

Environmentalists Protest Lynx Plan

Four groups ask U.S. Forest Service to reconsider management plan for lynx in Colorado.

Posted Dec. 28, 2008, 3 a.m. EST

Four environmentalist groups — Colorado Wild, the Center for Native Ecosystems, Defenders of Wildlife and WildEarth Guardians — filed an appeal of a U.S. Forest Service management plan this week. The groups said the plan, developed for lynx in national forests in Colorado and southern Wyoming, gives preference to other uses of the forest over habitat for the cat, the San Diego Union-Tribune reports.

Specifically, the final plan, released in November, dilutes guidelines for other forest uses such as logging, snow recreation, road improvements and gas/oil development, the groups said. “If the amendment’s weaker standards and guidelines are applied to areas in the Southern Rocky Mountains, lynx recovery may be delayed or even thwarted altogether,” said Rocky Smith of Colorado Wild, adding that the small lynx population in the southern Rockies is vulnerable to extinction.

Since 1999, the Colorado Division of Wildlife has worked to restore the cat’s population in Colorado, releasing more than 200 lynx from Canada and Alaska in the state. Up until two years ago, wildlife biologists reported seeing lynx kittens in the wild. The decline in litters may be attributed to a decline in the cat’s main prey, the snowshoe hare.

The Forest Service said the plan will manage vegetation to encourage growth in the snowshoe hare population. Exceptions for logging and other activities are included to reduce wildfire risks and to give forest managers more flexibility in dealing with the current bark beetle infestation affecting pine trees in Colorado.