

Los Angeles Times

Sections

\$1 FOR 3 MONTHS

Sale ends 8/1

Show Search

CALIFORNIA

P-64, the mountain lion known for his successful freeway crossings, found dead after surviving Woolsey fire



P-64, known for crossing the 101 and 118 freeways several times, died a few weeks after surviving the Woolsey fire. (National Park Service)

By **ALEJANDRA REYES-VELARDE** STAFF WRITER

DEC. 7, 2018

1:20 PM

P-64, the mountain lion that became known for successfully crossing Los Angeles' dangerous freeways numerous times, was found dead after surviving the massive Woolsey fire, National Park Service officials said Friday.

The 4-year-old male's GPS collar transmitted radio signals on Nov. 26 and Nov. 28 — more than two weeks after the fire broke out — from an unburned portion of the Simi Hills, giving officials hope that he had survived the destructive blaze, which [burned 88% of national parkland in the Santa Monica Mountains](#).

The big cat wandered for several miles in the remote area, but his GPS tracker eventually stopped. On Dec. 3, wildlife biologist Jeff Sikich hiked to the area and found P-64 at the bottom of grassy canyon near a streambed. All four of his paws were badly burned.

Officials said he had been dead for a few days.

When the Woolsey fire sparked on Nov. 8, threatening Malibu and parts of Ventura County, P-64 was in the nearby Simi Hills north of Oak Park.

“He basically had two options,” said Sikich, who studied P-64 closely. “He either had to enter an urban area that had many firefighters, loud fire engines and people fleeing and a lot of noise or retreat onto the burned landscape.”

The choice seemed to be the latter, as officials think P-64 likely walked through charred regions where the surface was still hot, singeing his paws. The burns, which might have become infected, would have made it difficult for the animal to move and hunt.



P-64 likely walked through an area that had been scorched by the Woolsey fire, significantly burning his paws. (National Park Service)

It's not uncommon for mountain lions to survive a fire, only to die soon after, Sikich said. A necropsy will determine P-64's exact cause of death.

The young cougar was first captured and fitted with a GPS in February in the Simi Hills, National Park officials said. [The next day](#), trail cameras captured him crossing the 101 Freeway using a culvert in the Liberty Canyon area, after which he was nicknamed the “Culvert Cat.”

The feat surprised experts. The crossing was only the second time in 16 years that a mountain lion had been recorded crossing that freeway, [which is fraught with danger for the animals](#), officials said.

Since then, P-64 crossed the 101 and 118 freeways 41 times.

“It’s really interesting that this mountain lion figured out how to use this extremely long and dark culvert under the freeway,” Seth Riley, a wildlife ecologist with the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, said after P-64’s culvert crossing.

The culvert itself is dangerous. It can be inundated when it rains, and because of its curved route, animals can’t see from one end to the other, experts said.

Scientists think P-64 was the father of [four female kittens born in May](#), though DNA testing has yet to verify that.

The park service tracks 11 mountain lions that frequented the area in or around the Woolsey fire’s perimeter. Nine seem to have survived, but P-74, a young male that was still traveling with his mother, likely died in the blaze, officials said.

alejandra.reyesvelarde@latimes.com

Twitter: [@r_valejandra](#)
CALIFORNIA

Alejandra Reyes-Velarde