

Endangered Species and Spaces

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3.2 Wolverine *luscus* subspecies: *Gulo gulo luscus* (Linnaeus)

Order: *Carnivora*
Family: *Mustelidae*

Status

Global Rank: G4T4
Provincial Rank: S3
COSEWIC: Vulnerable

Provincial Listing: [Blue list](#)



Distinguishing Features

One of the largest species in the weasel family, wolverines are about the size of a bear cub. They have stout, muscular bodies, short bushy tail, strong legs and bear-like paws with partly retractable claws suitable for climbing. Ears are short and rounded; head is broad with small black eyes and a prominent muzzle. They are a rich glossy dark brown in colour with two pale buff strips on the shoulders and flanks. Underparts are dark brown with splashes of creamy white spots on the chest and throat. They have prodigious strength and ferocity for their size. Males (avg. 14.8 kg) are larger than females (avg. 10.6 kg) (Banfield, 1974)

Distribution

Columbia Basin: Throughout the Columbia Basin in appropriate habitat - which is more frequent in the more remote northern portions.

British Columbia: The precise range of wolverines is not entirely clear, but is believed to extend throughout the mainland of the province in appropriate habitat. Wolverines are believed to avoid dry grassland areas, and are rare on the coast.

Global: Wolverines range across northern Eurasia and North America. *G. g. luscus* ranges throughout mainland North America, primarily in the northern forest and tundra with southward extensions into the western mountains (Hatler 1989).

Habitat

The Wolverine is a solitary and wide ranging carnivore occupying alpine and arctic tundra, boreal and mountain forest. Occupies a wide range of habitats in search of prey.

Threats

The population is believed to be stable over much of the province, but is declining in the south due to human activities. Wolverines are thought to be negatively affected by human activity and habitat alteration and are

generally found in remote areas of undisturbed wilderness. Females with kits are extremely sensitive to human disturbance and will abandon den sites if disturbed. Wolverines are reluctant to cross active transportation corridors and where they occur they form a significant barrier to movement and high mortality. Increased access roads can increase human disturbances in Wolverine habitat; for example, increased access for trappers could increase harvest rates (Cannings et al. 1999)

Biology

The biology of this species is poorly understood with only five major field studies in North America having been completed. None of these studies are in British Columbia, however, two major studies are currently underway. Food availability is the primary factor determining the movements and range of. Large herbivores, probably obtained as carrion, are the most important food item in the diet, particularly during the winter, although wolverine may hunt large prey such as caribou to a greater extent than previously thought (Cannings et al. 1999). Daily movements may exceed 30 km. Geographic features, such as mountain ranges and large rivers do not form barriers for wolverines to the same extent that they do many species. Seclusion appears to be the most important factor in the selection of natal den sites. The breeding season is usually in summer, but implantation is delayed so that kits are born the following spring, after a gestation of 30-40 days. Average litter size is 3 kits. (Cannings et al. 1999)

For recent research on Wolverine, check out the Columbia Mountains Institute of Applied Ecology website at <http://www.cmiae.org>



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