

Fishers in British Columbia: Options for Conservation of a Blue-listed Species

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ABSTRACT

The need for a conservation strategy for fishers in British Columbia has become increasingly apparent in recent years. Continued changes in the composition and distribution of adequate habitat, increased trapping pressure in previously inaccessible areas, combined with harvests during trapping seasons has likely increased the vulnerability of fisher populations in the province. To confound conservation problems facing this species, the effectiveness of past management strategies is unknown and relatively little is known about fisher ecology in British Columbia. These factors have contributed to the persistent classification of fisher populations in the province as "Blue-listed". Past management strategies for fishers have been very limited in scope and success. Harvest seasons for fishers were closed for 2 years during 1990-92, but the harvest of fishers (through incidental kills) remained basically unchanged. Fishers are also currently an "Identified Wildlife" species under the British Columbia Forest Practices Code. However, no guidelines have been implemented for this species. Several habitat and population conservation strategies for fishers could be implemented in British Columbia. For instance, habitats altered by forestry activities may be used successfully by fishers provided that stand level silvicultural treatments are modified to ensure the persistence of structure (e.g., overhead cover, coarse woody debris, den structures). For habitat conservation strategies to be successful, fisher habitat requirements also need to be included in higher level plans. In addition to habitat strategies, reducing or eliminating incidental kills of fishers would greatly diminish the conservation threat facing fishers. Changing kill traps that are intended for martens so that they exclude fishers (a design is currently available) would diminish the level of incidental harvest considerably and contribute substantially to the viability of fisher populations in the province.
