

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service -- Northern Region



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Lynx EIS out for public comment

MISSOULA, Mont., Jan 15, 2004. The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have issued a draft environmental impact statement addressing the conservation and recovery of Canada lynx for 53 million acres of federal land in Idaho, Montana, Utah and Wyoming. Called the Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment, the 430-page DEIS considers five alternatives that would add measures to conserve habitat for Canada lynx to management plans for 18 national forests and 4 BLM units. The direction would apply to an estimated 18.5 million acres of lynx habitat.

The full and summary documents, along with background documents, are located on the internet at www.fs.fed.us/r1/planning/lynx.html. To request a complete document, summary document or CD version of the document contact Joan Dickerson at the US Forest Service, Northern Regional Office, PO Box 7669, Missoula, MT 59807 or call (406) 329-3314.

The agencies will take comments until April 15, 2004. Send comments to: Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment, Northern Region Headquarters, P.O. Box 7669, Missoula, MT 59807, or e-mail comments to comments-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us (please specify *Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment* on the subject line. The agencies will hold informational meetings during February and March (see the attached list).

A final environmental impact statement and decision are expected later in 2004.

Public attention has focused on the following changes:

- Limits to expanding groomed over-the-snow trails, imposed because such trails compact snow and may give competing predators like coyotes access to lynx habitat during the winter when survival is most difficult; and
- Restrictions on vegetation management that defer thinning the dense trees that support snowshoe hares, the lynx primary prey. Restrictions could affect efforts to treat fuels to reduce fire risk.

The Forest Service and BLM prefer Alternative E. Alternative E would contribute to lynx conservation while addressing the issue of wildland fire risk. It also responds to findings that grazing, mineral, forest roads and over-the-snow activities are not a threat to lynx populations as a whole.

Groomed over-the-snow trails

Misunderstanding has fueled controversy over the provision to allow no net increase in designated over-the-snow trails.

- None of the alternatives closes any areas now open to winter use or change off-trail use
- About 4,500 miles of designated trails are groomed annually in the amendment area

- Alternative B allows grooming on about 3,500 miles of designated trails currently not groomed.
- Alternatives C and D allow the same as B, plus grooming in other areas with consistent snow compaction due to routine use.
- Alternative E is similar to Alternatives C and D but the direction is changed from a standard to a guideline. This alternative would discourage, but not prohibit expansion of grooming and outfitter use into areas that have not traditionally received such use.
- Most grooming is limited by the availability of state funds.

Vegetation management

All alternatives encourage vegetation management consistent with historic patterns. Timber harvest and prescribed burning should be used to create winter snowshoe hare habitat where it is lacking.

Limits on vegetation management projects would apply primarily to winter snowshoe hare habitat. Winter snowshoe hare habitat may be found in dense young regenerating forests or in older multistoried forests where small trees and shrubs grow thick enough to support snowshoe hares.

- About 10% of lynx habitat may provide winter snowshoe hare habitat in young regenerating forests.
- About 16% of lynx habitat may provide winter snowshoe hare habitat multistoried forests.
- All alternatives allow reducing vegetation within 200 feet of structures, a critical factor in keeping homes safe from wildland fire.
- Alternative B would not allow precommercial thinning beyond 200 feet from structures if it reduces winter snowshoe hare habitat.
- Alternative C would not allow any vegetation projects beyond 200 feet from structures if they reduce winter snowshoe hare habitat.
- Alternative D would allow vegetation projects in winter snowshoe hare habitat only to restore tree species and forest structures in decline, such as whitebark pine, planted white pine, ponderosa pine, larch and old growth lodgepole pine.
- Alternative E would allow fuel treatments that reduce winter snowshoe hare habitat in order to protect communities or forest health.

Three years ago, the Canada lynx was listed as a threatened species on federal lands, under the Endangered Species Act. At the time, the agencies agreed to consider changes to the land management activities that present risks to lynx.

For the Forest Service, the Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment would change existing plans for the Clearwater, Idaho Panhandle, Nez Perce, Salmon-Challis and Targhee National Forests in Idaho; the Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Bitterroot, Custer, Flathead, Gallatin, Helena, Kootenai, Lewis and Clark and Lolo National Forests in Montana; the Bridger-Teton, Bighorn and Shoshone National Forests in Wyoming; and the Ashley National Forests in Utah. *For the BLM*, existing plans would change where lynx habitat is a concern for all of Idaho and for the Salt Lake Field Office in Utah.

Forty-eight percent of the national forest lands are mapped lynx habitat compared to only one percent of the BLM land.

**Schedule of Open Houses
For the Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment DEIS**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>Location</u>
<u>Idaho</u>			
Feb 3	7:00-9:00	Salmon	Public Lands Center NE Conference Room 50 Highway 93 Salmon, ID
Feb 5	7:00-9:00	Challis	Challis/Middle Fork Ranger District Highway 93 Challis, ID
Feb 11	5:00-8:00	Idaho Falls	Caribou-Targhee National Forest Forest Supervisors Office 1405 Hollipark Drive Idaho Falls, ID
Feb 11	4:00-7:00	Grangeville	Nez Percé National Forest Forest Supervisors Office East Highway 13 Grangeville, ID
Feb 12	4:00-8:00	Orofino	Clearwater National Forest, Forest Supervisor's Office 12730 Hwy 12 Orofino, ID
Mar 1	6:30-9:00	Priest River	Priest River * Priest River Junior High 1020 W. Albeni Hwy Priest River, ID
Mar 2	6:30-9:00	Coeur d'Alene	Idaho Panhandle National Forest Forest Supervisor's Office 3815 Schreiber Way Coeur d'Alene, ID
Mar 3	12:00-9:00	Boise	Natural Resource Center Boise National Forest/BLM office 1387 S. Vinnell Way Boise, ID
<u>Montana</u>			
Feb 3	4:30-7:30	Bozeman	Holiday Inn 5 Baxter Lane Bozeman, MT
Feb 3	6:30-8:30	Libby	Kootenai National Forest Forest Supervisors Office 1101 US Highway 2 West Libby, MT
Feb 4	7:00-9:00	Hamilton	Holiday Inn Express 139 Bitterroot PL Dr Hamilton, MT
Feb 5	7:00-9:00	Missoula	Best Inn ** 3803 Brooks Missoula, MT
Feb 11	4:00-7:00	Helena	Helena National Forest *** Forest Supervisors Office 2880 Skyway Drive

				Helena, MT
Feb 17	12:00-1:30	Dillon		Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Forest Supervisors Office 420 Barrett Street Dillon, MT
Feb 19	7:00-9:00	Billings		Custer National Forest Forest Supervisors Office 1310 Main Billings, MT
				<u>Wyoming</u>
Feb 3	6:30-8:30	Afton		Lincoln County School District Building 222 East 4 th Avenue Afton, WY
Feb 4	6:30-8:30	Kemmerer		Kemmerer Town Hall 220 Wyoming Hwy 233 Kemmerer, WY
Feb 4	4:00-7:00	Cody		County Courthouse, Barley Room 1002 Sheridan Ave Cody, WY
Feb 5	6:30-8:30	Jackson		Teton County Commissioners Chambers 200 S. Willow Jackson, WY
Feb 5	4:00-7:00	Riverton		Holiday Inn 900 E. Sunset Riverton, WY
Feb 10	6:30-8:30	Pinedale		Pinedale Elementary School 665 North Tyler Pinedale, WY
Feb 11	6:30-8:30	Marbleton		Marbleton Fire Hall Hwy 189 Marbleton, WY
Feb 12	6:30-8:30	Rock Springs		Rock Springs Public Library 400 C Street Rock Springs, WY
Feb 19	7:00-9:00	Sheridan		Bighorn National Forest 2013 Eastside Second St. Sheridan, WY
				<u>Utah</u>
Feb 19	3:00-7:00	Vernal		Ashley National Forest Forest Supervisor's Office 355 N. Vernal Avenue Vernal, UT

Changes from cover letter sent to the public with copies of the summary or DEIS

* Location determined for Priest River meeting

** Missoula meeting location changed from Holiday Inn to Best Inn on Brooks St

*** Added Helena meeting which was inadvertently left off