The wolverine is the largest terrestrial member of the weasel family with males generally weighing 25 to 30 pounds and females 15 to 25 pounds. The durable, independent nature of the wolverine is embodied in its preference for the most rugged and harsh environments in North America. They live in remote mountains of the western United States and are currently found in portions of the northern Rocky Mountains of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming and the Cascade Mountains of Washington and Oregon. Historically, wolverines were found further south as well, as far the Rocky Mountains in Colorado and the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California.

Generally solitary, with home ranges that cover as much as 300-500 square miles, wolverines are active year-round. During summer months they hunt small and medium sized animals including grouse, hares, ground squirrels, and marmots. In winter, in addition to hunting, they rely on their acute sense of smell to find the scattered carcasses of big game animals.

**WINTER - AN IMPORTANT SEASON**

Pregnant female wolverines move to reproductive dens in mid to late February where they give birth to 1-3 kits. Dens are located at higher elevation, often near or above tree line, and are under deep snow, which insulates the kits from the cold and protects them from predators. To create the den, the female will dig through as much as 15 feet of snow to reach natural cavities under boulders or downed trees. She will keep her kits in this den or move them to other under-snow dens until they are weaned in early May. As the kits grow and are more mobile, the small family will move around using ‘rendezvous sites’ where the kit(s) stay while the female searches for food. On average, females give birth every two years and just one kit survives, meaning even long-lived wolverines have low reproductive potential. Thus, it’s important that we do everything we can not to negatively impact kit survival.

**WOLVERINES AND HUMANS**

The rugged and remote country that is home to the wolverine is naturally separated from the places people prefer to live, but improved technology and increasing interest in backcountry winter recreation has increased human presence in wolverine habitat during winter and the denning period when females are most sensitive to disturbance. Recent research into the response of wolverines to recreation show that wolverine, particularly female wolverines, avoid areas used repeatedly by backcountry winter recreationists resulting in a reduction in high quality habitat available to individual wolverines (download report at www.roundriver.org/wolverine).

Photos provided by Round River Conservation Studies, Forest McCarthy and Kylie Paul
Working together as responsible land users and managers, we should be able to balance our desire to recreate in these remote backcountry winter landscapes with the wolverine's need for habitat and a secure place to raise their young. By working together to better understand how our presence in wolverine country may impact this rare and fascinating animal we can help secure its future and our recreational opportunity.

Scientists recently completed a study – with help from snowmobilers and skiers – to learn more about how winter recreation affects wolverines. They learned that our recreation activities – snowmobiling and backcountry skiing – impact wolverines even though wolverines can and do co-exist with these activities. The scientists found that wolverines avoid the areas where recreation occurs, more strongly avoiding areas with repeated or higher levels of human use. Wolverines may use areas adjacent to high-intensity recreation areas, but they're not using the places on the landscape where there's lots of human activity. This is called “functional habitat loss” and poses a real concern. Fortunately, you can help!

**WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP WOLVERINES?**

Because we now know that wolverines avoid areas with repeated winter recreation use, we can help to reduce the effects on wolverines. One thing, for example, that we can do is constrain where we go in the winter. We’re all familiar with the concept of suburban sprawl. Now think about your favorite backcountry area and how recreation use can sprawl across the landscape. By limiting that sprawl we can limit the functional habitat loss that wolverines are experiencing. As tempting as it is to explore deeper and further into the backcountry, by sticking within established recreation areas you can help reduce your personal impact on wolverines. And, if we all limit our personal impact, together we can help wolverines. Together, we are working to understand other ways that we can continue to share these backcountry winter landscapes with this fascinating species.

You can help scientists continue to learn more about wolverines. By reporting wolverine tracks, you can help develop a better understanding of wolverine presence and distribution. The wolverine's track will show 5 toes and be nearly as large as a bear track. When traveling across shallow snow the wolverine's loping gate will produce the distinctive 1-2-1 pattern.

In deep, soft snow the wolverine will produce a 2x2 pattern similar to the track of a marten, although much larger.

If you discover wolverine tracks, take photographs of them if you can, ideally with something in the photo that would provide a scale (a hat or glove, for example) and take photos of the track trail showing the pattern of movement (for example the 1-2-1 track pattern). You can provide these to your local Forest Service or state wildlife agency office. Your efforts will be greatly appreciated and will contribute invaluable data to help ensure science-based management into the future.