

Dogs used to detect rare carnivores

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U.S. Forest Service scientists at the Pacific Southwest Research Station are using dogs to detect the presence of rare California carnivores.

Service researchers and scientists from the University of Vermont have found dogs that can detect the presence of specific scat -- animal excrement -- might be the best way to confirm the presence of rare carnivores in forested areas such as the Southern Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Land managers often have difficulty detecting forest carnivores because they tend to be elusive, solitary and on the go. Common methods for confirming a species at a site include using remotely triggered cameras and barbed wire snares that snag hair. But scientists have found detection dogs are 3 1/2 times more successful at detecting species than cameras, the second best method.

"Right now, dogs bring the most bang for the buck, compared to passive survey methods like snares and cameras," said Bill Zielinski, a Redwood Sciences Laboratory research ecologist and one of the study's authors.

Zielinski said he hoped scat detection dogs might be trained to find many rare carnivores in a given area since carnivores are a barometer of ecosystem health.

The study appeared in *Journal of Wildlife Management*.

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