

# **INFORMATION/BRIEFING MEMORANDUM FOR THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

DATE: March 11, 2016

FROM: Jodi Bush, Supervisor, Montana Ecological Services Office, (406) 449-5225.

SUBJECT: Status of Lynx SSA Process for AFWA

We are implementing the Species Status Assessment (SSA) framework, in order to meet a court ordered deadline to complete a Recovery Plan for Canada Lynx (if determined to still warrant listing) by January 2018. Prior to moving forward with recovery planning – the SSA will provide the additional analysis to re-evaluate the status of the species and document that through a five year review.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2000 (remanded 2003), the Canada lynx was listed in the contiguous U.S. DPS as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (Act) because of the inadequacy, at that time, of existing regulatory mechanisms. In 2005, we completed a Recovery Outline which focused on lynx conservation in “Core” areas. Currently, there are six geographic areas known to currently support resident lynx populations in the DPS: northern Maine (with occasional/sporadic breeding by small numbers of lynx in northernmost New Hampshire and Vermont); northeastern Minnesota; northwestern Montana and northeastern Idaho; the Greater Yellowstone Area, north-central Washington; and western Colorado (Figure 1).

In 2006, critical habitat was designated and then revised in 2009 and again in 2014 due to court remands as the result of litigation. Our current revised designation (2014) is under litigation.

## **KEY POINTS**

- We announced the initiation of a five-year status review on December 8, 2014. Shortly thereafter, we embarked on the SSA framework. Information in the SSA will be used by Service decision makers to inform classification decisions, recovery planning direction, and other determinations required by the Act.
- Through the SSA framework we intend to assess the species’ needs, current and future condition including viability of the Canada lynx DPS using a compilation of the best available scientific and commercial data, including empirical data, published literature, and expert input.
- During the SSA process, we have been prioritizing information and modeling to best evaluate potential future conditions and viability.
- We continue to engage State, Tribal and other Federal, and Canadian partners and other stakeholders, as well as Service managers typically through monthly coordination calls.

- In the fall of 2015, we convened a workshop for scientific experts to address the current and likely future status of the Canada lynx DPS. The participants included state agencies, biologists from other federal agencies, and academic researchers to elicit input from experts across the range of the DPS. The resultant workshop report is one component of the SSA.
- Information solicited from the 10 member lynx expert panel addressed the viability of the DPS based on the 3Rs: Representation, Redundancy, Resiliency and what is known about climate science related to lynx.
- Earlier this week, the Service Lynx SSA Team met in Denver for 3 days to make progress on the SSA report, address outstanding questions, identify decision points for managers and assign work.

## **TIMELINES**

- Workshop Report FINAL -MARCH 25, 2016
- Species Status Report DRAFT, APRIL 15, 2016
  - Internal Review Complete APRIL 29, 2016
  - Peer Review concurrent with State/Tribal Review MAY 15, 2016
  - Final Report Complete MAY 30, 2016
- Five-year Review
  - Draft DRAFT, MAY 5, 2016
  - Final FINAL, MAY 30, 2016
- Draft Recovery Plan (if necessary) DRAFT, JANUARY 2017??
- Final Recovery Plan (If necessary) FINAL, JANUARY 2018

## **IMPORTANT MESSAGES:**

- The report generated from the Expert workshop will be available by the end of March 2016. This document is a part of the information that will be considered in the SSA report.
- Our State and Tribal partners will have the opportunity to review the SSA report concurrent with the Peer Review process in mid-May.
- In general, the Service Core Team feels comfortable with the outcome from the expert panel workshop.
- We are behind in the development of the recovery planning process by 3 to 6 months.