

Proposed Amendment: BC Fisher Exclusion Boxes

Prepared for: Honourable Randene Neill, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

CC: The Honourable Julie Aviva Dabrusin, Minister of Environment and Climate Change

Prepared by: The BC Chapter of the Wildlife Society, Conservation Affairs Committee

BCTWS: The British Columbia Chapter of The Wildlife Society (BCTWS; <https://www.bctws.ca>) is the largest professional society of wildlife professionals in the province and is the fastest-growing Chapter of The Wildlife Society in the world. We are a registered society composed of individuals interested in the art and science of applying the principles of ecology to the conservation and management of wildlife and its habitats in British Columbia. We are dedicated to sound wildlife management and conservation worldwide, with a focus on the rich wildlife heritage of British Columbia.

Issue: The proposed regulatory change for fisher (*Pekania pennanti*) exclusion boxes (FEBs) only requires compliance from 7 of 81 total Management Units where trapping is closed for fishers, covering only 23% of their range. The current proposal by the Province will not reduce incidental mortality to sufficiently reverse current population trajectories, though a full implementation of FEBs across the range may achieve this goal. The Columbian population is red-listed, and mandating all 81 Management Units within their range to require FEBs is a straightforward solution with minimal economic costs. This could prevent further undesirable outcomes and decline for the population. Inaction would be a failure by BC to fulfil its legal requirements under the provincial *Wildlife Act* and would fail in the intent of the federal Accord for Protection of Species at Risk.

Key Notes:

Proposed regulation (BC Gov):

Require fisher exclusion boxes for all box trap sets in Management Units 3-30 and 3-31 in the Thompson region, and Management Units 5-1, 5-2, 5-12, 5-13 and 5-14 in the Cariboo Region (vicinity of Clinton, 100 Mile House, Williams Lake and Quesnel).

Suggested Amendment (BCTWS):

Require fisher exclusion boxes for any Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards (AIHTS) traps approved for martens and minks within Management Units in the Thompson, Cariboo and Omineca Regions (3, 5, 6, 7A), and MUs 6-1 to 6-11, 6-15 to 6-18, 6-30 in the Skeena Region, where commercial trapping for fishers has been closed since fall 2020.

Background:

- In British Columbia, there are two populations of fishers (the Columbian and the Boreal). The Columbian is provincially red-listed as endangered, and the Boreal is blue-listed as threatened.

- The Columbian population of fishers is at risk of extirpation due to both natural and human-caused disturbances from fur-harvest, logging, salvage logging, oil and gas development, and insect- and wildfire-killed forest disturbances.
- The Columbian population was listed as Endangered (S1S2, Red-listed) in 2020 (BC CDC 2025).
- In 2023, the provincial government declined to mandate the use of FEBs across Columbian fisher range.
- The government's own peer-reviewed and published research¹ demonstrated that continued incidental harvest would cause the extirpation of the red-listed Columbian fisher population in as little as 11 years.
- In the annual trapping regulations synopsis, the Province has been advising trappers to voluntarily use fisher exclusion modifications to their marten sets every year since 1993. Over the intervening 32 years, the Columbian fisher population has declined by about 70%. Relying on voluntary adoption of FEB by trappers is proving to be an ineffective approach.
- In August 2021, the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship closed the trapping season for fishers in 81 Management Units in these regions to alleviate pressure on the declining population. Fishers continue to be killed, however, as by-catch in legal traps set for other furbearers with open seasons, such as martens and minks. Implementing FEBs for traps set for these species would ensure that efforts to reduce the harvest of endangered fishers are as effective as possible and contribute to meaningful recovery of the Columbian population.

Discussion (including risks):

- Altering regulations to have a multi-species moratorium on all trapping would unequivocally ensure that fishers are not trapped, thus slowing the aggressive decline of the population. However, expanding the proposed regulation to mandate the use of FEBs across the range of the Columbian population would ensure that trapping practices can continue with minimal adverse effects.
- Not taking reasonable actions, including the amendments to FEB regulations, could lead to extirpation of the population and/or legal action against the provincial government by citizens, advocacy groups, or First Nations.

Indigenous Peoples:

- This proposed change only applies to the BC *Wildlife Act Commercial Activities Regulation*. This would not affect any First Nations cultural practices, and would not apply to food, ceremonial or cultural trapping.

Financial Implications:

- As there is already a moratorium on fisher trapping in Thompson, Cariboo and Omineca Regions (3, 5, 7A) and MUs 6-1 to 6-11, 6-15 to 6-18, 6-30 in the Skeena Region, there are no financial implications for the Province from the loss of sales of fisher pelts.

- Trappers may experience some increased financial costs to build FEBs, however thousands of FEBs were distributed by government to trappers in the impacted regions.
- Research conducted by government biologists and licensed trappers showed that FEB use does not significantly affect harvest of martens, thereby having negligible effect on fur revenues for both trappers and the Province.

Conclusion: Informed, evidence-based decisions about wildlife stewardship build trust with British Columbians. Under the *BC Wildlife Act*, Ministers hold the responsibility and privilege of regulating sustainable use of species. We would welcome any opportunity to speak with you about this issue.

Thank you for considering this easy-to-implement management action to conserve BC's vital species at risk.

Sincerely,



British Columbia Chapter

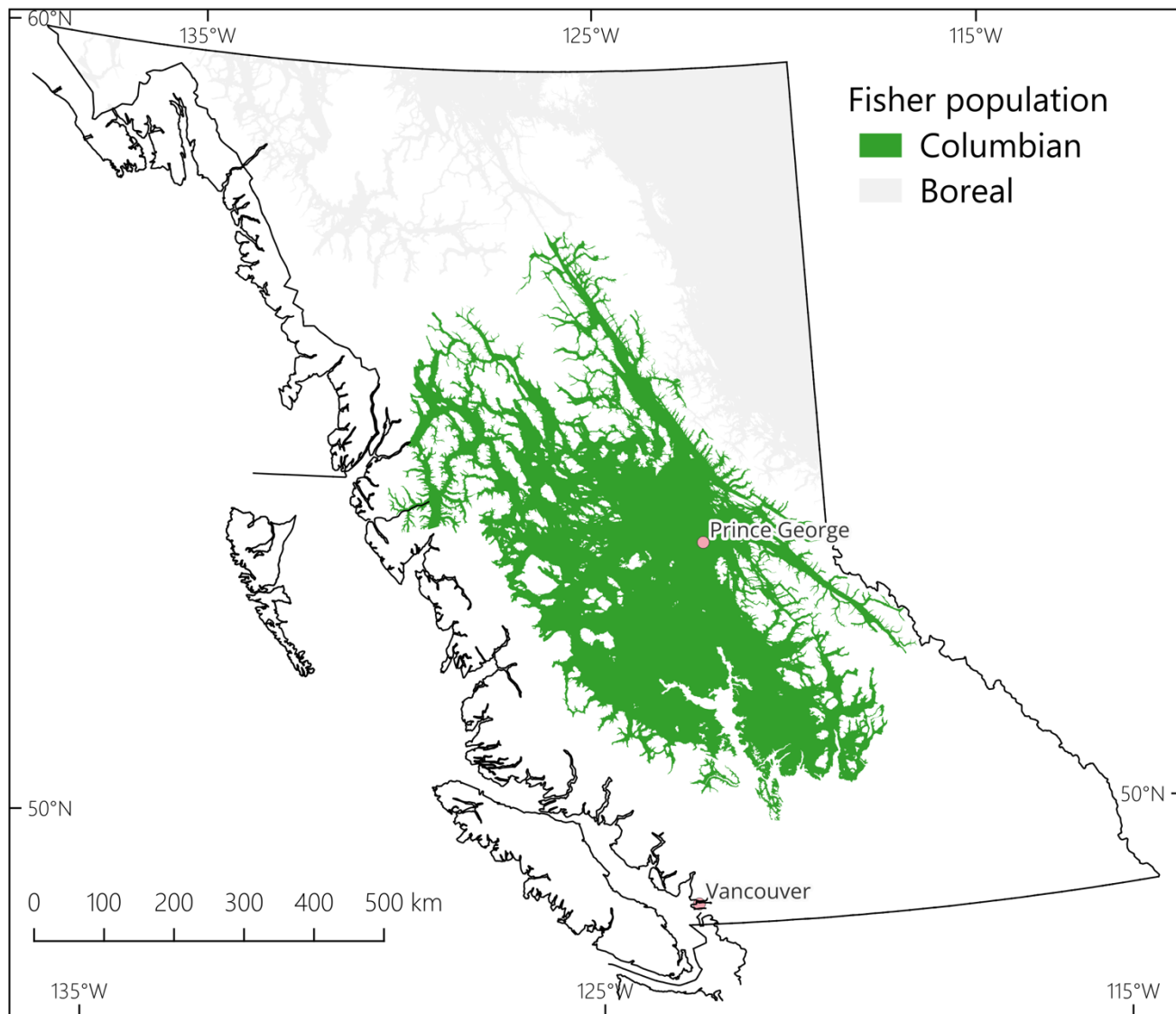
The Conservation Affairs Committee & Executive Board
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This letter is also endorsed by the international Martes Working Group



The Advocacy and Policy Committee & Executive Board
Martes Working Group
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Appendix A: Map of the range of the Columbian population of fishers



Appendix B - Fact Sheet & Additional Background

- Fishers are forest-dependent, medium-sized carnivores that are found only in North America. In BC there are two populations: the blue-listed Boreal population and the red-listed Columbian population. The Columbian fisher is currently estimated at 272-558 mature individuals.
- Declines in habitat quality through forest harvesting and additive mortality from trapping pose the primary threats to the red-listed Columbian population.
- In August 2021, trapping seasons for fishers in the range of the Columbian population were closed; however, fishers are still killed as bycatch during open seasons for other furbearers.
- Fisher exclusion boxes (FEBs) reduce the size of openings for marten boxes to prevent fishers from entering a marten box set, while still allowing the target species, marten, to enter. More information on FEBs can be found in the [Fisher Exclusion Box Infographic \(PDF, 3.8MB\)](#).
- The killing of fishers in traps set for other species remains a concern. Since the 1990s, the government of B.C. has worked with trappers to promote the use of FEBs and other methods to reduce fisher bycatch. These efforts have had a positive impact on rates of bycatch, but incidentally-killed Columbian fishers are still reported each year in traps set for other species (2022/23: 13-15; 2023/24: 27-32, 2024/25: 33). In comparison, in the decade prior to the 2021 closure of the fisher trapping season, an average of approximately 140 Columbian fishers were harvested annually. It is an objective of the B.C. government to reduce incidental trapping/bycatch of Columbian fisher.

Appendix C: Abstract from 2023 paper assessing and defining the Columbian population decline

This paper is one of the notable pieces of empirical evidence that bolsters our approach to mandating FEBs across the range of the Columbian population of fishers.

Title: Trapping mortality accelerates the decline of the fisher, an endangered mesocarnivore, in British Columbia, Canada

Authors: Rory D. Fogarty, Richard D. Weir, Eric C. Lofroth and Karl W. Larsen

Abstract: Understanding the environmental, demographic, and anthropogenic factors driving the population dynamics of endangered species is critical to effective conservation. Habitat loss, fragmentation, and trapping all have been linked to declines in the endangered population of fishers *Pekania pennanti* in central British Columbia (BC), Canada, hereafter referred to as the Columbian population. Although the commercial trapping season for fishers has recently been closed in central BC, the animals are still taken in traps legally set for other furbearer species, and with this continuing source of mortality, the sustainability of this vulnerable population remains unclear. We constructed population viability models in the program Vortex to evaluate the specific impacts that trapping mortality would have on Columbian fisher population persistence under different trapping scenarios. Our modeling predicted that current mortality sources, including deaths in traps set for other species, will cause the population to disappear within 11 yr. When fur harvest mortality was removed from our modeling, the Columbian population appeared unlikely to persist beyond 37 yr. Our analysis provides evidence that along with the continued trapping closure for fishers in central BC, it is likely necessary to modify trapping regulations and methods (including restricting the use of kill traps) for other furbearers within Columbian fisher range to sufficiently reduce mortality from bycatch and help to avoid extirpation of the population in the near future. Additionally, identifying areas where fishers are actively breeding and protecting these habitats from further disturbances will be needed to increase survival and reproductive rates to levels high enough to reverse population declines over the longer term.

Appendix D: Additional BC Fisher References

[British Columbia Wildlife Federation – Fisher exclusion boxes available](#). (2021). *Trappers – Free fisher exclusion boxes available!* British Columbia Wildlife Federation.

British Columbia Wildlife Federation. (2021). *The fisher exclusion box* [Information sheet PDF]. <https://bcwf.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Exclusion-Box-BCTrappersAd-210915-PRINT.pdf>

Government of British Columbia. (2026). *Practices to help reduce incidentally trapping fishers* [PDF]. Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/sports-recreation-arts-and-culture/outdoor-recreation/fishing-and-hunting/hunting/trapping/practices_to_reduce_incidentally_trapping_fishers.pdf

Proulx, G., & Barrett, M. W. (1993). Evaluation of mechanically improved Conibear 220 traps to quickly kill fisher (*Martes pennanti*) in simulated natural environments. *Journal of Wildlife Diseases*, 29(2), 317–323. <https://doi.org/10.7589/0090-3558-29.2.317>

Weir, R. D., & Lara Almuedo, P. (2010). British Columbia's interior fisher wildlife habitat decision aid. *Journal of Ecosystems and Management*, 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.22230/jem.2010v10n3a8>

Weir, R. D., Rankin, A. M., & Robinson, L. (2024). Genetic structuring of fishers in British Columbia, Canada: Implications for population conservation and management. *Journal of Mammalogy*, 105(3), 465–480. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmammal/gyae007>