Genetic population structure of fishers (Pekania pennanti) in the Great Lakes region: remnants and reintroductions

Paul Hapeman, Emily K. Latch, Olin E. Rhodes, Brad Swanson, and C. William Kilpatrick

Abstract: Reintroduction programs have been pivotal in augmenting populations of fishers (Pekania pennanti (Erxleben, 1777)) and re-establishing them to their former range in North America. The majority of reintroduction efforts in fishers have been considered demographically successful, but reintroductions can alter genetic population structure and success has rarely been evaluated in fishers from a genetic standpoint. We used microsatellite data (n = 169) to examine genetic population structure of fishers in the Great Lakes region and comment on the success of past reintroductions at two different spatial scales. We found significant genetic population structure among source and reintroduced populations within the Great Lakes region and large-scale genetic structure between fisher populations located in two geographically distant regions (Great Lakes and Northeast) in the eastern United States. Reintroductions associated with the Great Lakes produced results that were largely consistent with other studies of fisher reintroductions in the Northeast. However, our data are the first to support a measurable impact on genetic population structure in Pekania pennanti (Erxleben, 1777) from a reintroduction using geographically distant source and reintroduced populations. When feasible, we strongly recommend that reintroduction programs include an investigation of the underlying genetic structure to better define intended goals and supplement measures of demographic success.

Key words: Great Lakes, fishers, Pekania pennanti, structure, reintroductions.

Introduction

Wildlife reintroductions have been pivotal in conservation efforts to rescue declining populations and re-establish species in their former range (Sarrazin and Legendre 2000). Early reintroduction programs seldom used multiple source populations and the source populations chosen were often based on availability or convenience, and success was likely defined based on the sustained presence of the focal species in the area of the reintroduction (Griffith et al. 1989; Seddon 1999; Le Gouar et al. 2008). The development of variable genetic markers along with advances in analytical techniques have now made it possible to consider genetic factors in both the planning and monitoring stages of reintroduction programs (Olech and Perzanowski 2002; Joyce and Pullin 2004; Rails and Ballou 2004; Latch and Rhodes 2005; Drauch and Rhodes 2007; Swanson and Kyle 2007; Hedrick and Fredrickson 2008). Reintroductions have the potential to alter genetic population structure, thus it has become increasingly common to examine reintroduction success from a genetic perspective (Mock et al. 2004; Latch and Rhodes 2005; Wisely et al. 2005; Swanson et al. 2006; Mowry et al. 2015). Contemporary reintroductions now have the potential to consider not only the persistence of the reintroduced population, but also whether the genetic composition of the reintroduced population reflects the desired outcome (e.g., high levels of genetic variation, minimal divergence from source populations (Olech and Perzanowski 2002; Joyce and Pullin 2004; Rails and Ballou 2004; Latch and Rhodes 2005; Drauch and Rhodes 2007; Swanson and Kyle 2007; Hedrick and Fredrickson 2008). Reintroductions have the potential to alter genetic population structure, thus it has become increasingly common to examine reintroduction success from a genetic perspective (Mock et al. 2004; Latch and Rhodes 2005; Wisely et al. 2005; Swanson et al. 2006; Mowry et al. 2015). Contemporary reintroductions now have the potential to consider not only the persistence of the reintroduced population, but also whether the genetic composition of the reintroduced population reflects the desired outcome (e.g., high levels of genetic variation, minimal divergence from source
Fishers in eastern North America (Pekania pennanti pennanti (Erxleben, 1777), ranging from Manitoba to New Brunswick, Canada, and south in the Appalachians to Tennessee, USA (inset of Fig. 1), are one of three currently recognized subspecies (Hall 1981; Wozencraft 2005) supported by morphological and molecular data (Goldman 1935; Drew et al. 2003; Knaus et al. 2011). Like many carnivores, fishers in eastern North America have experienced a long history of human persecution resulting in the local extirpation of the species, and thus, have been a focal group for reintroduction efforts (e.g., Servheen et al. 1987; Russell et al. 1994; Raesly 2001; Swanson et al. 2006). Prior to European settlement, fishers were widely distributed and abundant, but by the early 1900s, fishers in the range of P. p. pennanti likely occurred as remnant populations in habitat fragments in the Adirondacks of New York (NY, USA), the White Mountains of New Hampshire (NH, USA), the Moosehead Plateau of Maine (ME, USA), Cumberland Plateau of New Brunswick (Canada), the Big Bog area of Minnesota (MN, USA), and Algonquin Provincial Park and Quebec (Canada) (devos 1952; Brander and Books 1973; Carr et al. 2007).

In an effort to restore fishers to their previous abundance and distribution and to reduce the level of damage to timber by porcupines (Erethizon dorsatus (L., 1758)) (Williams et al. 2006), trapping seasons were closed and a series of well-documented reintroductions (n = 25) were implemented across eastern North America (see Lewis et al. 2012 and Fig. 1) between 1896 and 2004 (Berg 1982; Lewis et al. 2012). Fishers have since recovered demographically throughout a large portion of their range in eastern North America, and even though regional genetic structure has been largely retained (Hapeman et al. 2011), reintroductions have resulted in distinct genetic signatures (Williams et al. 2000; Hapeman et al. 2011, 2014) with lower genetic diversity in reintroduced populations compared with their sources (Hapeman et al. 2011, 2014) and with adjacent indigenous populations (Kyle et al. 2001). Results from these studies included genetic data from reintroduced populations that were geographically close to their sources within the same region. How reintroductions have impacted the underlying genetic population structure locally within some regions (eastern Canada, Great Lakes) of eastern North America and more broadly across the range of P. p. pennanti remains unclear.

In this study, we examine the genetic population structure of fishers from three populations in the Great Lakes region at two spatial scales to comment on the success of past reintroductions and place genetic population structure of fishers in the Great Lakes region in a broader geographical framework within the southern portion of P. p. pennanti. Fisher populations in the Great Lakes region have been particularly pivotal in the reintroduction history of the species in North America, having been involved in 26% of all documented fisher reintroductions and used as sources for reintroductions that occurred in all three subspecies. Our specific objectives were (i) to examine genetic population structure among source and reintroduced populations of fishers in the Great Lakes region, (ii) place fishers in the Great Lakes region in a broader context of genetic population structure within the southern portion of P. p. pennanti, and (iii) comment on the success of fisher reintroductions that took place in the Great Lakes region. Our study will contribute to the limited data available on the genetic success of reintroductions and improve our understanding of how reintroductions impact genetic population structure at multiple spatial scales in fishers.
Fig. 2. Map of the study area showing sampling localities for the fisher subspecies *Pekania pennanti pennanti* designated by different shapes along with sample sizes (*n*) from each locality (inset), MN, Minnesota; WI, Wisconsin; UPMI, Upper Peninsula of Michigan; ME, Maine; NH, New Hampshire; NY, Adirondacks, New York.

Materials and methods

Great Lakes region only

We obtained muscle tissue samples of fishers from cooperating state agencies during their trapping seasons between 1997 and 2006 in the Great Lakes region (Minnesota (MN; n = 50), Wisconsin (WI; n = 33), and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan (UPMI; n = 86)) (Fig. 2). Locations for samples were reported by county when collected, which was sufficient resolution for our analyses and were located near documented sites where reintroductions occurred (WI, and multiple counties in the UPMI) and west and south of the source of the original founders in MN. We genotyped all samples (*n* = 169) at 11 microsatellite loci following published protocols and quality control measures (Hapeman et al. 2011).

We used the program STRUCTURE version 2.3.4 (Falush et al. 2003) to characterize patterns of genetic population structure in the Great Lakes region without using prior population information. We ran models in STRUCTURE with a burn-in of 200 000 iterations and run length of 500 000 iterations assuming admixture and linkage equilibrium and adjusted the results to account for multiple comparisons using a sequential Bonferroni correction (Rice 1989). We also examined each population for its deviation from Hardy–Weinberg expectations by calculating *F*<sub>E</sub> in GDA.

Fishers were severely reduced in numbers in the Great Lakes region due to overtrapping and this may have resulted in a bottleneck that impacted genetic population structure. We used multiple methods to examine the three pre-defined populations in the Great Lakes for evidence of historical bottlenecks using both the mode shift and heterozygosity excess methods (Cornuet and Luikart 1996) in the program BOTTLENECK version 1.2 (Piry et al. 1999). We also calculated the M-ratio (Garza and Williamson 2001) using the programs Critical M and MP Val (Garza and Williamson 2001). Allelic diversity is sensitive to changes in population size and can be a good indicator of recent historical bottlenecks (Spencer et al. 2000). Thus, we also compared allelic richness (calculated using HP-RARE version 1.02 (Kalinowski 2005)) between source and reintroduced populations using two-tailed *t* tests. Finally, we used a relatively recent coalescent-based method to detect past changes in the effective population sizes (*N*<sub>e</sub>) of each of the six populations in this study using the package VAREFF version 1.2 (Nikolic and Chevalet 2014) in the software R version 3.4. VAREFF simulates demographic histories using microsatellite data with a coalescent approach to estimate changes in recent and ancestral effective population sizes. We modeled demographic changes using a two-phase mutation model with a mutation rate of 0.001 and 10% of the mutations greater than a single step. The generation time for fishers was set to 5 years following Tucker et al. 2012 and the number of generations since the origin of each population was varied from 10 for reintroduced populations to 100 for source populations. Source populations have likely been present much longer than this, but we were interested only in the recent history that included European settlement. For each population, we ran models with three separate prior effective population sizes (minimum, intermediate, and maximum values) based on the global theta (*θ*) estimates produced in the first step of the modeling process. Models were run for 10 000 000 steps with a burn-in of 10 000 and all other variables in the models were set to what was suggested in the VAREFF user manual. We assessed whether effective population sizes had changed during three different time periods (0–10, 0–20, and 0–100 generations in the past) and made inferences about past expansions and declines based on posterior distributions and their attributes (mean, median, mode, etc.). The reintroductions of fishers to WI and MI were relatively recent, thus we only examined WI and UPMI at the 0–10 period. For each population, we compared median estimates of *N*<sub>e</sub> from the posterior distributions at different time intervals and calculated the RN criterion from Nikolic and Chevalet (2014). The RN criterion represents the ratio of the range of *N*<sub>e</sub> estimates to the mean of the *N*<sub>e</sub> estimates for a particular time period. An RN value >0.10 supports a past change in effective population size during the period examined (Nikolic and Chevalet 2014).

Larger geographical framework and reintroduction success

We examined genetic structure at a larger geographical scale (Great Lakes vs. Northeast) by incorporating into the present data set previously collected data from fishers in the Northeast (Hapeman et al. 2005) in the program STRUCTURE HARVESTER version 1.1 (Lewis and Zaykin 2001). We used exact tests in the program GENEPOP version 3.4 (Raymond and Rousset 1995) to test for deviations from Hardy–Weinberg and linkage equilibrium and adjusted the results to account for multiple comparisons using a sequential Bonferroni correction (Rice 1989). We also examined each population for its deviation from Hardy–Weinberg expectations by calculating *F*<sub>E</sub> in GDA.

We calculated observed and expected heterozygosities, and mean numbers of alleles in each of the three pre-defined populations using GDA Version 1.1 (Lewis and Zaykin 2001). We used exact tests in the program GENEPOP version 3.4 (Raymond and Rousset 1995) to test for deviations from Hardy–Weinberg and linkage equilibrium and adjusted the results to account for multiple comparisons using a sequential Bonferroni correction (Rice 1989). We also examined each population for its deviation from Hardy–Weinberg expectations by calculating *F*<sub>E</sub> in GDA.
et al. 2011). First, we ran analyses in STRUCTURE (same parameters described above and up to \( K = 8 \)) where the three populations in the Great Lakes were combined with three populations from the Northeast including NY (\( n = 49 \)), NH (\( n = 59 \)), and ME (\( n = 55 \)). The three populations from the Northeast were selected because NY served as a source population for the WI reintroduction (Petersen et al. 1977) and all three were considered the only remnant fisher populations in the northeastern United States by the early 1900s (Brander and Books 1973). We then used additional runs to check for substructure in clusters that resulted from the initial analysis. We repeated previous analyses of genetic differentiation and assignment tests in pairwise fashion between populations in the Great Lakes and the Northeast. Finally, we conducted a hierarchical analysis (AMOVA) using two groups of three populations from the Great Lakes (MN, WI, and UPMI) and the Northeast (NY, ME, and NH). We used \( F_{ST} \) as our distance metric for the squared distance matrices calculated in the AMOVAs and determined the significance of the observed \( \Phi \) statistics (\( \Phi_{ST}, \Phi_{RT}, \Phi_{RS} \)) by randomization of the data using 9999 iterations in the program GenAlEx version 6.5 (Peakall and Smouse 2012).

### Results

#### Great Lakes region only

The microsatellite data collected for the Great Lakes populations contained a small number of samples with missing data (3%) and greater than 98% of the data was available for all 11 loci.

Based on our results from the method of Evanno et al. (2005), \( \Delta K \) was maximized at \( K = 3 \) (Supplementary Fig. S1a). The three genetic clusters corresponded to the three sampled populations in MN, WI, and UPMI (Fig. 3c). Mean assignment values for each of the three populations were high and ranged from 89% to 95%, and were consistent between assignment methods in GENECLASS2. Two samples from MI were excluded as members of any of the three sampled populations based on the algorithm of Paetkau et al. (2004) with 10 000 simulated individuals and alpha set equal to 0.05.

#### Genetic differentiation and population structure

First, we ran analyses in STRUCTURE (same parameters described above and up to \( K = 8 \)) where the three populations in the Great Lakes were combined with three populations from the Northeast including NY (\( n = 49 \)), NH (\( n = 59 \)), and ME (\( n = 55 \)). The three populations from the Northeast were selected because NY served as a source population for the WI reintroduction (Petersen et al. 1977) and all three were considered the only remnant fisher populations in the northeastern United States by the early 1900s (Brander and Books 1973). We then used additional runs to check for substructure in clusters that resulted from the initial analysis. We repeated previous analyses of genetic differentiation and assignment tests in pairwise fashion between populations in the Great Lakes and the Northeast. Finally, we conducted a hierarchical analysis (AMOVA) using two groups of three populations from the Great Lakes (MN, WI, and UPMI) and the Northeast (NY, ME, and NH). We used \( F_{ST} \) as our distance metric for the squared distance matrices calculated in the AMOVAs and determined the significance of the observed \( \Phi \) statistics (\( \Phi_{ST}, \Phi_{RT}, \Phi_{RS} \)) by randomization of the data using 9999 iterations in the program GenAlEx version 6.5 (Peakall and Smouse 2012).

#### Assignment values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>MN</th>
<th>NY</th>
<th>NH</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>WI</th>
<th>UPMI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MN</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td>0.28*</td>
<td>0.06*</td>
<td>0.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.17*</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>0.33*</td>
<td>0.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.924</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05*</td>
<td>0.50*</td>
<td>0.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>0.878</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.35*</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WI</td>
<td>0.898</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPMI</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Pairwise values are given for Hedrick’s standardized \( F_{ST} \) (Hedrick 2005) above the diagonal and were calculated in FSTAT (Goudet 2001) using 10 000 iterations. All pairwise values were significantly different (\( p < 0.05 \)) from zero (*). Assignment values (lower diagonal) here were calculated (for description see the Materials and methods) as a relative measure of genetic distinctiveness between population pairs. Values were obtained using the Bayesian method of Rannala and Mountain (1997) and were calculated using the program GENECLASS2 (Piry et al. 2004). MN, Minnesota; NY, Adirondacks, New York; NH, New Hampshire; ME, Maine; WI, Wisconsin; UPMI, Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Labels set in italic type are reintroduced populations.

All source–reintroduced population pairs exhibited significant genetic differentiation; however, the values were generally low (Table 1). MI and WI were in Hardy–Weinberg and linkage equilibrium after a sequential Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons (Rice 1989). A significantly positive \( F_{RT} \) value was found in UPMI (Table 2) that could indicate a departure from Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium or the presence of cryptic population substructure too weak to be detected in our analyses.

Recent bottlenecks were not detected (refer to Supplementary Table S1) in any of the three Great Lakes populations using the BOTTLENECK and \( M \)-Ratio programs. Results of the two-tailed tests comparing allelic richness between source and reintroduced populations were not significant for any pairwise comparison. Heterozygosity and allelic richness in WI were reduced compared with MN, but were similar between MN and UPMI populations (Table 2). Recent declines in effective population size were detected in reintroduced and source populations from models developed in the VAREff version 1.2 package. RN values greater than 0.1 were found in MI for the period 0–10 generations in the past and for ME, NY, NH, and MN during the period from 0 to 100 generations ago. The NH population had the lowest estimate of \( N_e \) for the six populations in the study (Supplementary Table S3).

### Larger geographical framework and reintroduction success

The uppermost level of genetic structure when all six populations were included in STRUCTURE resulted in genetic clusters (\( K = 2 \); Supplementary Fig. S1b) that corresponded to populations in the Great Lakes region and NY separate from ME and NH (Fig. 3c). Membership of the NY population (mean \( Q \) from STRUCTURE runs) to the Great Lakes – NY cluster was greater than 0.99. Additional substructure (\( K = 3 \); Supplementary Fig. S1c) was found in the Great Lakes – NY cluster and corresponded to NY separate from the three Great Lakes populations (Fig. 3b). For this analysis, population membership for NY was lower (0.954), but more notable was the high membership of the UPMI population (\( Q = 0.253 \)) to NY. Significant genetic differentiation was found between fisher populations in the Northeast and the Great Lakes based on pairwise estimates of \( F_{ST} \) (0.18–0.50), and genetic differentiation was higher between NY and WI (\( F_{ST} = 0.33 \)) than between NY and UPMI (\( F_{ST} = 0.18 \); Table 1). In pairwise comparisons, individuals in all Great Lakes populations were assigned to their own populations or those within the region and not with populations in the Northeast. A hierarchical analysis of genetic population structure (AMOVA) from fishers found throughout the southern extent of

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**Table 1. Genetic differentiation between population pairs of fishers (Pekania pennanti) within the range of the subspecies Pekania pennanti pennanti.**

<table>
<thead>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.12*</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note: Pairwise values are given for Hedrick’s standardized \( F_{ST} \) (Hedrick 2005) above the diagonal and were calculated in FSTAT (Goudet 2001) using 10 000 iterations. All pairwise values were significantly different (\( p < 0.05 \)) from zero (*). Assignment values (lower diagonal) here were calculated (for description see the Materials and methods) as a relative measure of genetic distinctiveness between population pairs. Values were obtained using the Bayesian method of Rannala and Mountain (1997) and were calculated using the program GENECLASS2 (Piry et al. 2004). MN, Minnesota; NY, Adirondacks, New York; NH, New Hampshire; ME, Maine; WI, Wisconsin; UPMI, Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Labels set in italic type are reintroduced populations.
P. p. pennanti revealed significant differentiation (FST = 0.150, P < 0.001) among regions (Great Lakes vs. Northeast; Supplementary Table S2).

Discussion

We found significant genetic structure among fisher populations in the Great Lakes region. The reintroductions of fishers in the Great Lakes region have been considered largely successful (6 out of 7 documented reintroductions) from a demographic perspective, but have led to genetically distinct populations. Genetic structure following reintroductions has been found in other species (Mucci et al. 2010; Williams and Scribner 2010), but it is unclear how frequently this occurs since the number of studies that have collected genetic data on reintroduced populations and their sources is somewhat limited. The creation of genetic structure following a reintroduction may be an undesirable outcome if the goal is to create reintroduced populations that are genetically diverse or that are similar in genetic diversity to the source populations used (IUCN 2013). Both WI and UPMI were derived from the same source population in MI and exhibit genetic differentiation from their source and even greater differentiation from each other (Table 1). Genetic variation in the Great Lakes populations was lowest in WI, but there was no evidence of a recent bottleneck or a substantial change in population sizes declined during the time intervals examined in all other populations in our study and the decline ranged from 25% (NY, MI) to 62% (NH). The decline that we detected in the MI population may explain the level of differentiation with WI despite having the same source population (MN). Source populations had their lowest estimates of Ne at a period of time that corresponded to the early to mid-1800s when trapping and habitat loss reduced fisher populations across their range. The declines that we observed in our models were gradual and did not appear to be sudden and severe, and this may have affected the ability of other methods to detect genetic bottlenecks in the sampled populations.

The reintroduction of fishers from NY to WI (1955–1957) was considered a demographic success (Bradle 1957), but based on our genetic data, we did not find evidence of that success in WI. We may not have detected any signs of the NY reintroduction because our fisher samples from WI were taken from an area 90 miles (144.84 km) west of the original reintroduction site in the Nicolet National Forest (Williams et al. 2006). Our sample area was close to the Chequamegon National Forest where fishers from MN (n = 60) were reintroduced between 1966 and 1967 (Petersen et al. 1977). Thus, it is evident from our genetic data that the reintroduction of fishers from MN was the origin of the fishers within our sample area in WI. Fishers like other mustelids are capable of long-distance dispersal (Kyle and Strobeck 2001; Mowry et al. 2015; de Groot et al. 2016), and despite the distance of our sample site to the Nicolet National Forest, we expected to find evidence of the NY reintroduction in our WI samples had it been successful. This was not the case in our study and it appears that the original founders did not spread west in WI despite a strong recovery by fishers in the state. It is possible that the NY reintroduction was simply not successful because it did not meet the criteria described by Lewis et al. (2012) in that they used too few animals (n = 18; 12 females) in the founding population. Reintroduction success in other carnivores including Canada lynx (Lynx canadensis Kerr, 1792), American marten (Martes americana (Turton, 1806)), and sable (Martes zibellina (L., 1758)) has also been associated with small release numbers (Slough 1994; Steury and Murray 2004; Powell et al. 2012). However, we propose that at least some reintroduced fishers from NY moved north from the Nicolet National Forest into the adjacent Ottawa National Forest in MI and contributed to the founding population along with fishers reintroduced from MN between 1961 and 1963 (Williams et al. 2006). A similar kind of movement between MI and WI was suggested for marten (Williams and Scribner 2007).

The UPMI population was reportedly founded from a single source (MN; Williams et al. 2006), yet it appears to be composed of samples that have ancestry from more than one population based on a positive and significant FST value and a level of genetic variation that is more consistent with a multisource reintroduction. Additionally, two alleles were found in both NY and UPMI, but not in MN and WI. The UPMI population also had a lower level of genetic differentiation and greater ancestry with NY compared with the other populations from the Northeast (NH and ME). Collectively, our results support that fishers from NY contributed to the founding population of fishers in MI (Irvine et al. 1964). The Nicolet National Forest is close enough to the Ottawa National Forest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Hs</th>
<th>Hs</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>FST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0.56 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.52 (0.05)</td>
<td>4.27 (0.43)</td>
<td>3.95 (0.33)</td>
<td>0.07 (0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MN</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.56 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.55 (0.07)</td>
<td>4.82 (0.50)</td>
<td>4.52 (0.47)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0.51 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.48 (0.05)</td>
<td>4.09 (0.45)</td>
<td>3.75 (0.36)</td>
<td>0.06 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.60 (0.06)</td>
<td>0.61 (0.02)</td>
<td>5.55 (0.43)</td>
<td>4.23 (0.38)</td>
<td>−0.01 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reintroduced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WI (MN and NY)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.49 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.48 (0.07)</td>
<td>4.09 (0.42)</td>
<td>3.79 (0.40)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPMI (MN)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0.58 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.55 (0.07)</td>
<td>4.82 (0.46)</td>
<td>4.72 (0.45)</td>
<td><strong>0.05 (0.02)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Measures of genetic diversity in the fisher subspecies Pekania pennanti pennanti from source and reintroduced populations in the USA.
Forest for dispersal to occur, but our results are somewhat unexpected considering that only a limited number of fishers were reintroduced from NY (n = 18) into the Nicolet National Forest (Petersen et al. 1977) and a much greater number of fishers were reintroduced from MN to Nicolet National Forest (n = 42) and Ottawa National Forest (n = 61) during the same period. One alternative explanation for the UPMI data are that fishers are connected throughout eastern Canada and into the Northeast. Fishers were reported in several areas of southern Ontario during the 1950s when fishers were either declining or just beginning to recover and could have acted as stepping stones for dispersal to connect fishers in the UPMI with those farther east (Carr 2005). At least some connectivity between fishers in southeastern Ontario, Canada, and the Adirondacks of NY has been previously established (Carr et al. 2007), but that connectivity appears to be recent. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the UPMI data are the result of ongoing gene flow from NY. The two samples from the UPMI that were not assigned to a population that we sampled could indicate some level of gene flow into the UPMI population from fishers farther north in Ontario, Canada. Thus, the current genetic composition of fishers in the UPMI appears to be derived from MN and NY through reintroduction efforts and from recent gene flow from Ontario, Canada, to the north.

In a larger geographical context, fisher populations in the Great Lakes region (MN, WI, and UPMI) are genetically distinct (Figs. 3b, 3c) from fishers in NY and the remainder of the Northeast. Based on the distribution of mtDNA haplotypes from previous studies (Drew et al. 2003; Vinkey et al. 2006; Hapeman et al. 2014), it is evident that fishers throughout the range of P. p. pennanti were connected in the past. However, following European settlement, fishers declined and were found in only a limited number of remnant populations in eastern North America by the early 1930s (Coulter 1966; Brander and Books 1973). Those remnant populations served as sources for natural expansions and reintroductions during recovery efforts in the mid-twentieth century. Fishers have recovered well in the last 50 years and are now thought to be continuously distributed throughout their range in eastern North America.

The magnitude of genetic differentiation between the Great Lakes and the Northeast region in our study is much greater (mean pairwise F_{ST} among populations between regions = 0.32; P. Hapeman, unpublished data) than has been found previously for fisher populations separated by similar geographic distances (Kyle et al. 2001). Although gaps in our sample coverage limit our ability to fully characterize genetic structure across the entire range of P. p. pennanti, we attribute part of the between-region difference that we observed to isolation by distance (IBD) due to restricted dispersal. IBD has previously been suggested in other genetic studies of fishers in P. p. pennanti at similar scales (Kyle et al. 2001; Drew et al. 2003; Carr et al. 2007) and was evident in samples of fishers from the northeast region (Manet R = 0.687, P < 0.05; P. Hapeman, unpublished data). Additional sampling in areas contiguous with our study area, such as portions of southern Ontario, would be required to confirm the extent of IBD across the subspecies. Our data supports the role of reintroductions in shaping genetic population structure at multiple scales and is consistent with what has been found in other studies of fishers (Kyle et al. 2001; Vinkey et al. 2006). Reintroductions alongside the severe reduction in fisher abundance by the early 1900s (Brander and Books 1973; Hapeman et al. 2011), IBD, dispersal barriers, and deeper historical mechanisms (i.e., range expansion, fragmentation) (Drew et al. 2003; Hapeman 2006; Carr et al. 2007; Hapeman et al. 2011) explain the complex genetic population structure of fishers in eastern North America.

Management implications

We have provided data demonstrating that human-mediated reintroductions have contributed greatly to observed patterns of genetic population structure in fishers in the Great Lakes and these results complement the findings from previous studies (Kyle et al. 2001; Wisely et al. 2004; Carr et al. 2007; Hapeman et al. 2011; Lewis et al. 2012). Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of demographic variables to the success of reintroductions in fishers and genetic characteristics of reintroductions have begun to draw considerableattention with successful reintroductions being associated with regions of North America (east vs. west) and distance of source population to release site (Lewis et al. 2012). Similar in spirit to the framework developed by Gusset 2009, we believe that a more comprehensive approach should be taken when planning and evaluating the success of a reintroduction. Reintroduction success in fishers should not only consider demographic factors in the reintroduction process, but also consider the underlying genetic structure and implications of gene flow to the underlying genetic structure at multiple spatial scales when choosing source populations. This would require a shift in the paradigm that simply choosing the closest source population is the best choice even though many successful reintroductions have used source populations from neighboring states or provinces (Lewis et al. 2012). Emphasis on the underlying genetic structure may be particularly important in areas with unique genetic variation (Schwartz 2007) or where fishers appear to exhibit local adaptations (Knaus et al. 2011; Lewis et al. 2012). The presence of population structure in fishers at multiple scales may be particularly important when the geographic distance of source population to release site is being used as a proxy for genetic relatedness (Lewis et al. 2012). In recognition of the complex historical biogeography and the large number of translocations already carried out in fishers, we agree with the guidelines by the IUCN (1998) that reintroduced animals should be as genetically similar to former resident genotypes as possible. Therefore, in fishers, we suggest that adequate consideration of the underlying genetic structure should begin with differences at the subspecies level and extend to regional and local genetic population structure.

Each of the three subspecies of fishers is characterized by unique reintroduction histories, genetic structure, and conservation concerns (Drew et al. 2003; Knaus et al. 2011). We recommend that future translocations within P. p. pennanti select sources from within the subspecies because all past reintroductions within P. p. pennanti have used source populations only from within the subspecies. Further, we encourage managers to use pre-existing studies that have elaborated on regional and population-level genetic structure within the subspecies (Williams et al. 2000; Kyle et al. 2001; Drew et al. 2003; Carr et al. 2007; Hapeman et al. 2011; this study) to help guide their decisions prior to simply choosing the closest source for a reintroduction.

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