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## Den of Pacific fisher found in Yosemite National Park for first time

From staff reports

Researchers say a den of a Pacific fisher, a threatened member of the weasel family, has been identified within the borders of Yosemite National Park.

The fisher is a medium-sized weasel that's a candidate for listing as threatened or endangered species under the federal endangered species act.

The 2-year-old female fisher was captured as a juvenile in October 2009 in the Sierra National Forest, just south of Yosemite. Researchers with the UC Berkeley Sierra Nevada Adaptive Management Program Fisher Project tracked the fisher using radio-telemetry. She remained near the capture site for nearly a year, and then moved north toward Yosemite. She moved her kits from their den in Sierra National Forest to a den on the south side of Yosemite. Park officials say the fisher will likely move the kits several times to different dens over the next few months.

Female Pacific fishers can breed as early as 1 year old, but most don't successfully reproduce until they're around 3. Following a gestation of about 40 days, the fisher typically gives birth to a litter of one to three kits in a hollow cavity of a tree. Kits are born blind and helpless, and are completely dependent on their mother's milk for the first 8-to-10 weeks. Kits begin to crawl after about three weeks, can open their eyes after seven weeks and can start to climb after eight weeks. At 4 months old, kits can travel with their mother on hunting trips. Fishers eat small mammals such as mice and squirrels, and are known to be one of the few animals to prey on porcupines. After five to seven months, kits leave the maternal den.

The Pacific fisher is a western subspecies that once ranged from British Columbia, south through Washington, Oregon, and northern California, and reached their southern extent in the Sierra Nevada. Pacific fisher have declined to only 50 percent of their historical range in California, with only two native populations separated by approximately 260 miles remaining today. One population is located around the western California-Oregon border, while the other is located in the southern Sierra Nevada in California. Yosemite represents the northern boundary of the small and isolated southern Sierra Nevada population, which is estimated to be between 125 to 250 adults.

Yosemite National Park is home to more than 400 species of animals, including a number of species that qualify for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Wildlife species in Yosemite range from aquatic invertebrates to large mammals.

The Pacific fisher is threatened by low reproductive rates, reduced genetic diversity, predators, disease, and habitat degradation. Trapping prior to 1946 also contributed to population decline. Recently, road-kill has become a concern as several Pacific fisher have been found dead along the roadways in the park over the past decade after being hit by cars.

To promote continued fisher recovery, partnerships have developed between the NPS, the Yosemite Conservancy, U.C. Berkeley, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the California Department of Fish and Game.

