



Voluntary agreements protect fishers and forest landowners

THE FISHER, A MEMBER OF THE WEASEL FAMILY, IS returning to the state after disappearing from Washington's forestlands during the last century. Since 2008, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and its partners have successfully relocated more than 100 fishers from British Columbia to Olympic National Park and other federal lands within the Cascade Mountain Range.

Those recovery efforts were one reason why the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) determined in the spring of 2016 that the state's fisher population did not require protection under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) as initially proposed.

Another factor in that decision was the state's leadership in working with landowners and the forest industry to develop a voluntary program that offers forest landowners an incentive to work as partners in the recovery effort. At the time of the listing decision, WDFW had enrolled 25 landowners and 1.4 million acres in a federal plan called a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA).

How a CCAA works

A CCAA is a voluntary agreement whereby landowners agree to help promote the conservation of a species that may later become listed under the ESA. In return, landowners receive assurances against additional land-use restrictions should the species covered by the CCAA ever become listed for protection under federal law. Fishers also benefit from this type of agreement, because conservation measures outlined in a CCAA are designed to encourage landowners to support fisher reintroduction and recovery efforts.

Requirements under a CCAA

While wildlife managers expect that most fishers will remain on the national parks and national forests where they are released, they want to provide protection for any that may move onto non-federal lands. As part of the proposed CCAA, landowners agree to conservation measures such as:

- Work with WDFW wildlife managers to monitor fishers and their dens in the event that a den site is found on their property.
- Avoid harming or disturbing fishers and their young associated with active denning sites (March to September).

Wildlife managers are seeking a partnership with forest landowners for the recovery of fishers in Washington State.

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- Report den sites and sick, injured, or dead fishers on their property.

Benefits of the CCAA remain

Although USFWS did not list Washington's fishers under the ESA in 2016, there is no guarantee the agency will not do so in the future. Recent experience with other species shows that federal regulators may propose a new listing if recovery efforts do not meet expectations or if a lawsuit is filed challenging an earlier decision.

In its recent decision, USFWS specifically mentioned landowner enrollment in CCAAs as an example of ongoing conservation efforts that contributed to the decision to omit Washington from a fisher listing. For that reason, enrolling in the program not only allows landowners to obtain land-use assurances, but also supports fisher recovery and ensures that a federal listing is not needed in the future.

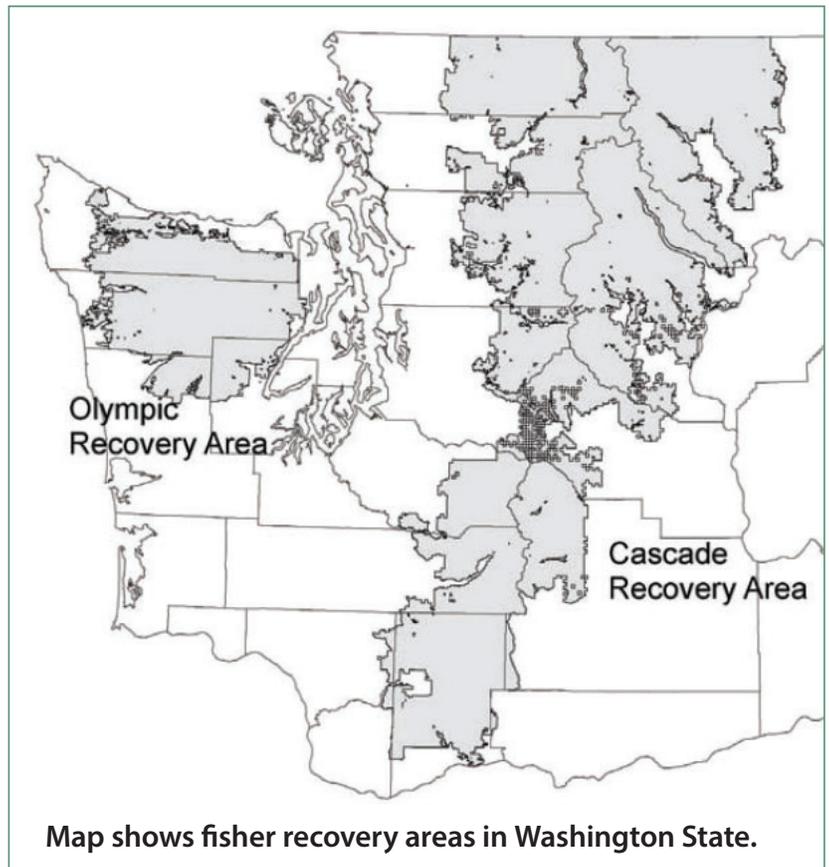
Landowners can continue to enroll so long as fishers in Washington state are not listed for protection under the ESA.

Bringing back the fisher

The fisher (*Pekania pennanti*) is one of the larger members of the weasel family and is found only in North America's boreal and temperate forests. Through excessive trapping and habitat loss, fishers were eliminated from Washington State by the mid-1900s.

In 1998, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission listed the fisher as endangered in the state.

Recovery of the species is now well under way. From 2008-10, WDFW worked with the National Park Service and other partners to reestablish the species in the state, relocating a total of 90 fishers from central



Map shows fisher recovery areas in Washington State.

British Columbia to Olympic National Park. Additional releases have been ongoing on federal land in the South Cascades and others are planned for the North Cascades in the next few years.

Since the 1940s, wildlife managers in 27 states and provinces have translocated fishers 30 times to reestablish local populations within the fisher's historical range. Twenty-two (73%) of these translocations are known to have been successful and two others are still being evaluated.



J. Hoder photo