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News Release



04-031
April 8, 2004
For Immediate Release

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FOREST PREDATOR IN TROUBLE, SERVICE FINDS

West Coast population of the fisher will be added to candidate list

The West Coast population of the fisher – a medium-sized forest predator in the weasel family – will become a candidate for threatened or endangered status, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today. The Service announced that rather than list the fisher as a threatened or endangered species, its resources would be better spent on species at greater risk. Nevertheless, the Service will continue to support conservation efforts for the fisher.

“We believe that the fisher faces biological threats that are sufficient to warrant listing,” said Steve Thompson, manager of the Service’s California-Nevada operations office. “However, we think the best use of our resources is to work with those parties interested in fisher conservation strategies, in an effort to eliminate the need for listing.”

The Service’s formal finding after a 12-month study of the fisher’s status was that listing this species is “warranted but precluded by other, higher priority listing actions.” Under the Endangered Species Act, a warranted but precluded finding requires subsequent annual reviews. The reviews must be conducted either until a listing proposal is published, or until there is new information establishing that listing is no longer warranted.

On April 4, 2003, the U.S. District Court of the Northern District of California ordered the Service to complete its 12-month status review of the fisher and submit it for publication in the *Federal Register* by April 3, 2004. This finding meets that requirement.

In this 12-month review, the Service determined that the fisher in Washington, Oregon and California is a “distinct population segment” of the entire fisher species. The Service considers information on genetics, behavior, distribution and ecology in determining whether a population is discrete and significant enough to be listed separately from the whole species.

The West Coast population of the Pacific fisher is endangered by habitat loss and fragmentation, small population sizes and isolation, and human-caused mortality from incidental trapping and vehicle

collisions. Moreover, protection provided for the species by other Federal, State or local laws may be insufficient.

Historically, fishers in the Pacific states occurred in forests throughout western Washington, western Oregon, northern California, and the Sierra Nevada. Recent studies have documented three fisher populations – one in the Siskiyou, Klamath, and Trinity ranges in northwestern California and southern Oregon, another in the southern Sierra Nevada, and a reintroduced population in the Cascades in southern Oregon. In Washington, the fisher is considered either likely to have disappeared, or reduced to scattered individuals.

Fishers are about the size of a common house cat with the body type of a stocky weasel. Their fur ranges in color from dark brown to black, with lighter colored fur around the face and shoulders.

Fast, agile and adept at climbing trees, fishers eat any prey they can catch and overpower, including squirrels, hares, mice and birds.

Despite their name, they do not, in fact, catch or eat fish. Though no one knows for sure, they may have received their name from early settlers from Europe. These settlers noted the fisher's similarity to the European polecat, which was variously known as a *fitch*, *fitchet*, or *fitchew*.

On Dec. 5, 2000, the Service received a petition to list and designate critical habitat for a distinct population segment of the fisher in portions of California, Oregon, and Washington. The petitioning organizations and individuals included the Center for Biological Diversity; the Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign; Noah Greenwald; American Lands; Biodiversity Legal Foundation, and the Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation.

More information on today's action can be founded at the Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office's Web site at <http://sacramento.fws.gov>

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies.