

# American Marten



Parks &  
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5201 St. Vrain Rd., Longmont CO 80504 303-678-6200 BoulderCountyOpenSpace.org



**Figure 1 American marten (*Martes Americana*)**  
By Tim Gage of Vancouver, Canada - American Marten (*Martes americana*) in Yellowstone National Park [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martes\\_americana\\_Yellowstone\\_2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martes_americana_Yellowstone_2.jpg)

## Background

Marten are in the Mustelidae family, a diverse group of medium-sized carnivores, often referred to as furbearers. They are crepuscular to nocturnal. They are omnivorous, feeding primarily on small rodents, but will also eat fruit, birds, and insects. Predominantly arboreal, they prefer subalpine spruce-fir, mixed conifer, and lodgepole pine forests and occasionally montane forests.

*Fun fact:* A group of marten is called a “richness”.

## Distribution & Range

Their territory spans across North America, as far south as New Mexico and up through Canada and Alaska. They can also be seen as far east as Newfoundland.

## Species Description

*Species:* American marten (*Martes americana*)

The American marten has brown fur with orange- or yellow-colored throat and chest with black feet and tail. It has a long, slender body with bushy tail, large eyes, cat-like ears, and partially retractable claws. Adult males are, on average, 24 inches long and 2.5 pounds, while females are slightly smaller, averaging 22 inches and 1.5 pounds.

*Look-alikes:* Sometimes confused for the American mink, the American marten is much larger. It can also be confused with long-tailed and short-tailed weasels; however, these smaller weasels tend to be longer and thinner.

*Habitat:* They can be found at subalpine elevations (5,500-10,000 ft) in old growth spruce and fir stands. They use the complex physical structures on the forest floor to create dens in tree cavities, logs, rock piles, and ground burrows. These old growth stands take decades to develop in order to support healthy marten populations.



International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_marten](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_marten)

## Threats

*Unregulated trapping:* Overharvesting historically has led to overall population declines. Trapping was restricted from 1995 to 2006 after the marten was put on the Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) Threatened and Endangered List. However, CPW lifted this restriction in 2006 and allowed trapping again.

*Intensive timber harvest:* Harvesting of old growth stands can push marten out of their preferred habitat and into younger stands that are less suitable and therefore support smaller numbers of marten.

*Landscape fragmentation/human disturbance:* Roads, developments, timber harvest, and pine beetle infestation tree mortality can lead to marten travel and dispersal through unsuitable habitat, significantly reducing survival.

*Wildfire:* With the impacts of climate change causing larger-scale, higher-intensity, and more frequent forest fires, resultant habitat loss is detrimental to marten populations.

*Climate change:* Future loss of snowpack amounts and retention will negatively impact marten, as their competitive advantage over other predators, based on their hunting strategies, will be reduced.



**Figure 2 American marten (*Martes Americana*)**  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07qtyj8/p07r2nkm>

## Management Considerations

*Habitat preservation:* Maintain foraging and cover requirements found in mature forests. Reduce fragmentation of habitat. Preserve coarse, woody debris to allow winter subnivean access as well as support of small mammal populations for marten prey. Maintain snags of all sizes for denning and resting habitat for marten.



**Figure 3 American marten (*Martes Americana*)**

Photo courtesy: Colorado Parks and Wildlife

American marten in Marietta Canyon, Boulder County, CO

**Disclaimer:** This summary is not a complete guide to conservation and/or recovery of the species. For more information, please read the full report on our website.

2021

The areas displayed in this map indicate known and potential locations of the following species of special concern in Boulder County:

## *Martes americana*



American Marten  
Photo credit: Tim Gage

American marten are members of the weasel family that dwell in structurally complex conifer forests from the foothills up to 10,000 feet. They are the size of a house cat and den in tree cavities, logs, rock piles, and ground burrows. They are listed a federally sensitive and State Tier 2 Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Threats include unregulated trapping, loss of suitable forest structure, landscape fragmentation, and human disturbance.

This map shows where there is potential for this species to occur based on its known elevation range.

 Potential Location

