracks have been detected on 8 survey routes across the mountain range. Wolf tracks have been documented on 2 entries of the same survey route. Martens are commonly encountered within certain habitat types. No lynx or fisher tracks have been documented at this time. We have surveyed the closed portion of the Polaris Road 4 times to date. Martens and coyotes are the most common carnivores using the road. Martens do not appear to travel along the road itself but simply cross. Coyotes are found crossing the road and using it as a travel corridor. Wolverine crossings have been documented on 2 of the 4 surveys. No lynx, fisher or wolf tracks have been detected to date.