

# Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup Newsletter

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Spring Newsletter

APRIL 2013

Edited by Kylie Paul

PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE AND STEWARDSHIP OF LOCAL WILDLIFE AND HABITATS WITHIN THE COMMUNITIES AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE NINEMILE, HUSON, AND ALBERTON REGION.

**EVENTS** Please check out our website [www.ninemilewildlife.org](http://www.ninemilewildlife.org) or join our email list (email us at [ninemilewildlife.com](mailto:ninemilewildlife.com)) for event updates!

Our free-admission **Wildlife Lecture Series** is going on right now! Please attend and bring friends and family. If you don't know: the NWW sponsors a lecture series each year consisting of four monthly talks from February through May. The topics are most often related to wildlife of the area. The lectures still left this spring are....

**April 25, 7pm** Beau Larkin with MPG Ranch will present **'Monitoring Wildlife and Restoring Habitat on Private Conservation Properties in Western Montana'** at the Alberton Senior Citizens' Center

**Saturday, May 18, 2pm** **Exhibit of local and exotic wildlife** by Jessie Castaneda (Animal Wonders); because of anticipated attendance by children this is scheduled for Saturday at 2:00PM. Alberton Senior Citizens' Center.

**Saturday, June 1** **Ninemile Bird Walk** Want to learn how to identify birds in the region? Meet us at 8am sharp at the Ninemile Ranger Station parking lot. All level of birders welcome. Bring your binoculars and a friend!

**'Not Just Cake' Auction 2013 in October:** More details to come!

**Here are some summer NWW activities that may occur -** once they are fully planned, details will be sent by email. Sign up if you don't currently get emails about NWW events.

Adopt a Highway: in June  
 Wildlife Work Day: in July  
 River Cleanup: in August



Black bear. Photo by Lucy/Doug McCoy



Pine grosbeak Photo by Genevieve Fix



## Wildlife-Resistant Cans STILL for Sale....REAL CHEAP

Wildlife ranging in size from mice to grizzly bears as well as the occasional dog like to get into our garbage. They also like other attractants such as animal feed. If you would like to safely store your garbage or animal feed, now is the time to purchase a bear resistant and mouse proof container that can be used as a garbage can or simply to store your bird feed, dog food or grain. Animals looting stored attractants means not only a big, ugly mess and destroyed property, but also that the animal has learned where the easy treats occur and will come back again to your place, or your neighbors, while possibly teaching their young bad habits as well.

Avoid the hassle, be a friend to wildlife, be part of the solution. For a limited time, buy wildlife resistant containers at greatly reduced prices--this is a screaming deal!

**95 gallon residential roll-out carts: \$60!** These are similar to the curbside roll-out carts currently provided by Allied Waste Services, and they are fully accepted by Allied Waste but you must manually unhook the snaps the morning of pickup.

For more information or to buy a container, please call Pat Sweeney, 626-1610.



NWW members at the Living with Critters event in Alberton

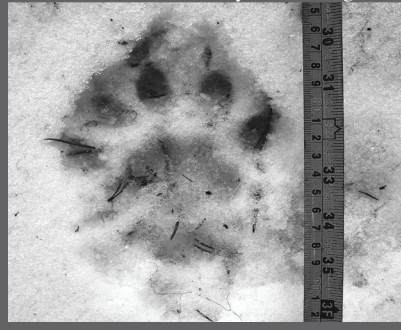
## THAT'S (STILL) CHEAP BEAR SPRAY!

Please also take advantage of our **Reduced Cost Bear Spray Program**. Because we believe that the more people in the woods carrying bear spray, the better off are both bears and humans, we're providing residents of our area with effective bear spray for only **\$25 a canister**. Retail sells at about \$45, so this is a real bargain. For more information, email us at [ninemilewildlife@gmail.com](mailto:ninemilewildlife@gmail.com), or call Pat Sweeney 626-1610.

Wolverine. Photo by Paul Nicklen

Wolverine track. Photo by Kalon Baughan

Wolverine. Photo by David Gaillard



by Kylie Paul

## WOLVERINES: PROPOSED FOR FEDERAL PROTECTION

Though their name may seem confusing with wolves, wolverines are not female wolves and are in no way related to wolves, and though they look like little bear cubs, they are related to weasels, otters, fisher, marten, and badgers. The New World wolverine was once found across Alaska, Canada, and across many of the northern states and down mountain ranges as south as New Mexico in the lower 48. Wolverines in the lower 48 live in rugged, remote country, spending most of their time in mountain ranges near or above timberline. By the early 20th century, wolverines were mostly killed off in the lower 48 due to indiscriminate predator control and unregulated trapping. However, it appears they have been slowly recolonizing their former territory over the last several decades, and are currently found in the North Cascades Range in Washington, the Willowa Range in eastern Oregon, and the northern Rocky Mountains of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. Biologists estimate there are currently fewer than 300 wolverines in the lower 48. Wolverine population densities here have likely always been small due to inhospitable habitat conditions, the resulting need for huge territories, and having one of the lowest reproduction rates known for mammals.

On February 4, the US Fish and Wildlife Services (FWS) proposed to protect wolverines as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). There are two separate proposals: 1) to list the wolverine as a threatened species under the ESA; 2) to designate the southern Rockies as an experimental population. Why do wolverines warrant listing on the ESA? The following information is pulled from the FWS listing proposal.

Wolverines need deep snow that lasts through spring for snow dens in which females raise their young. But current science indicates that wolverines in the lower 48 could lose two-thirds of their snow-covered habitat by the end of this century due to increasing temperatures and declining persistent spring snowpack due to climate change. This habitat reduction is expected to result in reduced numbers of wolverines, reduced genetic diversity, and reduced connectivity among wolverine populations to the point where the lower 48 population would become endangered with extinction. So climate change is the primary threat to wolverines.

Trapping is a factor identified impacting wolverines at local scales. Montana is the only state in the lower 48 that allows wolverine trapping. This proposed rule would lead to a closure of wolverine trapping in Montana, and it includes a prohibition against incidental take of wolverine in the course of legal trapping activities directed at other species.

In the proposed listing, human activities including dispersed recreational use such as backcountry skiing, snowmobiling, off-road motorized use, infrastructure development, and transportation corridors are not considered threats to the overall wolverine population in the lower 48. FWS cites a lack of scientific information regarding anticipated effects. Thus, the proposed listing will not curtail such activities across any part of the wolverine's range.

Meanwhile, the ESA itself cannot halt climate change. Instead, the FWS' proposed recovery outline discusses four ways to protect and restore wolverines: facilitate continued wolverine expansion, reduce human-caused mortality of wolverines, study possible human impacts, and monitor the population.

Probably the best bet to secure wolverines' future is to help them more rapidly expand their population and reclaim habitat they once occupied. FWS is proposing a special rule to establish a 'nonessential experimental' population area designation under 10(j) of the ESA in the southern Rockies. This means wolverines reintroduced into the state will have fewer protections under the ESA, allowing activities and land uses to continue without any new restrictions or consultations related to their reintroduction. This facilitates the possible reintroduction of wolverines into Colorado that Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife has been exploring for several years.

Colorado is a likely place for wolverine reintroduction: it has the highest average elevation of any state in the lower 48 including 54 peaks over 14,000 feet, and climate models suggest that Colorado's higher elevations may retain large blocks of suitable wolverine habitat and be less affected by climate change than other parts of the range. A male wolverine radiotracked from the Grand Tetons moved his way down to Colorado and is the only wolverine known to exist in the state since 1919. He's been persisting there for several years, but there's very little chance a female will ever move that distance to help establish a reproducing population...without a reintroduction.

With talk of population expansion and reintroductions, it may sound like wolverines will be swarming all across the West. But keep in mind that wolverines exist at very low densities. They are not a threat to livestock or big game. And the vast majority of wolverine habitat in the lower 48—94 percent according to FWS—is already federally owned and managed. More wolverines across the West will not impact most of us beyond knowing that wolverines have more places to call home and a better chance of long-term survival.

One way to get involved in the proposed listing process is to submit a comment during the public comment period, which lasts until May 6, 2013. Head to [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov). In the Keyword box, enter Docket No. FWS-R6-ES-2012-0107. In the Search panel on the left side, under the "Document Type" heading, click on the "Proposed Rules" link. You may submit a comment by clicking on "Comment Now!"



## ELECTRIC FENCES MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS

By Pat Sweeney

Electric fences can be important tools that reduce conflicts between humans and wildlife. Human caused mortalities of grizzly bears resulting from conflict with small livestock, garbage, fruit trees and other items, continue to be the single greatest obstacle to long term grizzly bear recovery. Black bears are often killed because they become habituated to food attractants that are unprotected. One way to reduce these conflicts that cause damage to property and increased mortality of bears is to protect bear attractants with an electric fence.

Defenders of Wildlife runs an Electric Fence Incentive Program that includes the NWW area, and gave financial incentive and assisted participants across western MT, western Wyoming, and northern Idaho with the design and installation of electric fences. The project provides 50% of the cost of an electric fence for securing bear attractants up to a maximum reimbursement of \$500. A fence must meet minimum criteria listed in the Electric Fence Guide for Bears (available at [www.fwp.mt.gov](http://www.fwp.mt.gov) or [www.missoulabears.org](http://www.missoulabears.org)). Examples of eligible grizzly bear attractants include: chicken coops, bee hives, livestock or pet food, carcass pits/boneyards, livestock, garbage, fruit trees, food waste compost, restaurant grease containers, and game.

In 2012, NWW partnered with Defenders of Wildlife to address this concern. NWW donated \$2,000 to use for electric fencing projects located in Ninemile, Alberton, and Huson. Four projects were completed at a cost of \$1,826.59; a Huson resident built a larger electric fence around his pasture and bee yard and three Alberton residents built electric fences to exclude bears from small livestock.

The remainder of the funds from last year will be spent this year on similar projects in our area. In addition, the board recently approved funding to be transferred to the Defenders of Wildlife to total \$2,000 dollars for 2013. These projects allow the coexistence

of bears and agricultural activities in the Ninemile Area and help to preserve the wildlife resource and wildlife connectivity values through the Huson, Ninemile, and Alberton region.

To learn more about the program, contact Erin Edge at (406) 728-8800 or [eedge@defenders.org](mailto:eedge@defenders.org).

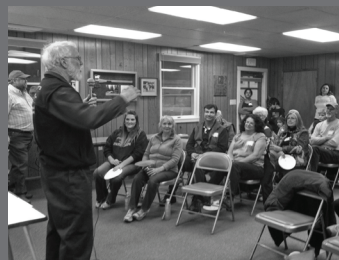


Habituated black bear - a good reason for electric fence! west fork Petty Creek. Photo by Lucy/Doug McCoy

## 2012 - ANOTHER GREAT 'NOT JUST CAKE' AUCTION

By Genevieve Fix

More than 50 people attended our "Not Just Cake Auction" on October 20th, 2012 at the Ninemile Ranger station. Our auctioneer, Mr. J.R. Strand did a wonderful job at selling cakes and all kind of goodies, gift certificates, gift baskets, home decor items, jewelry, clothing items, art and craft pieces. The NWW board would like to say THANK YOU VERY MUCH to all the generous donors and buyers! We raised \$2500 that will be used for our projects and programs to promote knowledge and stewardship of local wildlife and habitat. Mr. Strand ended this enjoyable evening telling cowboy poetry. We deeply appreciate your participation and hope to see you all at our 2013 auction this October.



### Businesses who donated:

Bernice's Bakery  
 Beverly Mc Gowan Photography  
 Big Sky Brewing Co.  
 Brooke Barnibbe Photography  
 Fat Belly Deli  
 Grizzly Liquor  
 Konya Designs Shirts and Cards

Lakeland Feed and Supply  
 Liquid Planet  
 Monte Dolack Gallery  
 Native Ideals  
 Nicol Annie at Healthy Hummingbird  
 Olson Amy for Scentsy  
 River Edge Resort

River Run Weaving  
 Rockin Rudy's  
 Steve Thorstenson Ceramics  
 The Silk Road  
 The Pearl Cafe  
 Wild Abandon Woolly Mittens  
 Your Energy Fix

Fisher



Fisher



NOT a fisher, but a cousin of a fisher, the weasel/ermine



## FISHER STUDIES IN THE NINEMILE

The fisher, a cat sized mammal in the weasel family has been a subject of wildlife studies in Montana in recent years. Historical records indicate that fishers occupied the western mountains of Montana but researchers believe that trapping eliminated fishers from most of Montana in the early part of the last century. Several reintroductions have occurred since then with the Cabinet Mountains showing success.

A Missoulian article recently highlighted a biologist in Glacier National Park who has been trying to determine if fishers exist in the park using a hair snare survey. This hair snare approach uses bait to lure animals into a small funnel-like structure that has brushes the animals rub against, thus leaving hair on the brushes. DNA analysis is then done on the captured hairs. A few other studies are using similar methods in Idaho and elsewhere to try to add to our currently quite limited knowledge on how fisher are doing in the West. In fact, you may remember the article in our October 2012 newsletter about fishers and a hair survey that occurred in our area using NWW volunteers. Happily, the results of that hair snare survey are in!

The results of our local survey from last year have been completed and following is the summary:

- Volunteers set out 52 snares
- 47 of those had at least one hair sample
- An average of 3.5 samples were captured in each snare to total 172 samples.
- 71 of the samples did not have enough DNA to determine species
- The 101 samples that provided identification were: striped skunk (53); bushy-tailed woodrat (21); the remainder were deer, marten, red squirrel, northern flying squirrel and snowshoe hare. No fishers were detected.
- Photos below show wildlife that were captured with NWW cameras near the fisher hair snares. Alas, no fishers seen!



Red squirrel



Bushy-tailed woodrat



Bushy-tailed woodrat



White-tailed fawn

**COLLARING PROJECT:** Carly Lewis, the biologist who led last years study, is trying another attempt to gain information on fishers. This monitoring project is designed to explore fisher habitat use in landscapes where forests are composed of a mix of wet and dry forest types, and a variety of forest age classes. The project will examine whether fishers restrict their habitat use to the moist, mature forest stands, or whether they also use drier forest types that are not currently recognized as fisher habitat.

Fishers will be live-trapped using scents and bait and fitted with collars that will collect data on the specific locations of fishers multiple times per day for several months, giving biologists accurate data on the types of habitat the fishers are using. Traps have been placed near the Idaho/Montana border near Lolo Creek, along with a few that were set in the Ninemile Valley. Again, volunteers are important to the project with access granted by several landowners, and monitoring provided by local residents. One nice feature is there is a remote detection system on the traps in the valley. A transmitter sends a unique signal as long as the trap is set. If the trap closes, a circuit is broken and the signal no longer transmits.

One volunteer checks the receiver daily, and informs Carly when trap has been sprung and which trap it is. Someone then goes to check the trap. Non target species are immediately released and the trap reset. If martens are caught, hairs are taken for DNA analysis.

Thus far, no fishers have been caught, and again, striped skunks are mostly what are found in the trap. A bobcat was caught and released! We'll keep you posted on additional information on the results of the program in a future newsletter.

For more information contact: Carly Lewis, Lolo National Forest, (406)329-3848, cwlewis@fs.fed.us

by Pat Sweeney



Striped skunk, not a favorite non-target catch



Fisher live trap

Sign in the Ninemile. Big sign installed by NWW.



Wild turkey hit by truck



Vandalized sign in the Ninemile. Was installed by NWW.



## HOW TO AVOID WILDLIFE COLLISIONS WHILE DRIVING

by Pat Sweeney

We live in excellent wildlife habitat—great for viewing wildlife, but sometimes not so great for safety. We’ve had fatalities due to wildlife collisions in the Ninemile area and you can expect deer, bear, moose, bighorn sheep and elk on many of the roads we drive. Hit one of these critters and you, your passengers, your vehicle, and the wildlife will all have a bad experience. Smaller animals of course also suffer from collisions. Turkeys are one example that I occasionally see dead in the road. Roadkill attracts scavengers that can also be hit by vehicles.

NWW has put up signs along the Six Mile, West Ninemile and Remount roads several years ago to try to remind people to be cautious while driving in wildlife areas and reduce wildlife collisions. Many of these signs have been vandalized to some extent with one location having been stolen twice. At the other extreme, one that I like, a sign has been modified to show a little respect to our kids and dogs.

Just how effective are warning signs at reducing wildlife vehicle collisions? An internet search showed that most studies conclude that signage is not effective. One report, *Wildlife-Vehicle Collision and Crossing Mitigation Measures: A Toolbox for the Montana Department of Transportation*, states that “Based on available data, standard deer warning signs are concluded to be ineffective in reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions.” Additionally the report states “Education and public information campaigns appear to result in increased driver awareness of the risks of wildlife-vehicle collisions and makes drivers aware of actions they can take to try to prevent severe collisions.”

In the spirit of informing drivers about avoiding collisions, here’s a list of wildlife avoidance tips. You can substitute most large animals for deer in this list.

### ***Slow Down and Save a Buck!***

- \* A driver’s best defense is to drive responsibly. Drive at a safe speed—this means slower when visibility is limited or when roads are slippery. Always wear a seat belt and insist passengers wear them.
- \* Make sure the vehicle’s windshield is clean inside and out. Wash your headlights during mud season.
- \* Enlist passengers to help keep an eye out for deer.
- \* Keep an eye on vehicles up ahead. If their brake lights suddenly come on, there might be a deer (or a herd) near or on the road. If a car slows down coming towards you, slow down and stay alert, they may be slowing down for animals that you don’t see. Ditto if a vehicle has hazard lights flashing or is stopped alongside or in the road.
- \* If you see one deer or elk cross the road, expect others. Also an animal may quickly cross back where it came from.
- \* Be especially aware at dusk and dawn. This is when deer presence is heaviest by the sides of roads, and it’s harder for humans to see.
- \* Actively scan both sides of the road as you drive looking for any signs of movement, flashes of eyes, or body shapes.
- \* Drive near the center line if there is no oncoming traffic.
- \* Drive defensively. Be ready to take evasive action. If a deer appears on or near the road, slow down and stop if necessary. Another not often used tactic is to speed up before the animal crosses your path, although I’d use this one sparingly and only if you cannot stop in time and believe you can avoid a collision by speeding up.
- \* Honk your horn when you see a deer about to cross the road. This is an effective way for deer to know where the car is coming from and heading to. Their instincts should do the rest.
- \* If there’s a choice between hitting a deer and swerving into traffic or off the road, hit the deer. Animal advocates may not like it, but studies show many crashes happen not only when drivers hit deer, but when colliding with another vehicle in the opposite lane while trying to take evasive action. Head on collisions or driving off the road can often do more damage to your vehicle and passengers than hitting the deer would have.
- \* Use the high beams where possible. Lights help illuminate the eyes of animals so they can be seen sooner. Don’t switch on the vehicle’s internal lights. This causes glare on the inside of the windshield which could reduce visibility and make the animals harder to see. Also, flash the high beams to warn approaching drivers when deer are spotted on or near the highway.

### ***If You Do Hit an Animal (especially a large one)!***

- \* Pull over if possible. Put your hazard lights on and if you can, put the headlights onto the animal or as close as possible.
- \* Check passengers for injuries and treat accordingly. Even if there are no injuries, shock will probably occur fairly quickly. Try to reassure one another and put on warmer clothing immediately as shock or fear increases the inability to ward off cold. If it is winter, stay in the car for warmth.
- \* Avoid going near the animal; it may kick or gore you from fear and pain. If it blocks the road, use your hazard lights and headlights and keep your car stationary. Only attempt to move the animal if you are 100% certain that it is dead.
  - \* Use road flares or triangles if you have them.
  - \* If you need help, call 911 or flag down someone.

# Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

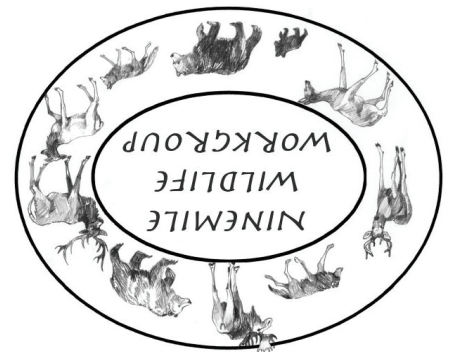
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Renew Your Membership!	\$10.00	_____
Individual Membership	\$10.00	_____
Family Membership	\$20.00	_____
Business Membership	\$25.00	_____

Place a checkmark beside type of yearly membership

Please become a member or renew your membership with the Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup! Fill out this coupon and mail it along with your membership payment to: Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup, PO Box 435, Huson, MT 59846



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