



Lynx

RESOURCE Brief

Importance

Although the Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) is a common denizen of the boreal forests of Alaska and Canada, its distribution extends more sparsely southward into the U.S. Rocky Mountains. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the lynx as threatened in the contiguous U.S. in 2000. Standards set by the Lynx Conservation and Assessment Strategy and National Forest Plan amendments should improve or at least maintain existing conditions for the species by protecting its denning habitat and the habitat of its primary prey, the snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*), which is most abundant in forests with dense understories. Silvicultural or fuel reduction treatments that reduce horizontal cover are detrimental to hares and may reduce potential lynx denning sites.

eastern and northern portion of Yellowstone. No critical habitat was designated in Grand Teton. The Endangered Species Act prohibits actions by a federal agency that adversely modify designated critical habitat. Radio-collared lynx from Colorado, where 218 have been released since 1999 to reestablish the species, have occasionally been documented in the GYE. Dispersers from Canada and northwest Montana may also help sustain lynx in the GYE.



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Status in Greater Yellowstone

Although historical records suggest that lynx have been present in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem since at least 1893, recent surveys using hair-snare and snow-tracking techniques indicate that the species is now rare and spotty in distribution (fig. 1). A Yellowstone survey (2001–2004) made 11 detections of lynx presence at sites associated with high densities of snowshoe hares and red squirrels. Three of the detections were based on DNA and the other eight on tracks, primarily in the east and central portions of the park. A Grand Teton survey (2000–2002) produced no conclusive evidence of lynx presence. Data from radio-collared lynx indicate that males range widely, possibly in search of food or prospective mates that are widely dispersed. Available data are insufficient to estimate population numbers or trends for lynx in the GYE, but their apparent scarcity and distance from other populations contribute to the species' tenuous state.

Discussion

Much lynx habitat in the GYE is sub-optimal; it is often fragmented and generally limited to conifer forests above 7,700 feet where snowshoe hare distribution is patchy and often insufficient to support lynx residency and reproduction. Lynx home ranges in the GYE are therefore larger than those farther north, with lynx traveling long distances between foraging sites. In 2009, the USFWS designated critical habitat for lynx in five regions of the continental United States, including a 6.1-million-acre area in the GYE. This designation includes much of the

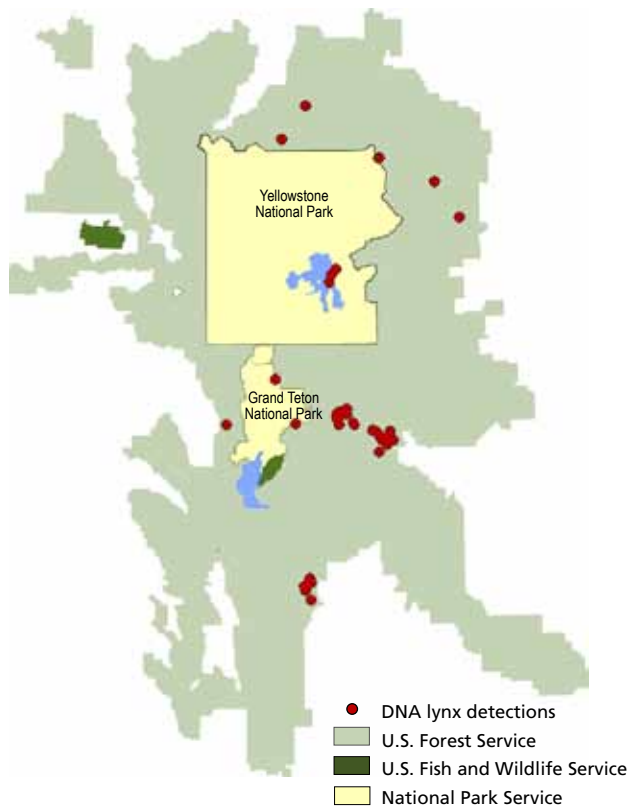


Figure 1. DNA-based detections of lynx documented in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, 1996 to 2008. Numerous locations of radio-collared lynx from Colorado that were obtained using satellite-based telemetry are unavailable. Data provided by Endeavor Wildlife Research, Wild Things Unlimited, the U.S. Forest Service, and the National Park Service.

