

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 22, 2018

Deputy Director Greg Sheehan
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C St NW
Washington, DC 20240

Deputy Director Sheehan:

We write you in strong opposition regarding the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the Department of Interior's (DOI) recommendation to delist the Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), which is currently considered threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Under court order by the U.S District Court for the District of Montana in 2014, it was ruled that the Service failed to prepare a recovery plan for the lynx after a 12 year delay. The recovery plan with determined recovery goals was due by January 15, 2018. Instead of providing a recovery plan for the lynx, as ordered by the Court, the Service recommended delisting it on January 11, 2018, just four days before the plan was due. This is extremely concerning.

Despite the court mandated January 15, 2018 deadline, no recovery plan has been released to date. According to the Species Status Assessment from January 11, 2018, the Service recommends delisting Canada lynx based on the "best available scientific information," yet according to best available science, major threats to the lynx are becoming more severe.

Rising temperatures, snowfall reductions, earlier snowmelt, and fewer snow-covered days associated with climate change have serious negative implications for lynx as well as snowshoe hares, which make up the bulk of the lynx's diet. ^[i] Less snow means lynx have more competition with other predators for their prey. Snowshoe hares turn from brown to white as fall becomes winter to match their natural background. As the climate warms and snowfall decreases, this seasonal camouflage is now becoming a liability, as they cannot adapt fast enough to adjust the timing of their change in color. Their fur stays white when the ground is devoid of snow, exposing animals to predators during early snowmelts.

Increasing human development has forced the lynx to cross into marginal habitat to find suitable areas for mating and food. ^[ii] Lynx have large home ranges and do not like to cross open areas that have little or no tree cover. ^[iii] Shifts in temperature, snowfall and snowmelt contribute to fragmentation through a reduction of snow-covered areas, creating snow islands in higher elevation. The loss of habitat connectivity puts the Canada lynx at greater risk to conflicts with humans, death from vehicle collisions, and the loss of genetic adaptability.

Without a recovery plan and the protections of the Endangered Species Act, the Canada lynx species will continue toward extinction and will certainly not survive in the lower 48 states if delisted.

In light of this, we request that you provide answers to the following questions:

- With so much uncertainty in the factors that will continue to affect this species, and with low certainty as to current population levels, what scientific evidence supports your recommendation to delist and remove protections currently in place for the Canada lynx?
- Estimates of “probability of persistence” show declines in all 6 lynx units in the short term (through 2050). By 2100, 5 of 6 lynx units have less than 50% probability of persistence. Can you provide specific evidence that supports these declining trends will not persist? If the Service’s assembled experts agree that things are getting worse, and they are likely to get worse over time, how can the Service then conclude that lynx no longer need federal protection?
- Despite a 2016 assessment concluding the Canada lynx will die out from one or more geographic units by the end of the century in the without federal protections, what specific research led the Service to a final decision in the 2018 Species Status Assessment?
- Who specifically was consulted in the 2018 assessment?
- Who specifically from the original 2016 assessment was consulted in the 2018 assessment?
- On January 28, 2018, alterations were made to the Service’s Environmental Conservation Online System, specifically the Canada lynx species page to expand its range beyond its previous borders. To our knowledge, the range map was increased to include 56 additional counties. Experts have stated that the range now includes inaccuracies. For example, the new map now includes Seattle as part of the Canada lynx’s range, which is not in line with the best available science. Why were these changes made? What evidence was used to increase the range and include areas that were not previously included?

With a lack of a species recovery plan and impacts to habitat and access to food caused by climate change, logging and development, we vehemently oppose the proposed delisting of the Canada lynx. We strongly encourage the creation of a species recovery plan centered on science-based approaches to support the resiliency and recovery of the Canada lynx commensurate with ESA protocol. Thank you for your time, and we look forward to receiving responses to our questions within 30 days.

Sincerely,




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Member of Congress



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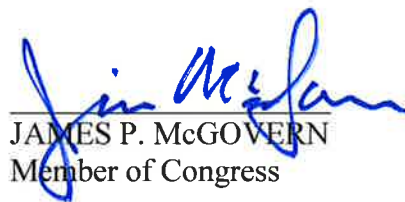

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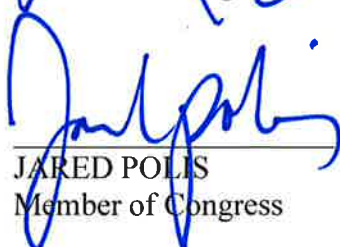

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- [i] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2016. Canada Lynx Expert Elicitation Workshop, Final Report. pp. 14-15. April 18. <https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/es/species/mammals/lynx/SSA2016/Appendices/2016%2004%2018%20FINAL%20Lynx%20SSA%20EE%20Workshop%20Report%202%20jzeds.pdf>.
- [ii] Vanbianchi et al. 2017. Habitat selection by Canada lynx: making do in heavily fragmented landscapes. *Biodiversity and Conservation* 26(14): 3343-3361. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/William_Gaines/publication/319084119_Habitat_selection_by_Canada_lynx_making_do_in_heavily_fragmented_landscapes/links/59e50036a6fdcc1b1d8d244c/Habitat-selection-by-Canada-lynx-making-do-in-heavily-fragmented-landscapes.pdf.
- [iii] Interagency Lynx Biology Team. 2013. Canada lynx conservation assessment and strategy. 3rd edition. USDA Forest Service, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, USDI Bureau of Land Management, and USDI National Park Service. Forest Service Publication R1-13-19, Missoula, MT. 128 pp. https://www.fs.fed.us/biology/resources/pubs/wildlife/LCAS_revisedAugust2013.pdf.