BAER Wildlife Biologist Discovers Mountain Lion Paw Print in Washburn Fire Burned Area

By Mike Donald, Yosemite National Park Wildlife Biologist

Mountain lions are adapted to living with fire and have been part of the forest community in this part of California for thousands of years. They are top predators that are highly mobile with large home ranges and the ability to leave an area quickly when a fire starts. They return quickly too as evidenced by this paw print found in the Washburn burned area shortly after the fire passed through.

Images of mountain lions have been captured in burned areas prior to the wildfire by automatic trail cameras set as part of a 2020 National Park Service (NPS) study on California mountain lions. That study collected photographs and genetic material from scat to determine population size and habitat use of mountain lions living in the Yosemite National Park. Over the course of two years, researchers collected DNA from 44 individual mountain lions (25 females and 19 males), showing that Yosemite is home to a large and healthy population of these iconic animals even in the presence of fire. (See NPS Mountain Lion Fact Sheet: Mtn Lion_9-07.pdf (nps.gov).) Scroll through a StoryMap to learn more about this research and follow a mountain lion’s journey on a summer morning in Yosemite.

Photo 1--NPS Study Trail Cam Photo Taken During the Day:
Photo 2--NPS Study Trail Cam Photo Taken During the Night:

For more information about mountain lions, visit these websites:

Mountain Lion Research — Yosemite Conservancy
Mountain Lions - Yosemite National Park (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)
Your Safety in Mountain Lion Habitat - Point Reyes National Seashore (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)
Mountain Lion Safety (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)
Mountain Lions | US Forest Service (usda.gov)

Photo 3—Mountain Lion Paw Print Found in Washburn Fire Burned Area: