

INFORMATION/ BRIEFING MEMORANDUM FOR THE ASSISTANT REGIONAL DIRECTORS

DATE: March 11, 2016

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

SUBJECT: Status of Lynx SSA Process for ARD Briefing

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 6 “Core” areas. At that time, these included the Kettle/Wedge area in Washington and the Greater Yellowstone Area; areas we no longer think are occupied. Currently, there are six geographic areas known to currently support or that recently supported (as in the Greater Yellowstone Area) 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.

- The Service Lynx SSA team developed expert selection criteria based on professional credentials, positions, areas of expertise, and pertinent experience and coordinated with State and other partners to develop a list of candidate lynx experts and other subject matter experts.
- 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.
- After the workshop, we contacted Steve Torbit, ARD for Scientific Applications in Denver, for assistance because of the uncertainty we had regarding climate science and lynx. He made some contacts for us and determined that additional modeling – if needed- could take up to 6 weeks per area to complete.
- Earlier this week, the Service Lynx SSA Team met in Denver for 3 full days to make progress on the SSA report, address outstanding questions, identify decision points for managers and assign work.
- Results from the SSA meeting in Denver included some decision points for managers:
 - Do we need better information to address likely impacts to lynx from CC? If the answer is yes, are we willing to request the settlement date be changed to allow the time for this information. It would likely require an additional 6 months.
 - Are we comfortable with the range of climate scenario years from the panel report? Present, mid-century (2050), and end of century (2100)?
 - When conducting Peer review of SSA, do we want our State counterparts to receive it at the same time? If so, how do we treat their comments?
 - Do managers want any recommendation from team in the SSA? If the SSA document is supposed to be science only, the five-year review would be the recommendation from the team and all units would need to concur before it was finalized.

TIMELINES

- Workshop Report FINAL -MARCH 25, 2016
- Species Status Report DRAFT, APRIL 15, 2016
 - Internal Review Complete APRIL 29, 2016
 - Peer Review Complete 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:

- We are behind in the development of the recovery planning process by 3 to 6 months.
- If we do additional climate science scenarios –we will **further delay** the timeline by another 3 to 6 months as we would need to ask the court and the reduction in uncertainty is only likely to be important in the end of the century (2100) analysis scenario.
- In general, the Service Core Team feels comfortable with the outcome from the expert panel workshop.



Figure 1. Six geographic units within the range of the contiguous U.S. distinct population segment of Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) that currently support or recently supported (GYA) resident lynx populations.