

NORTHERN ROCKIES LYNX AMENDMENT

Frequently Asked Questions

Canada lynx

What is a Canada lynx?

The Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), the only lynx in North America, is a rare forest-dwelling cat of northern latitudes. The lynx is medium sized, similar to the bobcat, but somewhat larger. It has longer hind legs and very large well-furred paws, which make it highly adapted to hunting in the soft, deep snow typical throughout its range. It has long tufts on the ears and a short, black-tipped tail. Adult males average 22 pounds and are 33.5 inches long; females average 19 pounds and 32 inches in length.

What do lynx eat?

Lynx are highly specialized to hunt their primary prey – the snowshoe hare. The lynx's long legs and large feet act like snowshoes so they can effectively track and catch hares. In fact, especially in Canada, lynx are so tied to snowshoe hares that lynx populations rise and fall with snowshoe hare numbers. Red squirrels are an important alternate prey. Lynx may also eat other squirrels, rabbits, mice, voles, and ptarmigan and other birds.

What are their habitat needs?

Lynx prefer the habitat used by their primary prey. Older forests with substantial understories of small conifers, or patches of young trees and shrubs, or young thick stands — any of which provide dense cover that touches the snow. Primarily, they use moist forests that receive abundant snow, such as Douglas-fir, spruce/fir and in some cases cedar/hemlock, in the Northern Rockies. In deep soft snow, their large feet give them a competitive advantage over other predators.

Downed trees and windfalls provide cover for denning, escape and protection from severe weather. Lynx typically use forested cover when they travel, but they can use shrub cover as well.

Where do they range?

The historical and present North American range of the Canada lynx includes Alaska, Canada and many northern states. The size of their home ranges varies greatly, from 3 to 300 square miles. They are capable of traveling great distances to find food or a new home range.

In the Northern Rockies area, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that at least 70 percent of lynx habitat occurs on federal lands.

How many lynx are there?

Because the lynx is such a rare animal, the size of the total population in the lower 48 states is unknown.

What makes them rare?

Lynx in the contiguous United States are part of a larger population whose core is located in central Canada. In the lower 48 states, lynx populations naturally occur at lower densities and it's normal for them to be rare. The rarity of lynx is based largely on the limited availability of their primary prey. At our latitudes, lower snowshoe hare populations are likely a result of our naturally patchy, transitional habitat, preventing hare populations from achieving the high densities found in the extensive northern boreal forest.

What's threatening lynx?

Risk factors that may have affected lynx habitat in the Northern Rockies include logging, fire suppression, grazing, incidental trapping, and highways, which affect movement.

In recent years, recreation and road access have increased the number of people using forests. Some winter recreation activities are becoming more widespread, providing more snow-packed trails and areas that may allow bobcats and coyotes to enter the deep snow that traditionally was the lynx's domain. In some areas, bobcats and coyotes are able to compete with lynx for food and space, making it more difficult for lynx to survive.

In the lower 48 states, the combination of changes and their naturally low numbers, are preventing lynx populations from rebounding.