

## **Wildlife Species and Habitat Affected by the Rim Fire**

(By Roy Bridgeman, and edits by C. Holland and C. Ewell)

Spotted Owl territories	46 (20% of total on Stanislaus NF)
Goshawk territories	22 (26% of total)
Great Gray Owl territories	13 (52% of total)
Great Gray Owl nests/ structures	31 (74% of total)

### **Pacific Fisher**

Despite numerous surveys over the past decade, biologists have not found any evidence of fisher on the Stanislaus NF, although they occur just south of the Merced River in Yosemite NP and the Sierra NF. Some people confuse pine marten (1 picture) sightings on the Stanislaus NF and other places with the fisher.

### **Western Pond Turtle**

Pond turtles occur in lower elevation ponds and year-round streams. Some of their ponds dried up, including several areas that burned in the Rim fire. Some turtles died in the fire, but when biologists visited some dry ponds that burned, they found live turtles (2 pictures). One dried pond had at least 17 live turtles! It appears that turtles return from their summer resting burrows to the pond when a wildfire comes through. Biologists also observed this during another fire in 1996.

### **Bald Eagle**

The bald eagle nests on the Tuolumne River and at Cherry Lake survived the Rim Fire. During the winter survey in January 2014, Stanislaus N F biologists counted 30 bald eagles at Cherry Lake.

### **Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle and California Red-legged Frog**

These species are federally-listed under the Endangered Species Act as Threatened (more information on the ESA: <https://www.fws.gov/endangered/laws-policies/index.html>). Neither species has been observed on the Stanislaus NF, but the beetle (1 picture) likely occurs at low elevations in the river canyons. The beetle occurs almost exclusively in elderberry shrubs, many of which burned in the Rim Fire. The red-legged frog occurs in lower elevation ponds and year-round streams. Suitable habitat for both species occurs in the Rim Fire area.

### **Foothill yellow-legged frog**

Not to be confused with the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog (that is proposed for ESA listing), the Foothill yellow-legged frog occupies creeks and streams with suitable pool habitat at lower elevations and is a USFS sensitive species. Several known populations are within the fire area. The frogs probably escaped harm from the fire itself because they don't often travel far from their stream habitat. Impacts from erosion and sediment after the fire could impact the frog habitats. The Yosemite toad has no habitat in the Rim fire area, and is also proposed for ESA listing.

### **Bats**

The Stanislaus NF is home to 17 different species of bats (1 picture), including some of the largest and smallest species in North America and 3 sensitive species. They feed on insects in the air, on tree foliage and plants on the ground. Bats roost and breed in caves, mine shafts, trees, and cavities in dead trees. They can also fly long distances from roost sites to feeding sites.

Within the Rim Fire, bats, like birds, probably were able to escape the fire and smoke, but some of their roosting and foraging areas were lost. Biologists know of 17 bat roost sites in the Rim fire area. At the same time new foraging and roosting areas were created, and caves and adits (mine entry sites) remain. We expect bat use and species composition to shift after the fire, but the area will still support a thriving bat population.

### **California mule deer**

The Rim Fire included important habitat (1 picture) for mule deer. Many of the plants they depend on for winter food were burned. The fire also burned many oak trees, which provide acorns and leaves for deer. Most of the deer migrate up and down the slope to areas with the most food (1 picture). Fortunately, many of the deer were at higher elevations when the fire occurred. Unfortunately, some deer died in the fire. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife studies the condition and movements of the deer herds.

**Many other animals were also affected by the Rim Fire.** By August most baby birds were out of the nest and flying, so they could escape the fire. Many of the migratory birds had already left for the season. Some small animals like lizards, snakes, and gophers could escape into burrows or into unburned areas. Some animals like squirrels and wood rats may not have fared very well in burned areas. Unfortunately, some coyote, bear, and skunk probably died in the fire too.

The Stanislaus NF has a variety of wildlife species (1 picture of a newt) and if you have questions or want to learn more, please visit our website, call one of our district offices, or visit the National Forests in California wildlife website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r5/plants-animals>.

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