News Release: American Marten discovered in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park: First in Recent Times

ARCATA, Ca., November 12, 2009. An American marten (Martes americana) was detected in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park this summer. The marten was photographed on 5 occasions on a remote camera near a small creek in old growth redwood forest. This detection is significant because it is within the range of a distinct subspecies, the Humboldt marten (M. a. humboldtensis), that was considered extinct until 1996 when a single population was rediscovered on the Six Rivers National Forest. The marten detected this summer in Prairie Creek is the first marten in recent times that has been confirmed to occur south of the Klamath River and is nearly 10 miles west of the nearest marten detection.

Martens are carnivorous mammals of the weasel family that typically live in old growth forests of North America. They are the size of a small cat, appearing overall brown in color with a distinctive orange throat patch, large triangular-shaped ears, and a long tail. Martens are skilled forest predators, adept at pursuing prey, such as voles and squirrels, both on the ground and up into the canopies of trees.

The Humboldt marten currently occupies <5% of its historical range in coastal northwestern California. There are currently few places with large enough blocks of coastal old growth forest remaining to support additional marten populations. However, the old growth portions of the California State and Redwood National Parks represent one of the best locations for martens to recolonize and the establishment of a second population there would greatly improve the conservation outlook for the subspecies. Additional research will be required to determine whether this individual is part of a larger population or is a lone disperser from the population to the east.

The camera station that detected the marten is part of a collaborative research project between the USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station Redwoods Sciences Laboratory, Save the Redwoods League, Redwood National Park, and California State Parks. We will continue to follow up on this exciting find and share new information as we receive it.