

Montana Swift Fox Occupancy Survey

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Swift fox (*Vulpes velox*) distribution and population viability is currently not well understood in much of central and eastern Montana. Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks is conducting a range wide camera survey to determine the distribution and connectivity of swift fox populations across Montana. This is a roving survey across four administrative regions in central and eastern Montana. Camera surveys are conducted on a rotational basis with surveys conducted in Region 7 in 2023/24, Region 6 in 2024/25, and Regions 4 and 5 in 2025/26. From October 2023 through March 2024, staff surveyed portions of moderate and high-quality swift fox habitat in Region 7, southeastern Montana using a systematic camera survey. Data from two previous pilot studies was used to determine the best protocol: including lure type, number of cameras, and number of deployment days. Each survey grid had 4 cameras baited with a sent lure, one in each quadrant of the survey grid and were deployed for 14 days. A total of 656 cameras, equaling 164 survey grids, were set. Surveying a, roughly, proportionate amount of high-quality (44%) and moderate-quality (56%) habitat sample grids. This survey effort produced a total of 1,219,157 photos. These photos are currently being cataloged. So far there have been 18 cameras, equaling 13 survey grids, that have confirmed swift fox presence. By the time of this conference there should be more data to discuss!