

WOLVERINE

Wolverine were once widespread across the northern part of the United States, but due to overtrapping and other factors, are now gone from most of their range, including, most biologists believe, the Mt Hood National Forest. The last confirmed sighting in the Mt Hood National Forest was in 1980 when one was killed crossing I-84 near Cascade Locks.

With protections in place, wolverine have been making a comeback in other areas of the country. There are healthy breeding populations in the northern Cascades of Washington, and individuals have been detected as far south as Mt Adams. Wolverine have also been detected in the Wallow Mountains in eastern Oregon, thought to have dispersed from the Idaho/Montana area. With populations on the increase, it seems only a matter of time before they make their way back to Mt Hood once again. For an animal that can easily travel over 30 miles in a day while scaling high mountain peaks, the journey to Mt Hood, though daunting, is indeed possible.

Wolverine were recently denied protection under from the endangered species act in the lower 48 states, despite small population sizes and the support of many USF&W scientists. In addition to past population reductions, wolverine are also potentially under threat due to global climate change, as they are thought to depend on areas of deep snow pack for denning. The more we know about their habitat requirements, the better they can be protected.

What would happen if we saw wolverine tracks?

If tracks were sighted, most likely they would be from a lone, juvenile individual passing through the area. Young animals, when they leave their parent's home, often travel long distances (over 200 miles) in search of a mate and a territory of their own. Our next step would be to determine if the tracks did indeed represent a mating pair or a lone individual. This would require extensive surveys and a search for a denning site, which, since wolverines den in high elevation, remote areas, would most likely be done by helicopter or by professionals trained in winter travel. If there is a mating pair, the area around their den would need to be protected.

IDENTIFYING WOLVERINE TRACKS

Gait:

- Look for a short stride in relation to foot size.
- Usually a 3x4 or 4x4 lope. (Though may also walk, or 2x lope like marten.) Stride is 35-57".



Tracks:

- Feet are large!
3 $\frac{3}{8}$ – 6" long by
3 $\frac{1}{4}$ – 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide
- Feet covered with fur,
track usually blurry
- 5 toes on both feet, with
typical mustelid foot
structure
- Claws are semi retractable
and may or may not show
- Extended heal pad may or
may not show



To distinguish from bear: Track size overlaps. Look at the size and shape of the heel pad (the heel pad of wolverine is much smaller and does not extend the width of the toes) and the arc of the toes (wolverine are in a more arced arrangement). If a bear is loping it will have a much longer stride, though there is overlap between the overstep walk of a bear and a lope of a wolverine, so make sure you identify the gait.

To distinguish from large canine or cougar: Track size overlaps. If the small toe (toe 5) does not register, a wolverine track may look reasonably symmetrical and may be confused with a canine or feline. Look at the short stride (dog and cougar will have a much longer stride). Also look at the proportional size of the palm pad (others will be proportionally larger).

To distinguish from otter: Otter have a similar trail pattern and similar shaped tracks. Look at the size – there is only a very slight overlap in track size and group length (or none according to some authors). Otter also don't have fur on the bottom of their feet, so the track may be clearer, and have a very long toe 5 on the rear foot.