

## **The Canada Lynx: A Resource Issue Paper of the Great Lakes Forest Alliance**

**June, 30, 1999**

### **Recommendations**

The Alliance opposes the listing of the Canada Lynx as threatened in the western Lake States.

The Alliance asks the USFWS to thoroughly evaluate existing and new information being developed in reaching a decision.

The Alliance also strongly suggests that the USFWS share all available information with peers in the states and conduct collaborative workshops with their counter parts in order to ensure that all information is thoroughly evaluated and judged fairly and against standards that are supportable. Attendance by the public at such a workshop would help communicate relevant information to interested parties.

The USFWS should convene a Blue Ribbon Panel to review the Forest Service Science Team Report and make those deliberations part of the record in reaching a decision concerning listing. Such steps would greatly facilitate acceptance of any decisions.

### **Resource Issue Paper**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has proposed to list the Canada Lynx as threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (as amended) in the contiguous United States. The Departments of Natural Resources in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have gone on record as opposing that listing. Biologists in all three states are consistent in asserting that the states have not recorded self-sustaining, resident populations of Canada Lynx; only transient animals that increased or decreased in numbers depending on populations of Canada Lynx in the neighboring provinces of Manitoba and Ontario, Canada. After reviewing relevant information, the Board of Trustees of the Great Lakes Forest Alliance (Alliance) agreed unanimously\* to oppose the listing of the Canada Lynx as threatened in the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan.

### **Background**

The three western Lake states only have factual information which supports the contention that the occurrences of Canada Lynx in Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin are due to dispersal patterns following population cycles in Canada. Minnesota has the most information because of a greater number of occurrences, and harvest records, which date back to the 1930's. Those records show that high and low harvests in Minnesota followed the Canadian population

peaks and low points very closely. Additionally when age distribution of harvested animals was examined in Minnesota, no animals over 3 1/2 years were found. That is consistent with a dispersing population, not with a resident population. The fact that there are and have been many more occurrences in Minnesota than in Wisconsin or Michigan is also consistent with a population dispersing from Canada. Lake Superior and the St. Marys River are formidable barriers to dispersal to those two states, while the international border between Minnesota and Canada is virtually indistinguishable and relatively easy to cross. Again, available evidence points to a transient Canada Lynx population on the edge of its range in the three western Lake States.

### Rationale

In reviewing the five criteria that are to be considered in making a listing determination, it is impossible to justify a conclusion that the lynx should be listed in the western Lake States. Those criteria and discussion follow.

The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range:

The area of forestland in the three states has increased and the mosaic of forest types and age classes has improved with management and as forests have grown: Average tree sizes and ages have increased and with increasing age, tree mortality has also increased providing more dead and down trees for denning sites. Concern for maintaining this mosaic and providing diverse habitats across those three states is high and can be expected to continue. Evidence would suggest improving habitat and no real threat to that habitat situation.

Over-utilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes:

All three states provide full protection for the lynx and have done so for 15 years or longer and there is no indication whatsoever that this factor has had any impact on the transient population in the western Lake States.

Disease or predation:

Again, although this is a transient and secretive species, there is simply no evidence that this factor has played any role in the population of lynx in the western Lake States.

The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms:

As stated previously, all three Lake States provide full protection for the lynx and have done so for 15 years or more. Trapping allowed for other fur-bearers is very closely regulated and incidental take of lynx has been minimal to non-existent.

This tightly controlled situation with extensive monitoring will continue in the three states.

Other natural or man-made factors affecting its continued existence:

There is no indication that any such factors exist. As mining and similar resource extraction activities have declined across the northern part of the states, developed infrastructure has also declined. Rail lines have been abandoned and road closures have occurred. Human population has either declined or remained stable across Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The same is true for other communities in the northern part of the western Lake States. Snowmobile trails have been developed utilizing some of this abandoned infrastructure, but there is no evidence that lynx competitors are able to use this access to compete more effectively in prey capture in deep snow off the trails. The recent success of the fisher, marten, and wolf provides positive evidence that the situation for secretive predators has improved across the northern Lake States.

A thorough review of the five criteria to be evaluated would either suggest stability or improvement for lynx; certainly there is no conclusive evidence which would suggest listing as a viable, productive endeavor.

Finally, there has been an indication that the international boundary is sufficient to establish a distinct population segment for the lynx. However, that boundary is purely a political determination and has no biological status. Simply moving the boundary north or south in the western Lake States would change the status of the lynx from abundant to non-existent and is totally an artificial element that cannot support listing.

After reviewing the situation of the Canada Lynx in the western Lake States, the Alliance can find no evidence to indicate that the animal was ever anything but a transient that moved southward during times of high populations and relative lack of food (snowshoe hare) in Canada. Given the present information, the Alliance can see no justification for listing the lynx as threatened in the western Lake States nor any productive activities that might be stimulated by such a listing. The lynx is fully protected in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, and abundant and carefully regulated in Canada.

### Position and Recommendations

For these reasons, the Alliance opposes the listing of the Canada Lynx as threatened in the western Lake States and asks the USFWS to thoroughly evaluate existing and new information being developed in reaching a decision. The Alliance also strongly suggests that the USFWS share all available information with peers in the states and conduct collaborative workshops with their counter parts in order to ensure that all information is thoroughly evaluated and judged fairly and against standards that are supportable. Attendance by the

public at such a workshop would help communicate relevant information to interested parties. Additionally, the USFWS should convene a Blue Ribbon Panel to review the Forest Service Science Team Report and make those deliberations part of the record in reaching a decision concerning listing. Such steps would greatly facilitate acceptance of any decisions.

United States federal agency members of the Board of Trustees abstain from any votes related to U.S. federal policy.

The Great Lakes Forest Alliance serves as a forum to foster and facilitate cooperative efforts that enhance management and sustainable use of public and private forest lands in the Upper Great Lakes. The trustees believe that through cooperation the states/province can achieve benefits for their citizens greater than if each jurisdiction worked alone. To that end, the Alliance promotes involvement of all those concerned with the region's forests to improve cooperation and coordination in forest policy and programs.