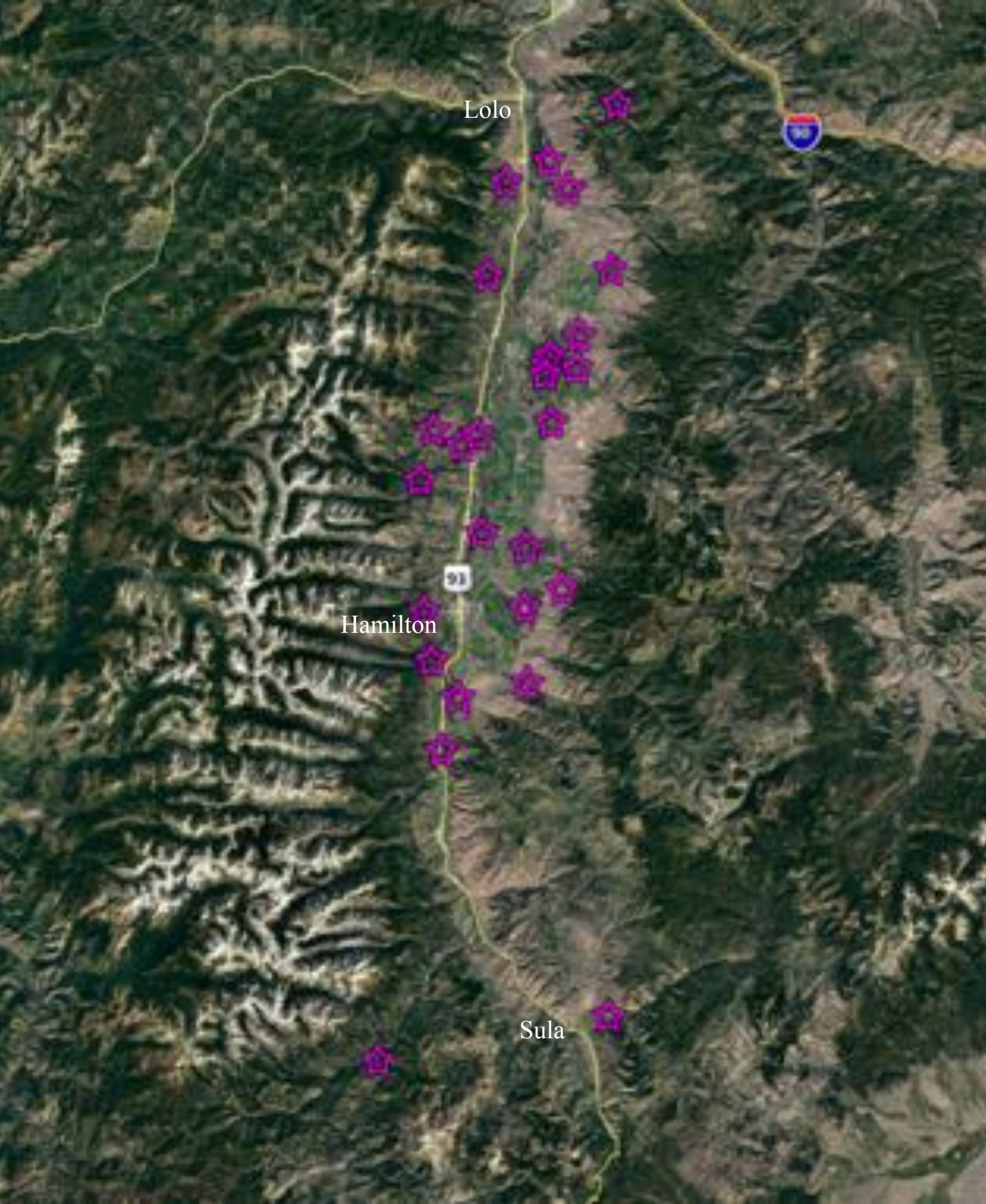


Bitterroot Valley Winter Eagle Project
Spring 2018 Update
Kate Stone
5/15/18



During the winter of 2017-2018 we placed cameras at 27 locations on private lands throughout the Bitterroot Valley, stretching from the Miller Creek drainage southeast of Missoula to the West and East Fork drainages near Sula.



We collected and set 130 white-tailed deer, two mule deer, two elk, and two horse carcasses. We picked up most of the mature male white-tailed deer in late November and early December, correlating with the end of the rut. We owe many thanks to the Montana Department of Transportation for helping us with roadkill collection efforts.



The discovery of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in Montana east of the Continental Divide raises many questions regarding disease spread, impact on deer populations, and hunter activities. CWD is transmitted via contact with nervous system tissues. Our camera footage suggests that deer routinely investigate carcasses, revealing one possible means of disease transmission.



We installed cameras at several new upland locations, hoping to capture more Golden Eagles than winter 2016-2017. Our upland sites paid off; this year we detected more Golden Eagles, including presumably resident pairs feeding together at five sites.



Despite detecting more Golden Eagles, we did not detect more of the eagles marked as part of Raptor View Research Institute's (RVRI) banding efforts. Our "best" Golden Eagle re-sighting took place at a camera station near the Bitterroot River in Victor. Golden Eagle "170" is now the most detected eagle in RVRI's history. RVRI captured him as a second-year male on the MPG Ranch on 3/25/12 and re-sighted him eight times since: six times on MPG Ranch cameras in the winters of 2014-2016 (top), once by a visitor to Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge in Stevensville in 2014, and finally this year at our Victor camera station (bottom). Researchers rarely catch a glimpse of their study animals so many times. In this instance, our pictures documented his development into maturity.



We also had Golden Eagle “Petey” show up at a camera station across the valley soon after his release from MPG Ranch.



Petey has remained regionally faithful, making movements between the Bitterroot, Missoula, and Blackfoot Valleys. Most recently he traveled to the Sleeping Child area southeast of Hamilton. His movements suggest he’s not breeding.



We continued to detected hundreds of Bald Eagles of all ages.



25.43 inHg - 26 F 12/03/2017 09:49AM FLO2

The deployment of a horse carcass in the Burnt Fork drainage east of Stevensville yielded over 30 Bald Eagles at once, creating a neighborhood spectacle.



STEALTH CAM 09:02 02/02/18 37 F STEV1A J

We had two re-sightings of Bald Eagles from outside our study area. Bald Eagle “62” was born at the West End nest on Catalina Island, CA in 2016. People can see her nest and watch her parents care for their 2018 eaglet by visiting the Institute for Wildlife Studies live West End Eagle Nest camera (top). We detected her feeding on a carcass near Sula, MT approximately 900 miles from her birth site (bottom).



25.90 inHg | 8 32F ● 12/06/2017 01:35PM SULA1

We also detected an adult Bald Eagle with a satellite transmitter and colored leg bands. It appeared at a camera in the Roaring Lion area southwest of Hamilton (top), and then in the Burnt Fork area east of Stevensville (bottom). Arizona Game and Fish captured this eagle in the Camp Navajo area west of Flagstaff during the winter of 2008-2009. Its transmitter still functions. We're awaiting additional information on how this eagle spent its time between 2009 and 2018.



Bushnell HAM4 17F-8°C 12-23-2017 13:48:17



STEALTH CAM 16:40 02/07/18 53 F STEV1A J

We had less persistent snowpack compared to winter 2016-2017. Subsequently, we saw many fewer Red-tail and Rough-legged Hawks feeding on carcasses. We did have at least three different Northern Goshawks feeding. Goshawks seldom scavenge; they usually seek medium-sized, live prey items in continuous forest.



25.25 inHg | 34 F | 01/09/2018 12:07PM FLO2



Bushnell BASS1 13F-10C 12-23-2017 16:06:03



Bushnell FLOR1 27.02 in 21F 12-07-2017 14:02:45

Last year we did not detect any skunks until the first week in February; this year skunks fed at our stations throughout the season. We had many instances of foxes taking a risk to share a carcass with skunks.



We added a bear, two American marten, and five wolves to the array of carnivores detected via this project. We continued to see bobcats at several sites. A pregnant mountain lion took over a site near Florence for much of the winter.



Bushnell FLOR1 2697In→ 8F 12-11-2017 09:14:02



STEALTH CAM 10:25 01/13/18 42 F FLO1BTH CAM

Zombie horses and cows visited several of our camera sites.



BASS1 26F-3°C

11-24-2017 21:22:19



WIL1 25.77In→ 30F ●

11-16-2017 17:31:13

We've relied on Citizen Science volunteers on the Zooniverse website to help us classify the captured images. So far, we have over 4,300 people from all over the world helping us. We routinely host "Zooniverse Nights" at local watering holes to encourage engagement. We hope to have local high school students helping us produce short films from some of our camera footage.



We also enjoyed local and national media coverage. Our project was featured in National Audubon magazine this May.



Bald Eagles and magpies feast on a deer carcass at a camera-trap station in Montana's Bitterroot Valley. Photo: Bitterroot Valley Winter Eagle Project

Conservation

Montana Landowners Are Hooked on Luring Eagles with Deer Carcasses

Carrion is key to studying the abundance of Bald and Golden Eagles—and a bevy of other wildlife—overwintering in the Bitterroot Valley.



By Alisa Opar

May 04, 2018

This project would not have been possible without the hospitality of private landowners throughout the Bitterroot Valley. Many thanks! Hopefully we'll see you next year.



Staff involved on this project include:

MPG Ranch:

Kate Stone

Eric Rasmussen

Mike McTee

Raptor View Research Institute:

Rob Domenech

Adam Shreading

Jack Toriello

Mary Scofield

Brian Busby

