

NORTHERN ROCKIES LYNX AMENDMENT

AREA OF CONCERN

The Canada lynx is a threatened species in the lower 48 states. Federal land in the Northern Rocky Mountains has some of the last remaining suitable habitat. The Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment will implement management direction for lynx for the following national forests and BLM units in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and Utah:

<u>National Forests</u>		
Montana	Idaho	Wyoming
Beaverhead-Deerlodge	Clearwater	Bighorn
Bitterroot	Idaho Panhandle	Bridger-Teton
Custer	Nez Perce	Shoshone
Flathead	Salmon-Challis	
Gallatin	Targhee	
Helena		
Kootenai	Utah	
Lewis and Clark	Ashley	
Lolo		

<u>BLM Units</u>	
Idaho	Utah
Upper Snake River District	Salt Lake Field Office
Lower Snake River District	
Upper Columbia-	
Salmon Clearwater District	

The Forest Service and BLM believe that whenever practical, management direction should be developed at the local level. However, with lynx, new scientific information affecting many plans needs to be addressed promptly and consistently. The Forest Service and BLM expect this amendment to expeditiously update the affected plans with consistent, broad-scale management direction for lynx.

Once this amendment is in place, individual plans may be amended or revised to respond to local conditions. Seventeen of the 18 national forests will likely revise their forest plans within the next few years (the Targhee National Forest revised their plan in 1999). The BLM anticipates replacing their land use plans within the next few years.

OPEN HOUSES

Open house public meetings have been scheduled as follows:

September 21	Sheridan, Wyoming	October 2	Challis, Idaho
September 24	Billings, Montana	October 2	Grangeville, Idaho
September 25	Idaho Falls, Idaho	October 3	Orofino, Idaho
September 26	Hamilton, Montana	October 3	Missoula, Montana
September 27	Helena, Montana	October 4	Salmon, Idaho
September 27	Great Falls, Montana	October 10	Libby, Montana
September 27	Cody, Wyoming	October 10	Bozeman, Montana
		October 10	Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
		October 11	Kalispell, Montana
		October 17	Dillon, Montana

By mid-September, more information about the meeting locations and times will be announced in local news media and available at local Forest Service and BLM offices and on the Web site. More open houses will be scheduled as needed.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose and need for the proposed amendment is to establish land management direction that conserves and promotes recovery of the Canada lynx. It will reduce or eliminate adverse effects from activities on national forests and BLM lands, while preserving the overall multiple-use direction in existing plans.

The Forest Service and BLM expect to consider alternatives for the planning area as a whole, rather than treating each unit individually. This approach will streamline the consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that's required by the Endangered Species Act.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Forest Service and BLM will amend 18 forest plans and 18 land use plans in the Northern Rockies to provide for conservation and recovery of the Canada lynx. The amendment will incorporate management direction found in the *Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy*. When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a biological opinion about lynx a year ago, it said, "... if Plans are amended or revised incorporating conservation measures in the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy... the Plans would likely not jeopardize the continued existence of lynx" (p. 54).

Attachment 2 cites the objectives, standards and guidelines.

The following summarizes the proposed changes:

- Snowshoe hares, the lynx's primary prey, require dense sapling cover. New management direction would affect where pre-commercial thinning of timber is allowed. Specifically, it would defer pre-commercial thinning within lynx habitat until the stands no longer provide snowshoe hare habitat.
- Lynx use down trees and root wads as den sites. New direction would change timber harvest practices to provide denning habitat. Salvage logging could be limited.
- Young aspen and lodgepole pine provide good quality habitat for snowshoe hares. Shrub-steppe habitats are important in naturally fragmented forests for movement and dispersal. New direction would require that livestock grazing be managed so new growth on aspen and lodgepole pine is not impeded, and that shrub-steppe habitats be maintained.
- Packed trails created by activities such as snowmobiles, cross-country skiing and dog sleds, may serve as travel routes for potential competitors and predators, especially coyotes. New direction would allow increases in groomed trails or designated over-the-snow routes and play areas only where increases would consolidate use, and result in no net-increase of snow-compacted areas.
- Ski areas and four-season resorts may affect lynx denning, foraging, and security habitats, and their ability to move between areas. The direction would require that certain types of lynx habitat be retained, and that expansion not create barriers to lynx movement and dispersal.
- Highways, developments and other uses can fragment large tracts of land, affecting the movement of lynx between blocks of habitat. New direction would require that federal land management activities maintain and restore habitat connectivity, by using highway crossings, by retaining public ownership, and by ensuring new developments don't impair connectivity.

The agencies will prepare an Environmental Assessment to evaluate the effects of the proposed action, and to look at alternative ways to conserve lynx.

The responsible officials will decide:

- Whether or not an Environmental Impact Statement is warranted.
- Whether or not to amend National Forest and BLM land management plans to incorporate direction on lynx conservation and recovery, and if so what that direction would contain.

Due to agency-specific planning regulations, the Forest Service and BLM will publish separate decision documents for their respective amendments.