

| ENNIS, MONTANA'S BOB AND KRIS INMAN

Couple Tracks Yellowstone's Most Elusive Resident

IN 2001, GRADUATE student Bob Inman met his future wife, fellow grad student Kris, at a conference where both were presenting papers about black bears. It was a match made in conservationist heaven. After a brief long-distance courtship, the two married and went to work for the private Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). The organization, founded in 1895 as the New York Zoological Society, funds global projects aimed at saving wildlife and wild lands through research, education and conservation. Today, the Inmans are the WCS point team for the Yellowstone wolverine program—an effort aimed at gathering information about the little-known denizen of the park's farthest reaches. Most of their research is carried out between December and March when the wolverines are most active. During the rest of the year, their fund raising efforts take them to far-flung destinations where they share the importance of this fascinating mammal. They and their almost-three-year-old twins live, year-round, near the park in Ennis, Montana. Here, Bob shares insight into their intriguing work.



individual wolverine uses. The study areas—Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks and the six surrounding national forests—include 22 million acres. We think there may be about 100 to 200 wolverines in that entire region. We've discovered that a female wolverine uses an area as large or larger than a female grizzly. They're territorial, so there's no overlap

in the females' territories. So, you can't fit too many into that 22 million acres.

Q. Why is this work important?

A. The wolverine is a unique creature. They do not live in many places in the lower 48. When people come to the park to enjoy wildlife, this is really the pinnacle of that experience. You can see wolves and grizzly bears pretty readily, but to see a mountain lion or a wolverine, that is a real thrill. We're not about increasing their numbers. We do want to preserve what we have. Maintaining connectivity between their islands of habitat is critical to an exchange of genes. Otherwise they become inbred.

Q. Why wolverines?

A. Idaho, Montana and Wyoming were all interested in wolverine research because of concerns about the species' longevity and persistence in the Yellowstone ecosystem based on changes resulting from human population growth in the region. It was known that wolverines exist in low numbers, but nothing specific was known about them in the area. No scientific work has been conducted before.

Q. What are you most hoping to accomplish?

A. We wanted to find out what the population status was and how to manage it in light of continued human population growth. The area around the park saw much more growth than the rest of the country in the 1990s, and that's continuing into the new century. People move here for the environment. We want to protect that asset.

Q. You tag and track the wolverines with telemetry. Have you uncovered any surprises?

A. Yes, we were surprised at how large an area an

Q. Are you hoping your work will help place wolverines on the endangered species list?

A. Our organization is focused on field data that can positively influence management. We think we've learned some things that can move species management in the right direction whether wolverines are on the list or not.

Q. You're enrolled in the doctorate program at the University of Sweden? How does that work?

A. At some point my family and I will be going there for three to six months. Scandinavians have the most advanced wolverine research program in the world. We're looking forward to that.

Q. How do people get in touch if they want to help support your non-profit and its efforts?

A. Check out the website www.wcs.org for information about memberships, mailing lists and how to make a donation. ■