



MIKAEL MALES, Photo

A fisher sits on a log.



COLD HOLLOW TO CANADA

Meet the fisher: A wildpaths target species

By BRIDGET BUTLER
Special to the Messenger

RICHFORD — On May 18th a WildPaths Project datasheet from one of our volunteers in Richford peaked my interest. It was for a fisher that had been found dead on Route 105 near the Steven’s Mills Slide Road.

The volunteer reported it had been dead less than 12 hours. Here it was, finally, a unique report amid all the others so far. Why was it unique? The fisher, the fisher cat to some, is one of our target species for Cold Hollow to Canada’s wildlife habitat connectivity work.

The fisher (*Martes pennani*), is a member of the weasel family which includes pine martens, otter, mink and the long and short-tailed weasels in Vermont. The fisher is a large, short bodied weasel with pointed ears, and dark brown fur with black at the legs and tail. They differ from their pine marten cousins who have rounded ears and large patches of cream and gold on their chins and throats.

The fisher is one of Cold Hollow to Canada’s target species because of its particular habitat requirements, especially unfragmented forests with coniferous trees. Fishers aren’t fond of open spaces as they prefer continuous cover and plenty of dead and downed trees for foraging, resting and raising their young.

When the report of this fisher came in, I immediately looked at a map online where it had crossed as it was near one of our wildlife crossing hotspots.

This area along Route 105 is a connector between one large intact forest block to the south and a smaller intact block to the north. This spot is along the Missisquoi River. South of Route 105, this large block of forest has a significant spruce fir natural community, which is a great spot for snowshoe hare, a preferred prey species for fisher.

Fisher are an elusive mammal, which is what both excited and saddened me about this particular report. Winter is really the best time to connect with this forest neighbor, as the snow-covered woodlands reveal their tracks. Many of us who enjoy snowshoeing, backcountry skiing or snowmobiling have come across their bounding pattern of footprints. But come spring, they just seem to disappear into the dark spaces between the greens in our forests.

So why was this fisher here? I gleaned a few ideas to answer the “whys” from the volunteer’s datasheet and some other clues.

On the WildPaths data sheet we ask when the animal was found/seen and approximately how long it had been there.



JOAN HILDRETH, Photo

Fisher tracks in winter.

This sighting happened at 7:30 a.m. and the volunteer estimated that the fisher had been dead for less than 12 hours. Taking into account that fisher are most active after sunset and before sunrise, it’s likely the fisher had been hit the night before. Fisher tend to avoid roadways and are more likely to use river or stream corridors to travel. With the Missisquoi nearby, it’s likely this fisher was coming from or trying to get to the river. And, when we take the time of year into account, it was likely a male because males tend to move more in April and May, expanding their range to in order to find mates.

Being a part of the WildPaths Project is like being a forensic scientist for wildlife! We’re attempting to gather lots of clues about how animals move in order to help them safely disperse for food, mating or to migrate.

You can be a citizen scientist for the WildPaths Project this summer and keep your eye out for target species like the fisher. With young fisher kits getting ready to learn how to hunt, summer is the most active season for this mammal.

What to look for: Watch out at dawn & dusk for fishers crossing the roads. Look for tracks along streams and rivers. Report your observations to the WildPaths Project, especially when finding roadkill.

What to report: Grab a datasheet from our website at <http://bit.ly/CHCWildPaths> to keep in your car. Random observations of roadkill are needed, especially for target species mammals like fisher, bobcat, bear, otter, marten, mink and moose. What to do: On your property, leave downed trees as potential denning spots and protect patches of conifers in the landscape.

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The WildPaths Project is a program of Cold Hollow to Canada which uses volunteers to gather observations about wildlife crossing roadways in the Northern Green Mountains. Learn more at www.coldhollow-tocanada.org.

Shumlin signs renewable energy bill after long battle

MIDDLEBURY (AP) — Four days after Vermont lawmakers passed a revised version of a renewable energy bill earlier vetoed by Gov. Peter Shumlin, the Democratic governor has signed the revised bill into law.

Shumlin signed the bill Monday, saying it will help local communities and regional planning commissions have more of a say in the process of siting wind and solar power projects around Vermont.

Shumlin vetoed an earlier version of the bill, prompting a contentious veto session last week in which lawmakers debated and eventually passed changes the governor had sought.

A key sticking point was over standards for sound coming from wind turbines.

South Burlington council to hold public hearing on F-35 suit

SOUTH BURLINGTON, Vt. (AP) — South Burlington officials are holding a public hearing on a lawsuit against the U.S. Air Force regarding F-35 fighter jets.

The city council decided unanimously Monday to hold the hearing June 22 on whether to join the lawsuit filed in reaction to the military planes’ environmental impact.

The suit claims that the Air Force underestimated the level of noise caused by F-35 jets flying overhead as well as their potential negative impact on health and local property values.

Grand Isle County Sheriff settles discrimination case for \$30,000

By MORGAN TRUE
VTDigger.org

The Grand Isle County Sheriff’s Department has paid \$30,000 to settle a case alleging that one of its deputies illegally discriminated against a Mexican citizen during a routine traffic stop.

The case stems from a February 2015 incident where Sgt. Blake Allen pulled over Kerry Martin for speeding. Martin came away from the incident with a warning, but his passenger Lorenzo Alcudia was pulled from the car and detained for hours by federal agents.

Alcudia, who is Mexican, was working on a dairy farm in Alburgh. Martin is a white U.S. citizen. The two were on their way to a meeting of the advocacy group Migrant Justice.

During the traffic stop Allen repeatedly asked if Alcudia was “supposed to be here,” documents show. U.S. Border Patrol agents were called to the scene and detained Alcudia, who now faces deportation.

In a 32-page report summarizing its investigation, the Human Rights Commission says Alcudia’s skin color and national origin “played a chief role” in the way he was treated during the traffic stop. It also says there is “overwhelming evidence” that Allen was “primarily interested” in Alcudia’s immigration status.

The settlement money will be split between Alcudia and the Human Rights Commission.

“Being profiled by the sheriff was a terrible experience, and I live with the consequences every day,” Alcudia said in a statement provided by Migrant Justice. “I hope that police will learn from this case and stop discriminating against people like me.”

Will Lambek, with Migrant Justice, said a hearing has not yet been set in Alcudia’s deportation proceeding.

The Grand Isle County Sheriff’s Department admitted no wrongdoing as part of the settlement. Sheriff Ray Allen, Sgt. Allen’s father, did not return a call Monday requesting comment.

The settlement also requires the department to adopt the essential elements of a bias-free policing policy being developed by the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council by July 1. The department’s deputies must receive a copy of the revised policy, and the department must go through training on bias-free policing before Dec. 31.

All state, county and municipal law enforcement agencies in Vermont must adopt bias-free policing policies that include the essential elements of the Criminal Justice Training Council policy by July 1 anyway, as a result of a 2014 law meant to address similar incidents of discrimination by police.

The law requires the council to develop its model policy in consultation with specific stakeholders, including Migrant Justice, the Human Rights Commission and the Vermont chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. The council will meet Tuesday to discuss and potentially vote on a draft policy.

Lambek, with Migrant Justice, said a draft policy circulated to law enforcement and others last week makes several crucial departures from a previous draft circulated in May, which he said he and others thought would be the policy debated Tuesday.

That policy was developed over the last six months through at least five meetings between stakeholder groups and law enforcement. Now Migrant Justice says that “at the 11th hour, police representatives have made unilateral changes” that undermine safeguards against discrimination.

Some provisions in the May draft policy were removed, while others are marked as nonessential elements, which means police agencies in the state won’t need to adopt them.

‘Being profiled by the sheriff was a terrible experience, and I live with the consequences every day.’

Lorenzo Alcudia

Rick Gauthier, the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council executive director, said the changes were made to comply with the legislative intent of Act 193, the 2014 bias-free policing law.

Police agencies are currently required to have policies modeled after those put forward by the Vermont State Police or the attorney general. Gauthier said the council’s mandate was essentially to meld those two policies into one that would serve as the “floor” for agency rules.

“There’s nothing that prevents an agency adding whatever they like to this policy,” Gauthier said.

Gauthier acknowledged that the decisions about what provisions would be marked essential or nonessential, as well as changes in the draft language, were made based on consultations with members of law enforcement.

Some of the provisions that interest groups like Migrant Justice wanted included as essential elements exceed the scope of Act 193’s legislative intent, Gauthier said.

Lambek said that far from helping to create the uniform policy state lawmakers were looking for, dividing the draft into essential and nonessential elements will lead to a patchwork of policies across the state.

Elements that were deemed nonessential by law enforcement leave open the possibility of the same type of discrimination that Alcudia experienced and that forced the Grand Isle County sheriff into a settlement that cost taxpayers \$30,000, Lambek said.

Of particular concern to Lambek was the removal of a provision that stated, “(Agency members) shall utilize federal databases in attempts to establish an individual’s identity only when there is reasonable suspicion that the person has violated Vermont laws and all other attempts to identify the person have failed.”

In its place is a sentence that reads, “(Agency members) may utilize federal databases in attempts to establish an individual’s identity.”

Lambek said that leaves open the possibility that law enforcement will continue to exploit what he calls a loophole in current policies, wherein police check a person’s immigration status under the guise of establishing identity.

“It’s a pretext for discriminatory treatment and a pretext for enforcing immigration laws,” Lambek said.

The Grand Isle Sheriff’s Department told investigators with the Human Rights Commission that Sgt. Allen was questioning Alcudia “for the purpose of determining his identity, not his immigration status,” according to its report.

When asked about that specific language being removed from the latest draft, Gauthier said, “I don’t know why that entire phrase was removed.”

Looking back at his notes, Gauthier said he believed that members of law enforcement felt it was too broadly worded and could hamstring Vermont officers when they’re working with federal officials on joint task forces, especially those focused on border security.

Gauthier said he would flag that passage for members of the council, so they could discuss it at Tuesday’s meeting. He said he’s flagged several other sections for review as well.

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