



Linking habitat areas called vital for survival of state's wildlife Scientists map main migration corridors

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[Glen Martin, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

Much of California's wildlife could be lost unless crucial linkages are established between shrinking areas of choice habitat, a group of scientists and conservationists warned yesterday.

As an initial effort in creating such corridors, the group has issued a 79- page report detailing the state's primary wildlife migration routes.

"This is a first step in making wildlife corridors a central component of the state's conservation strategy," said Paul Spitler, executive director of the California Wilderness Coalition.

"Despite a growing body of scientific evidence that wildlife corridors are critical to preventing the extinction of some of our best-known species, we have known very little about these corridors until now," Spitler said.

The report was supported by the wilderness coalition, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Nature Conservancy, the Center for the Reproduction of Endangered Species and the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

The ad hoc committee that produced the report met in November at the San Diego Zoo to identify migration routes used by some of the state's "most charismatic" wildlife species -- including mountain lion, bobcat, Pacific fisher, wolverine, American marten, badger, coho and chinook salmon, steelhead and mule deer.

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The scientists divided the state into eight ecoregions and identified the primary migration routes in each.

The regions are the Bay Area, the North Coast, the Central Coast, the South Coast, the Central Valley, the Modoc Plateau and Cascades, the Sierra Nevada and the Mojave and Sonoran deserts.

In a letter sent to Gov. Gray Davis after the November meeting, the scientists stated that a failure to protect habitat linkages could result in cascading losses of anadromous fish and such carnivores as mountain lions, bobcats and badgers.

"These species maintain countless others by ensuring the balance of nature both within and outside the protected areas," the scientists wrote. "Further, the corridors themselves serve as important habitats for many important and rare species."

The scientists concluded that habitat loss was particularly severe in Southern California, an area with tremendous natural diversity and simultaneous heavy development pressure because of rapid human population growth.

"An area of prime concern down there is Coal Canyon, which connects the Chino Hills with the Santa Ana Mountains," Spitler said. "This is one of the prime mountain lion habitats in all of Southern California. A recent \$40 million land purchase by the state should help keep that area intact."

In Northern California, Spitler said, the Tahoe Gap is a region of foremost concern.

"This is an area of checkerboard lands northwest of Lake Tahoe, some owned by Sierra Pacific (timber company) and some managed as part of the Tahoe National Forest," Spitler said.

"It's known that (the Tahoe Gap) harbors rare species

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such as Pacific fisher, American marten and perhaps wolverine. To maintain these animals, we need some kind of continuous forest canopy -- not the kind of thing you get from clear-cut logging."

Timber industry advocates expressed wariness of the report and its implications.

"If the purpose for this study is to identify the best ways to manage for wildlife, then that is something we could support," said Chris Nance, a spokesman for the California Forestry Association. "But if there's a predetermined outcome looming in there that would eliminate all human use of the forest regardless of what the science supports, then we could never support that."

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