

## Endangered Species and Spaces

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### 3.3 Fisher: *Martes pennanti* (Erxleben)

**Order: Carnivora**  
**Family: *Mustelidae***

#### Status

Global Rank: G5  
Provincial Rank: S3S4  
COSEWIC:

Provincial Listing:  
**Blue list**



#### *Distinguishing Features*

Fishers resemble large black cats, but are more slender, with shorter legs and a long bushy tails that taper towards the tip. The coat is a variable grey on the head, shoulders and upper back. The rump, tail, feet and belly are dark chocolate brown or almost black. There may be small irregular white spots on the chest and abdomen. Males average 3.7 kg and females 2.1 kg (Banfield, 1974).

#### *Distribution*

Columbia Basin: Throughout the Columbia Basin in suitable habitat.

British Columbia: Fishers are found throughout the province except for coastal islands. Believed to be extirpated from the Lower Mainland, portions of the Thompson and Okanagan Valleys, and the southeast corner of the province.

Global: Extensive range across northeastern and western United States and most of northern Canada.

#### *Habitat*

Fishers use primarily coniferous or mixed-wood habitats. Optimum Fisher habitat consists of a diversity of forest types and, therefore, greater prey abundance. Large diameter trees with cavities, especially riparian cottonwoods in British Columbia, are important as natal den sites. Fishers move to larger cavities as the young grow. Dense forest stands in the latter successional stages provide the best quality habitat, particularly in western North America. Weir (1995) regarded Fishers in south central British Columbia as a habitat specialist associated with late successional forest (Cannings et al, 1999)

#### *Threats*

Fewer than 1500 Fishers are believed to live in province; they are vulnerable to habitat loss through forestry, trapping and hydroelectric development. Loss of habitat through the cutting of forests for timber or

conversion to other land uses, over-trapping and the widespread use of poisons as a harvest and predator control method have also contributed to the reduction and extirpation of Fisher populations. Forest harvesting elsewhere also increases access for trappers, which is a particular concern because Fishers are taken in Marten sets, and Marten trapping is a mainstay of BC's fur industry (Cannings et al. 1999).

## Biology

Fishers are medium sized carnivores that prey on a wide variety of foods including birds, rabbits, porcupines and carrion. Distribution is likely governed by the availability of food but the presence of overhead cover may also be an important factor (Strickland et al. 1982). Home range sizes of Fishers vary up to 30 km<sup>2</sup> for adult males. The range of one male will overlap those of more than one female, but home ranges within adult sexes are exclusive (Cannings et al. 1999).



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