

Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment UPDATE

Bringing you up to date

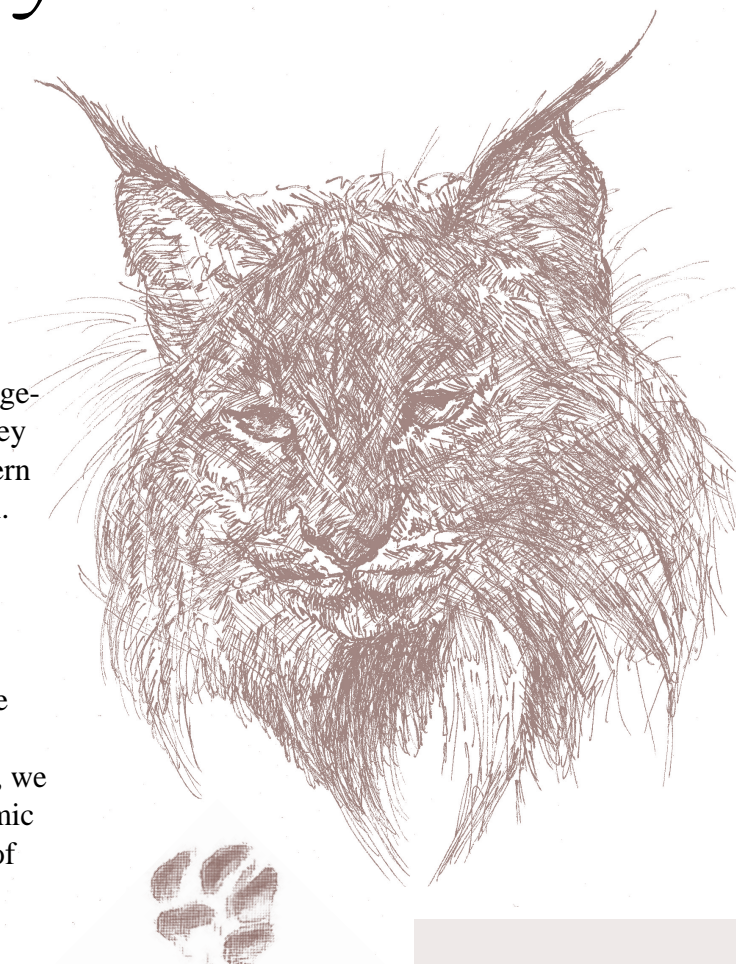
The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management are proposing some changes to how they manage 22 administrative units in the northern Rockies to better address the needs of Canada lynx.

This update will provide information on what's called the Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment. It will present where we are in the environmental review process and some information about lynx.

Last fall, we laid out the management changes we want to make for lynx in meetings, news stories and letters. After taking comments on the lynx proposal, we are now examining the biological, social and economic effects of the proposal and alternatives to it. Many of the issues being examined were raised in the public comments received last fall (see story on page 2).

Our analysis will be available in early summer. The document will be subject to at least a 60-day public review. After that, we will decide what measures to put in place for lynx conservation.

Be sure to return the form on the back if you want to receive more than a summary.



What's Inside

Public Comments

Questions that Can
Be Answered Now

Where are the Lynx?

Lynx Ecology
and Research

Amendment Schedule

| Date | Milestone |
|------------------------------|---|
| September - December 2001 | Public comment taken on proposed amendment |
| Summer 2002 | Issue environmental document and take public comment |
| Fall 2002 | Issue decision |

The Public Comments

What people had to say

Almost 3,000 people responded to the announcement that we're proposing to amend land management plans for lynx. The reaction was mixed. About two-thirds of the people who commented thought adding conservation measures for Canada lynx, a threatened species, was a bad idea, and most of the rest liked the idea. People on both sides of the issue thought some parts of the proposal and maps were unclear.

People who didn't like the idea mentioned concerns such as:

- The lynx shouldn't have been listed as a threatened species because the northern Rockies is marginal habitat.
- Lynx don't live in my area, so why do we need conservation measures here.
- Single-species management hurts other species and multiple-use management.
- There's no reliable scientific basis for the conservation measures.
- It doesn't matter if snowmobiles compact snow, because nature compacts far more snow.
- The conservation measures will shut down access to public lands, especially for snowmobiles.
- The economic impacts on ranchers, loggers and businesses that depend on winter recreation, haven't been considered.
- The result of less thinning will be more intense fires.

People who liked the conservation measures pointed out that the amendment is not a legal escape from the requirements of the Endangered Species Act at the project level. They wanted the conservation measures to go further, encouraging such things as:

- Coordination between forests and among agencies when identifying and protecting linkage areas;
- Applying restrictions to all the lynx habitat on federal lands in the Rockies;
- Protecting snowshoe hares from hunting and trapping, and creating hare habitat;
- Maintaining all remaining old growth and mature forests; and
- Allowing wildfires to burn to create natural conditions.

All these points will be explored in the environmental document. Some are addressed in this bulletin. A summary of the public comment is on our website at www.fs.fed.us/r1/planning/lynx.html.

The proposed northern Rockies amendment affects the following national forests and BLM units

| BLM | |
|------------------|------------------------|
| Idaho | all units |
| Utah | Salt Lake field office |
| National Forests | |
| Montana | Beaverhead-Deerlodge |
| | Bitterroot |
| | Custer |
| | Flathead |
| | Gallatin |
| | Helena |
| | Kootenai |
| | Lewis and Clark |
| | Lolo |
| Idaho | Clearwater |
| | Idaho Panhandle |
| | Nez Perce |
| | Salmon-Challis |
| | Targhee |
| Wyoming | Bridger-Teton |
| | Bighorn |
| | Shoshone |
| Utah | Ashley |



Questions That Can Be Answered Now

Many issues will be analyzed in detail in the environmental document, but we can clarify some things now



The listing decision

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed the Canada lynx as a threatened species in the continental United States under the Endangered Species Act in March of 2000. The decision to list the lynx is outside the authority of the BLM and Forest Service.

Many BLM and Forest Service land management plans have general provisions about wildlife and wildlife habitat, but few address lynx. The FWS found this lack of consideration to be the chief threat to lynx. They said the plans adversely affect lynx because they don't address their needs. So now we are considering changes to the plans to remove and reduce the risks to lynx.

The listing rule applies only to Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Washington, Oregon, Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire and New York. This amendment would apply only to federal lands.

Snowmobile access

The result of the proposed snowmobile restriction has been overstated, both by the media and by some recreation groups.

The winter trail standard would allow "no net increase" of groomed or designated snowmobile trails inside lynx habitat. There are about 12,300 miles of groomed and designated trails in the northern Rockies area. This measure would cap the 7,200 miles of trail that are in lynx habitat.

This measure does *not* close any existing trails, inside or outside lynx habitat. It does *not* affect trails or roads that are open to snowmobiles, but are not groomed or designated. It also does *not* restrict off-trail use in the backcountry. It will *not* shut down snowmobiling or block public access.

New trails would be allowed in lynx habitat if they consolidate use, or if an existing trail of equal length is dropped.

Logging

Another standard recommends no pre-commercial thinning in lynx habitat until the trees are too large to provide cover or forage for snowshoe hares. The effect of this restriction is still under study, but it does *not* ban logging in lynx habitat as implied in recent stories on lynx. Less than 25 percent of the federal lands would be subject to the lynx provisions for pre-commercial thinning.

Fire risk and the National Fire Plan

Lynx live in deep-snow, high-elevation forests. Under the National Fire Plan, thinning to reduce fuels for public safety would be done close to where people live. A preliminary analysis shows that less than one percent of lynx habitat in the national forests in Montana and northern Idaho is within a mile of where people live.



Where are the lynx?

That's a question people have been asking since management changes were proposed to conserve lynx

Historic records

Historically, lynx occurred in much of the northern continental United States. Scientists can reliably point to lynx in 24 states using museum specimens, photos and written accounts by credible people.

While trapping records are less reliable, they show that in the 20th century more than 3,500 lynx were trapped in Montana and 3,000 in Minnesota. Biologists won't use Idaho's trapping records because their records included bobcats. Wyoming didn't keep trapping records, because they classified lynx as a predator until they protected it in 1973. Utah has no reliable trapping records.

Present day

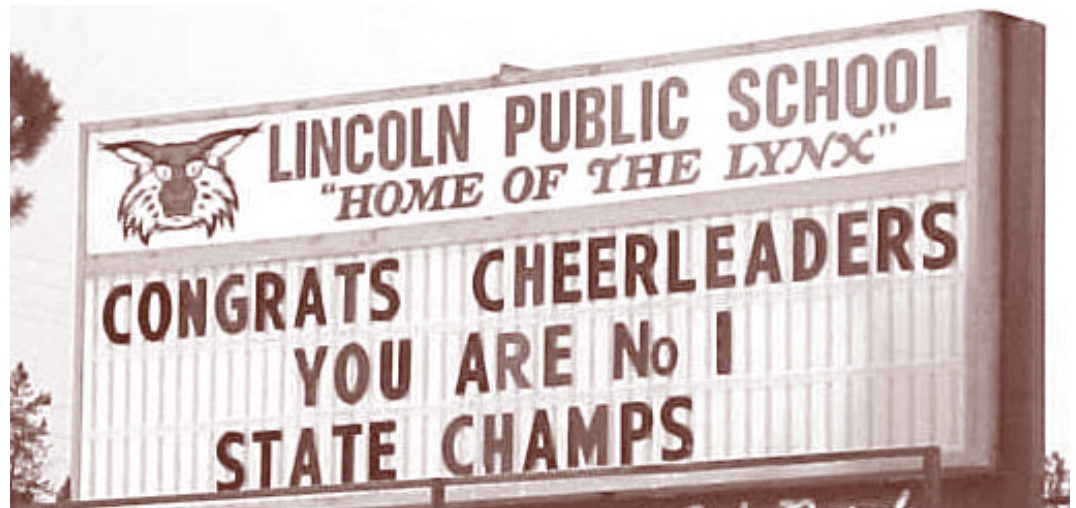
While there is no question about the past presence of lynx, very little is known about where they are today. The National Lynx Survey, recently in the news, was designed to determine the current distribution of lynx (see related story on page 7).

The survey is checking to see whether lynx are present on federal lands in 13 states where lynx are listed as threatened. If the survey finds lynx in an area where they were not known to occur, intensive follow-up surveys are done to see if lynx actually live there.

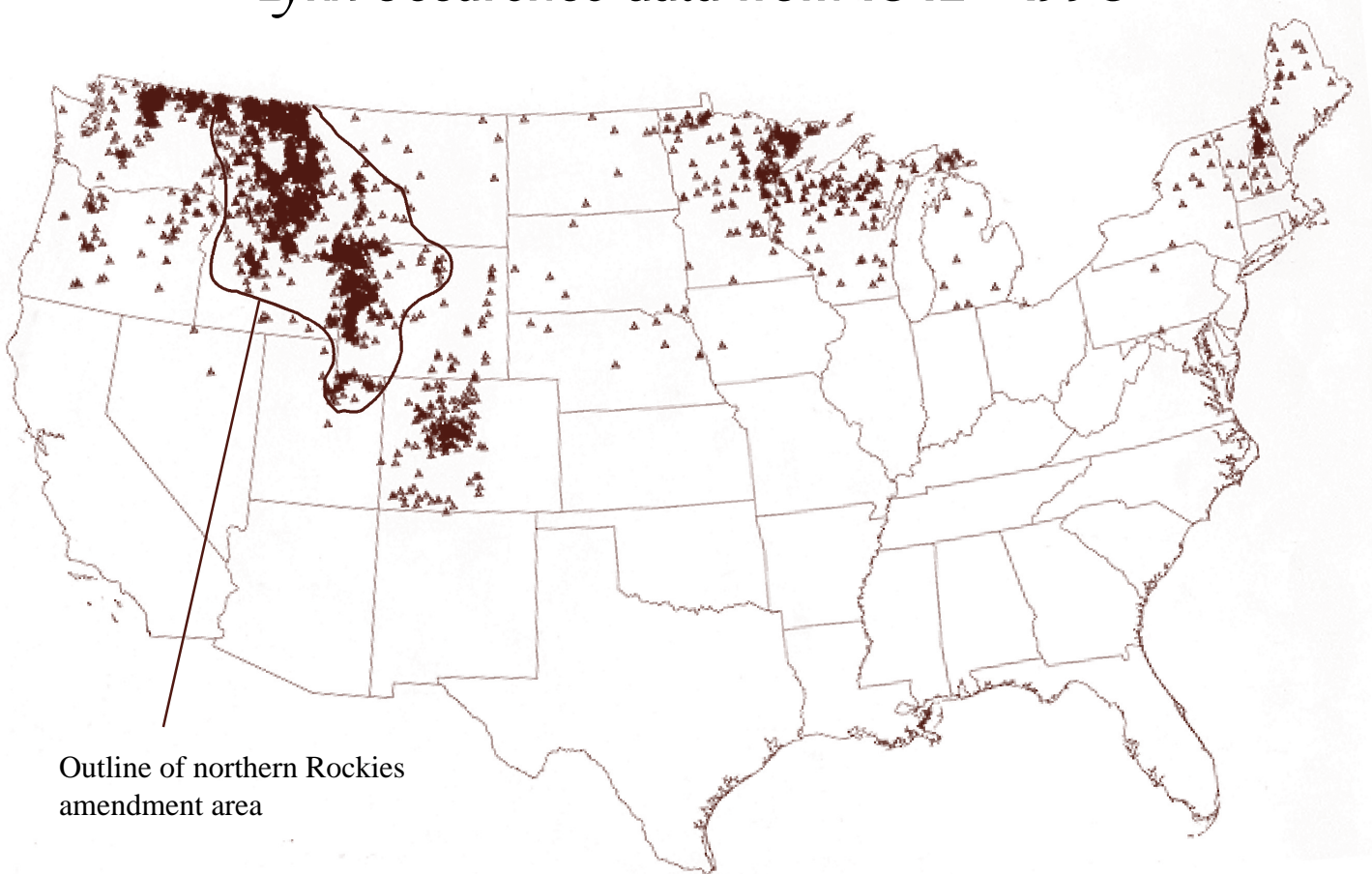
So far, the survey has detected lynx in just two areas where they were not known — on the Boise National Forest in Idaho and the Shoshone in Wyoming. Follow-up surveys this winter did not detect lynx there.

Today, Washington, Montana, Wyoming, Minnesota and Maine are the only states where lynx are known to reside. In Montana, researchers have radio-collared 61 lynx in an area near Seeley Lake and Lincoln, and between the Mission and Bob Marshall wildernesses.

Lynx still reside near Lincoln, Montana where they have been the mascot for the public school for many years.



Lynx occurrence data from 1842 - 1998



Habitat mapping

So how did biologists map lynx habitat with limited information about where lynx are?

Lynx habitat was initially defined using the same historic records that showed the geographic distribution of lynx. Those records showed that in western mountain states, most lynx occurred in cool, snowy, conifer forests at higher elevations.

The direction given to map lynx habitat in the northern Rockies included:

- Areas generally above 4,000 feet, with a shift to increasingly higher elevations as latitudes become more southerly; and
- Cool, moist forests dominated by spruce, subalpine fir, Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine, western red cedar and/or western hemlock.

The Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment would apply only to those lands currently mapped as lynx habitat. The current maps may be refined in the future as site-specific information and research results become available.

More information on research about the history and distribution of lynx can be found in Chapter 8 of *Ecology and Conservation of Lynx in the United States*, posted under “Background Documents” on our web page at www.fs.fed.us/r1/planning/lynx.html.

Lynx Ecology

Lynx live on the edge

The Canada lynx is a wide-ranging forest cat that lives in upper elevation, moist coniferous forests with cold, snowy winters. The only species of lynx found in North America, they are naturally rare and reclusive, but don't seem to be particularly sensitive to human presence.

Lynx are between 2-1/2 to 4-1/2 feet long, about 3 feet tall at the shoulder, and weigh from 19 to 22 pounds. Their coats are brown or brown-grey in winter, more reddish in summer, with black ear tufts up to 2 inches long, and a short tail that looks like it was dipped in black ink,

Lynx have lean bodies and huge feet, which act like snowshoes, supporting them on top of the snow when most other animals sink. Their big feet and light frames give them an advantage over other forest predators at mid-to-upper elevations in the snow.

Their leading cause of death is starvation. Their lean bodies just don't store fat; they need to eat regularly.






By far the largest part of a lynx's diet is snowshoe hares. Good lynx habitat is good hare habitat, with a thick cover of small trees and bushes where hares hide and browse. Unfortunately, snowshoe hares are not abundant in the northern Rockies. Minor reductions in hare abundance result in lynx starvation and limit reproduction.

The red squirrel is the next biggest part of a lynx's diet. Squirrels eat pinecone seeds, so they need cone-producing trees. However, an abundance of squirrels cannot make up for a lack of hares.

Lynx habitat also includes the dead and down material in which they den.

In the northern Rockies, a lynx home range is anywhere from 25 to 50 square miles. At times, lynx travel hundreds of miles. Heavily traveled highways can hinder their movements.

How ecology translates into the proposed conservation measures

-  Snow-shoeing, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling compacts snow. Compacted trails may make it possible for competing predators like coyotes to access lynx habitat during the winter, when survival is most difficult. Amendment direction would prohibit increases in groomed or designated snow trails in lynx habitat, to help maintain the lynx's competitive advantage over other predators.
-  Young, dense conifers are critical cover and forage for snowshoe hares. Pre-commercial thinning would be allowed only when stands have grown too tall to provide snowshoe hare habitat. Timber cutting may be used to create or maintain snowshoe hare forage.
-  Intense fires historically maintained snowshoe hare habitat by providing a dense cover of small trees as vegetation grew back. Cooler-burning fires stimulated the development of layers in older stands, creating both hare and squirrel habitat. Fire may be used to create, restore or maintain this condition.
-  Young, densely regenerating aspen provide good habitat for snowshoe hares. Browsing or grazing can contribute to the decline or loss of aspen. Grazing would be managed so aspen can regenerate.
-  A species' survival depends on its ability to move from one patch of habitat to another. We're working with other federal and state agencies and tribal governments to identify these linkage areas. Highway crossing structures may be built to reduce the collisions that injure and kill both people and animals. Conservation easements and land acquisition may be used with interested landowners.

Lynx Research

What are the conservation measures based on?

An internationally recognized team of wildlife biologists, experts in forest carnivore ecology, summarized and published the best available science on lynx in the *Ecology and Conservation of Lynx in the United States*. This work is the basis of the conservation measures recommended in the “Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy.”

The Forest Service and BLM are using both publications to address the needs of lynx in their projects and changes to their land management plans.

The research dilemma

Research for remote and sparsely distributed species like the lynx presents a dilemma when it comes time to develop conservation measures. Land managers may not know exactly what to do until more exhaustive research is done.

In the meantime, we use the best information available and take a conservative approach, so we don’t make matters worse until we know more. In a nutshell, the conservation strategy is to protect lynx by maintaining their habitat and prey.

A list of ongoing lynx research is posted on our website at www.fs.fed.us/r1/planning/lynx.html.

The lynx hair survey

On March 6, 2002, the largest current research effort, the National Lynx Survey, was the focus of an oversight hearing held by the U.S. House Committee on Resources. Officials from the Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture were on hand to testify, and the General Accounting Office reported about their investigation of four unauthorized hair samples submitted to the survey in 1999 and 2000.

Congress wanted to know about the motivations of the federal employees who submitted the samples (ostensibly from the Gifford Pinchot and Wenatchee national forests in Washington) and whether their supervisors had taken appropriate action.

Congress was also concerned about the integrity of the survey. They wanted to know if the outcome of the false samples was that lynx habitat would be wrongly mapped.



On March 18, 2002, Clearwater National Forest biologist Dan Davis photographed this lynx along U.S. Highway 12 in Idaho. He recognized the distinctive two-inch long ear tufts.

Deputy Chief of the Forest Service Tom Thompson’s testimony explained that the survey requires follow-up, snow-track surveys when lynx are detected in an area where they were not previously known to occur. He said the false samples were not included in the survey data and the employees who submitted them had been removed from the survey.

The Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment was not part of the hearing.

You will receive a summary – about 20 pages long – of the environmental document *unless you tell us you want something different*. Please return this form if you want something different. (The whole document will be posted on our web page, <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/planning/lynx.html>.)

_____ I want the whole document on paper.

_____ I want the whole document on CD.

_____ Don't send me anything more - take me off this mailing list.

Reply via e-mail to: mlhogan@fs.fed.us

Or call (406) 329-3300

Or mail this form to:

Lynx Amendment

P.O. Box 7669

Missoula, MT 59807

Your name: _____

Address line 1: _____

Address line 2: _____

City/State/Zip: _____



Official Use - Penalty for Private Use \$300

PRESORTED STANDARD
U.S. Postage Paid
USDA Forest Service
Missoula, MT 59801
Permit No. G-40

Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment
USDA Forest Service
P.O. Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807