

# Putting Knowledge to Work: The Fisher Habitat Extension Initiative

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**F**ishers (*Martes pennanti*) are carnivores of the weasel family that rely on many features of late-successional forests to survive and reproduce. Fishers are considered a species at risk in British Columbia under the Identified Wildlife Management Strategy of the Forest and Range Practices Act 2004 and is also considered a “species of special concern” (blue-listed) by BC’s Conservation Data Centre. Under BC’s Forest and Range Practices Act 2004, forest licensees are required to maintain key habitat features for fishers within their tenures.

Many late-successional forests in BC are targeted for timber harvest and other forestry activities, which can have negative impacts on the ability of the forest landscape to support fishers.

Recognizing that fishers use habitat resources at spatial scales ranging from elements (e.g., tree cavities, rust brooms) to landscapes, a number of options are available to forest practitioners to make forestry decisions that help conserve fisher habitat at each of these scales.

Recent research on fishers has identified many opportunities for forest licensees to incorporate decisions that may positively affect the conservation and supply of habitat for fishers during all phases of forest management (planning, harvesting, regeneration/post-harvest treatments).

**Image: Fisher kit peeking out of den tree cavity.**



Photo by: Carl Gitscheff.

## Objectives of the Fisher Habitat Extension Initiative

For the last four years, the British Columbia Fisher Habitat Working Group has been implementing an extension program called the Fisher Habitat Extension Initiative to support forest management decision-makers with relevant information and tools.

The long-term goal of this initiative is to ensure that sufficient habitat is conserved, recruited, and enhanced at different spatial scales – element, patch, stand, and landscape – to sustain populations of fishers distributed throughout their historical range in BC.



This extension initiative aims to achieve this goal by

- Identifying key forest management practitioners whose decisions affect fisher habitat in BC.
- Helping these target audiences learn about the habitat requirements of fishers.
- Building relevant knowledge and skills among forest management practitioners to facilitate incorporation of fisher habitat needs into their decision-making.
- Inspiring these groups to implement the new knowledge and skills they have learned.

### Target audience

The target audience of this extension initiative includes forest management practitioners active within fisher habitat range (historical, current, or potential) in BC, including: higher-level government and industry planners; planning foresters; government and industry biologists; timber cruising crews; layout personnel; operational foresters; silviculture foresters; machine operators; and forestry contractors.

### Outreach and extension products and activities to date

#### Fisher Habitat Workshops

These face-to-face events are opportunities for forestry practitioners to acquire relevant information on fisher habitat needs and work with workshop organizers to develop effective ways of incorporating this information into their operational practices. One regional workshop was delivered from October 4th to 5th, 2010 in Williams Lake. For the Spring of 2012, a number of training workshops are to be delivered in Lillooet, Williams Lake, Dawson Creek, and other northern BC locations.

#### Fisher Wildlife Habitat Decision Aid

This is a user-friendly decision-support tool integrating the best available scientific and expert knowledge that forestry practitioners need to consider when managing for fisher habitat requirements. Available at [http://www.forrex.org/publications/jem/ISS52/vol10\\_no3\\_art5.pdf](http://www.forrex.org/publications/jem/ISS52/vol10_no3_art5.pdf) (Weir & Lara Almuedo 2010).

#### Fisher Habitat and Forest Management Web Module

This online product is designed to be used at operational levels and for training purposes. It is loaded with information and resources (e.g., maps, summary tables with quantitative management targets, pictures, and presentations) that facilitate the identification, conservation, recruitment, and enhancement of fisher habitat and is specific for different biogeoclimatic zones of BC. Available at the Fisher Habitat and Forest Management Web Module website at <http://fisher.forrex.org>

#### Outreach Presentations in International and Regional Forums

Presentations on this initiative have been made at the 5th International Martes Symposium (Seattle, September 2009) and at the West Coast Fisher Symposium (Sacramento, January 31 to February 1, 2012), providing a great opportunity to share our experience and also learn from the fisher conservation work that other colleagues are implementing in western North America.



## Pilot field projects

Our team is currently working in collaboration with forest licensees within the fisher range in BC in the development of several pilot projects that will test silvicultural prescriptions for fisher habitat in the field and will serve as demonstration projects for forest practitioners.

## Affecting change

The following forestry stakeholders have already expressed their interest in incorporating the above-mentioned information and extension products in their forest management planning and forestry operations within fisher range in BC: Louisiana-Pacific Canada Ltd., West Fraser Mills, Tolko, BC Timber Sales, and the Quesnel and Williams Lake District Offices of the BC Ministry of Forests and Range.

The next steps of this extension initiative include the development and implementation of field silviculture trials in collaboration with our target audience and partners in the forestry sector. In the near future, this extension initiative is also aiming to engage key stakeholders of the oil and gas sector to further improve current fisher habitat management practices in collaboration with partners in this industry.

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- FORREX Forum for Research and Extension in Natural Resources
- Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation
- Louisiana-Pacific Canada Ltd

## Website

Fisher Habitat and Forest Management Web Module website. <http://fisher.forrex.org>

## Reference

Weir, R.D. & P. Lara Almuedo. 2010. British Columbia's Interior: Fisher Wildlife Habitat Decision Aid. BC Journal of Ecosystems and Management 10(3):35–41. [http://www.forrex.org/publications/jem/ISS52/vol10\\_no3\\_art5.pdf](http://www.forrex.org/publications/jem/ISS52/vol10_no3_art5.pdf) (Accessed April 2012)

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