

USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station

CALIFORNIA – ALBANY-ARCATA-DAVIS-FRESNO-PLACERVILLE-REDDING-RIVERSIDE
HAWAII – HILO

SCIENCE THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

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FOREST SERVICE RESEARCHERS RELEASE SIERRA NEVADA FISHER KIT

FRESNO, CA, December 18, 2009— An orphaned fisher kit released back into its native habitat after being rescued this summer by USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station’s Kings River Fisher Project (KRFP) crew appears to be thriving. His successful reintroduction to Sierra National Forest is considered significant because Fishers are currently listed as a candidate species under the California Endangered Species Act; their status is currently being reviewed. ([Read about the rescue.](#))

There are many dangers that fishers like the rescued kit, dubbed M22, need to learn to avoid. Lacking a mother’s nurturing, he was disadvantaged in developing defensive and precautionary behavior. To help prepare him for the challenges of life in the wild, KRFP transitioned M22 by housing him in a caged environment with obstacles he would learn to navigate in order to survive on his own. He was moved to the cage at 3 months old, the age when a wild fisher kit would begin following its mother around the forest. He learned to hunt prey he would naturally encounter. He was exposed to various predators from the safety of his cage, giving him a realistic taste of the challenges he might encounter on his own.

By the time when young fishers naturally leave their parents protection and head off on their own, M22 was a proficient hunter and adept at moving through the forest canopy. To allow him to dictate the speed of his release, KRFP cut a small hole near the top of one wall. M22, like his mother, carries a small radio collar to monitor his movements and survival. Within minutes M22 discovered his freedom and over the next 3 days began making longer and longer forays into the forest, returning to sleep in the security of the pen. On the fourth day, he left and didn’t return. Over the past month he has explored much of his mother’s territory. Unlike his mother, he rarely pauses long enough in his explorations for crew members to catch up and record his location. This nomadic lifestyle is typical of young fishers, particularly males, as they learn the landscape and search for an open territory.

Despite his rough start, M22 seems to have caught up with his peers. He’s considered to have a good chance at surviving into adulthood. This is particularly gratifying for the KRFP crew, whose job is to identify and help correct the causes of fisher’s decline in the region.

Once widespread throughout the coniferous forests of the western United States, they’re now only found south of Yosemite National Park, near the California/Oregon border, and in the coastal redwood forests of northwestern California. The most recent estimate of the number of adult fishers surviving south of Yosemite National Park is less than 300 individuals. The KRFP crew will continue to monitor M22 into the future.



M22 in the Wild.

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