

Frequently Asked Questions

Canada Lynx 5-Year Review



Q. Why does the Service believe the Canada lynx Distinct Population Segment (DPS) may no longer be threatened?

A. Federal land management changes, as well as state, tribal, and other local conservation efforts, have adequately protected the species' habitat against the primary threats that led to listing and will ensure that the species remains resilient in the foreseeable future, even in the face of climate change. We've also learned that land management changes in ME and CO have led to historically high numbers of the species, and that lynx populations are larger and more secure in Maine, Minnesota, and Colorado than we thought when it was listed. Those numbers may moderate with forest succession, but our analysis suggests resiliency for the species.

Q. What is a five-year status review?

A. A five-year status review is a periodic review of the status of species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Its purpose is to ensure that listed species have the appropriate level of protection under the law.

Q. Why was the Canada lynx DPS originally listed?

A. At the time, the existing regulatory mechanisms on federal lands, which constitute the majority of the lynx DPS range, did not provide sufficient guidance for the ongoing conservation of lynx habitat. The species was thereby listed as threatened in 2000.

Q. What conservation efforts have been undertaken since 2000?

A. Since listing in 2000, federal land managers have amended land management plans and implemented conservation agreements with the Service, which include science-based conservation measures, standards and guidelines, and best management practices to conserve lynx. We believe these commitments have largely addressed the threats for which the Canada lynx DPS was listed. Additionally, many state and tribal agencies and academic partners have worked with the Service to identify and protect important lynx habitats and monitor and enhance lynx populations.

Q. How did the Service consider the best available science in the recommendation?

A. The Service always considers the best available science in managing threatened and endangered species. Beginning in 2014, the Service reviewed available science related to lynx ecology, historical and recent distribution, and current and potential threats to develop the Species Status Assessment (SSA). The SSA review was also informed by the professional opinions of a panel of 10 recognized lynx experts in Canada and the United States, as well as

subject matter experts in the fields of ecology, genetics, climate modeling and habitat management, regarding a variety of potential threats to the species including: climate change, forest ecology and hare population dynamics. This SSA was then peer reviewed by independent experts and our federal and state agency partners.

Q. What has changed in regard to existing regulatory mechanisms?

A. The SSA found that conservation measures included in the land management plans adopted by the U. S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have substantially addressed the threats to the maintenance of lynx DPS habitat conditions and the availability of snowshoe hare and other prey populations for which the DPS was listed.

Q. Who else did the Service consult with in producing this review?

A. We consulted a panel of 10 recognized lynx experts regarding potential threats and the likelihood that resident populations will be able to be sustained in the future. We also sought relevant information from federal, state and tribal management agencies.

Q. What are the potential effects of climate change on the lynx?

A. With continued warming, the boreal forests, snow conditions, and hare populations that support lynx in the DPS range are expected to contract northward and upslope, resulting in increased fragmentation and isolation of habitats and populations and, over the long-term, in reduced population resiliency and increasing vulnerability to extirpation. Other effects of climate warming include increases in the size and intensity of wildfires and forest insect outbreaks, both of which may influence the future amount, distribution and quality of lynx and hare habitats.

Climate change remains an important factor for the conservation of the Canada lynx DPS and could result in future shifts in their habitat, which may affect their population numbers and distribution. How vulnerable lynx populations are to these shifts is unknown and undeterminable at this time. However, neither the Service nor the experts we consulted conclude that the lynx DPS is at risk of extinction from climate change within the foreseeable future.

Q. Do lynx population numbers normally fluctuate?

A. The Canada lynx DPS represents the southern extent of the species' range and naturally expands and contracts based on snowshoe hare abundance, which fluctuates at varying degrees within the DPS. Canada lynx in the contiguous United States comprises only 2% of the species' entire range.

Q. When would the lynx be delisted?

A. Based on this recommendation, in the future the Service will promulgate a proposed rule to delist the lynx DPS and, based on peer and public review, may move forward with a final rule to delist the DPS. However, delisting would not occur until 30 days after publication of a final rule if one is proposed. Until then, the DPS remains listed as threatened under the ESA, and the protections and prohibitions of the ESA remain in force.

Q. Why has the Service determined that a recovery plan for Canada lynx is not needed?

A. Because the 5-year status review recommends delisting the Canada lynx, and therefore a recovery plan would not promote the conservation of the species, we will not be completing a recovery plan for Canada lynx. In the near future, the Service will begin development of a proposed rule to delist the Canada lynx. If during the rule-making process the Service determines that lynx should remain listed, the Service would reconsider the need to complete a recovery plan.