

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATED FOR CANADA LYNX

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced a final rule designating approximately 1,841 square miles as critical habitat for the federally threatened Canada lynx. Areas designated include 317 square miles in Voyageurs National Park, Minnesota; 1,389 square miles in Glacier National Park, Montana; and 135 square miles in North Cascades National Park, Washington.

Critical habitat is a term defined in the Endangered Species Act. It identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations or protection.

The Service originally proposed approximately 18,031 square miles of land in portions of northern Maine, northeastern Minnesota, the northern Rocky Mountains and north-central Washington. Based on extensive peer review, public comment, and biological information received during the public comment period, the Service reevaluated the proposed critical habitat and excluded lands with existing lynx management plans or pending Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs), lands managed for commercial forestry, small landowners and lands not managed for commercial forestry, and tribally-owned lands.

U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands were not included in this designation based on a commitment from those agencies to use the Lynx Conservation and Assessment Strategy (LCAS) to guide actions on their lands. The LCAS was developed by the Forest Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, and the Bureau of Land Management and represents the best available scientific information regarding conservation of lynx and lynx habitat on federal lands. The National Park Service lands are being designated because, at this time, their management plans lack specific guidance on lynx conservation.

Other lands excluded from the critical habitat designation include:

- Lands managed for commercial forestry in Maine, Minnesota and Montana where recent past and current commercial forestry practices have created habitat supporting lynx and snowshoe hares. The benefit to lynx conservation of maintaining a cooperative working relationship with these land managers exceeds any benefit realized through consultations required under section 7 of the ESA. Additionally, most activities on these lands would not require federal

authorization, funding, or permitting; therefore, actions requiring consultation under section 7 of the Act would be uncommon.

- State lands in Maine, Montana and Washington covered by lynx management plans or policies that direct management of habitats for listed species.
- Tribal lands of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians, Passamaquoddy Tribe, and Penobscot Indian Nation, Grand Portage Indian Reservation and Vermillion Lake Indian Reservation. These lands are small in size relative to the large landscape required to sustain a lynx population. Based on government-to-government relations with Native American tribal governments, the Service believes that fish, wildlife, and other natural resources on tribal lands are better managed under tribal programs than through federal regulation wherever possible and practicable.
- Lands owned by the Nature Conservancy in Maine because of their policy of managing their lands for biodiversity and endangered species.

The Service believes management of these lands has created habitat that supports lynx populations. The preservation of partnerships with these landowners is essential because of their cooperation and funding of ongoing research regarding lynx, snowshoe hare, and lynx habitat relationships, which is greater than any protections or conservation benefits that would result from the designation of critical habitat.

“We appreciate the willingness of landowners and land managers to cooperate with the Service and others in efforts to better understand and conserve lynx,” said Mitch King, the Service’s director of the Mountain-Prairie Region. “These partnerships afford us the opportunity to learn more about the ecology and recovery of imperiled species.”

Also excluded are small landowners and lands not managed for commercial forestry. Because of their small size compared to the large spatial scale required by lynx, they are not considered to play a significant role in lynx conservation but were benefited by efforts taken by larger landowners on adjacent and nearby lands.

When considering lands for critical habitat designation, the Service focused on boreal forest landscapes supporting a mosaic of differing successional forest stages of sufficient size to encompass several lynx home ranges; the presence of snowshoe hare populations to support breeding lynx populations; winter snow conditions that are generally deep and fluffy for extended periods of time; and sites for denning that have abundant coarse woody debris, such as downed trees and root wads. Areas that support lynx populations but are outside the critical habitat designation will continue to be subject to consultation with the Service if proposed activities require a federal permit, authorization, or funding.

Lynx are medium-sized cats, generally measuring 30-35 inches long and weighing 18-23 pounds. They have tufts on their ears, short, black-tipped tails, and large, well-furred feet and long legs for traversing snow. Lynx are highly specialized predators of snowshoe hare and are strongly associated with what is broadly described as boreal forest habitat. The Canada lynx was listed in 2000 as a

threatened species under the ESA throughout its range in the contiguous United States. The lynx currently lives in boreal forests in five geographic regions: the Northeast, the Great Lakes, the Northern Rocky Mountains, the Southern Rocky Mountains, and the Cascade Mountains.

This final rule was prepared pursuant to a court order resulting from a lawsuit filed against the Service by the Defenders of Wildlife and others and will be published in the Federal Register on November 9, 2006.

A copy of the final rule, economic analysis, and other information about the Canada lynx is available on the Internet at <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/species/mammals/lynx>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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