



Wolverine are very shy, and rarely encountered by humans. (Photo courtesy of Roy Andersen/Norsk institutt for naturforskning)



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

In the world of wildlife science, there is a huge difference between the status “threatened” and the status “endangered.” Endangered means imminent danger of extinction. Species can be endangered in one place and thriving in another.

Take the wolf, for example. The wolf is listed as an endangered species in the United States, but his numbers have climbed lately. Currently, there are about 7,500 gray wolves in the lower 48 states. In Canada, he is far from endangered, where he numbers above 60,000, and still occupies around 90 percent of his original territory.

The biggest threat to wildlife populations is

not hunting, poaching, or environmental conditions. Wildlife is threatened mostly due to loss of habitat from the World’s burgeoning human population. This is a seemingly unstoppable tide, but where land has been set aside, wildlife seems to thrive.

My point to this diatribe is that the introduction and reintroduction of animals should be left to the game commissions and wildlife biologists, and based on careful study, and analysis of the habitat to insure it can support the animals, and not to voters who make their decisions based on television shows and emotions. Reintroductions should be handled legislatively, based on reports and findings from all the crucial parties involved.

Once again, the wolverine is in the Colorado spotlight, but it appears that we are doing it the right way. All the involved parties, including Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), are behind a bipartisan Senate Bill 171 that would authorize the wolverine reintroduction. Colorado has the ability to sup-

port 100 to 180 of these solitary animals because of our high altitude, remote, and snowy terrain. Officials feel there will be less pushback from landowners than over the gray wolf introduction because wolverine rarely attack cattle, and don’t pose much of a threat to big game animals.

Ski areas are concerned about their ability to continue their operations and further expansions, if there are wolverines moving into their ski country. Wolverines generally stay in very steep terrain and forest areas near ranchland, avoiding people and busy ski areas, so I doubt there will be much conflict. Besides, we probably have enough ski areas.

CPW has studied the possibility of reintroducing the wolverine since the 1990s. It never happened because the lynx reintroduction was more urgent. The Colorado lynx reintroduction is one of CPW’s greatest success stories, as the lynx is doing very well.

The scientific name for the wolverine, in case you were wondering, is Gulo

gulo. Gulo is the Latin word for glutton. I don’t understand the science behind naming a critter glutton glutton, but I am not a scientist.

Wolverines are the largest members of the weasel family, reaching 3 and ½ feet in length and topping the scales at over 50 pounds. Known populations of wolverines exist in Montana, and occasionally Wyoming and Idaho. The United States population is estimated at 400 animals. Colorado has not seen a substantial population since the early 1900s when most of them were killed off by poisoning because ranchers thought they were a threat to cattle.

The fur of a wolverine is hydrophobic, resisting water similar to a duck’s back. Their fur is extremely thick and oily, and they are capable of resting in a bare shelter in the harshest of climate conditions, making them a true survivor.

Male wolverines have an extremely large range, up to 500 miles, while the female may range 250 miles. They both have the ability to cover 20 to 30 miles a day.

The paws of a wolverine have incredibly long and sharp claws. These claws make them great tree climbers. They have short legs, so they do not run down their prey, preferring to lie hidden in a tree and then pounce on the unsuspecting animal.

Wolverines will scavenge the prey of other animals, especially the grizzly bear. You may think that is a death wish but it isn’t. When the wolverine approaches the bear with his hackles raised, teeth showing, and growling ferociously, the mighty grizzly will usually turn tail and run. Whatever the wolverine does not finish, he will bury or store for another day.

The last confirmed wolverine in Colorado occurred in 2009. An adult male, wearing a radio-tagged collar, wandered into Rocky Mountain National Park. Remember the miles they can cover in a day, and their range is extremely large.

Introducing wolverine back in Colorado would make sense. The animal is not much of a worry to farmers and ranchers

because they typically avoid urban areas. While the wolverine has the ability to take down an adult-sized deer, there is little danger for any type of human conflicts.

The wolverine is a survivor.

I have seen a wolverine on a couple of occasions, both in Canada. I am all for bringing him back to Colorado, and CPW has the ability to make it work. Helping an endangered species, giving him a chance to survive, and giving other generations a chance to see him is the right thing to do.

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West Elk Challenge Trail Marathon announced

STAFF REPORT

The Nature Connection, an outdoor equity program of the Delta County School District, is hosting a trail race through the West Elk mountain range on October 5, 2024.

This point-to-point trail marathon (26.2 miles) during the peak of fall foliage will be a celebration of the incredible backyard of Delta County and a major fundraiser for Nature Connection’s Summer Camp Scholarship Fund.

The race starts on the shores of Crawford Reservoir State Park and will travel on gravel roads through the farms and ranches at the base of the iconic Needle Rock.

Soon thereafter, the trail enters the Gunnison National Forest and climbs singletrack trails through golden aspen stands on the slopes of Mt. Lamborn.

After about five miles of climbing, runners top the 9,762 foot summit of Inter-Ocean Pass, and descend through spruce, aspen and oak, past Lone Cabin Reservoir to the

town of Paonia, finally ending at the River Park on the North Fork of the Gunnison River. Unlike many “trail marathons,” which are actually on gravel 4x4 roads, over half of this race is on singletrack trails!

Runners, “ruckers,” and hikers alike are encouraged to participate in this unique challenge benefiting kids and family outdoor programs. There will be shuttles between the start and finish, five staffed aid stations supplying participants with water, trail snacks, and first aid and a celebratory party at the finish line.

“This is a great opportunity to explore our backyard and the beautiful West Elk mountains. These mountains can be intimidating to even experienced hikers. By providing aid stations, transportation shuttles, and support we are removing the barriers for folks to do this by themselves,” says Jess Finnigan, Nature Connection’s Executive Director.

The race will also attract seasoned trail runners from the region looking for a unique



Racers will be traveling from around the state to compete and will be looking for lodging and incentives to visit local businesses. (Courtesy photo/The Nature Connection)

challenge and spirited adventure. “In addition to the race, we want to make this a weekend for the entire family to enjoy and really highlight all that Delta County and the North Fork Valley has to offer,” says Ben Graves, Nature Connection’s development director.

A pre-race dinner in Paonia will be hosted by the Learn-

ing Council and feature local producers, while the post-race beer garden, hosted by West Elk Mountain Rescue will give racers a chance to celebrate with Paonia PUB craft beer and Big B’s Cider.

This challenge is a fundraiser for the Nature Connection’s Scholarship Fund and interested businesses are encouraged to

sponsor this inaugural event so that 100% of proceeds can support kids programs. Racers will be traveling from around the state to compete and will be looking for lodging and incentives to visit local businesses.

To learn more and to register for the West Elk Challenge, please visit thenatureconnection.net/west-elk-challenge/