

Lynx Reintroduction



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Colorado's Lynx Reintroduction Success

A year before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the lynx as a threatened species in 2000, the Colorado Division of Wildlife (now Colorado Parks and Wildlife - CPW) started reintroducing lynx to the state. Over the next seven years, CPW brought 218 lynx to Colorado and established a self-sustaining population.

Lynx Background

Lynx, (*Lynx canadensis*), are large members of the cat family with short tails and distinctive black ear tufts that are as large as the animal's ear. Often confused with the bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), lynx have large feet and grayish coats without spots. Lynx tails are entirely black while the underside of bobcat tails is white.

Lynx are solitary by nature and inhabit dense high altitude forests or willow-rich mountain stream corridors. The huge feet enable lynx to easily traverse deep winter snowfields in search of their preferred prey - snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*). Lynx weigh 20-to-30 pounds and have a home range of up to 20 square miles

Lynx are native to North America, historically inhabiting forests in 25 states, including Colorado. Lynx populations dropped steadily in the United States throughout the 1900s due to unregulated trapping, widespread predator poisoning and habitat loss due to logging and other development.

History of Lynx in Colorado

Lynx were established in Colorado's high elevation forests prior to European settlement. In the early 1800s, commercial trappers sought the thick fur, which sold for premium prices in the international market. The lynx population in Colorado dropped rapidly in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Colorado's last known lynx was illegally trapped near Vail in 1974, a year after the state listed the lynx as endangered.

Colorado's Lynx Reintroduction Program

The CPW mission includes restoring species that are native to the state. In 1982, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) started work to list lynx as a threatened species and declared the lynx a protected species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2000. To be proactive, CPW started work in the mid-1990s on a lynx reintroduction program.

In 1999, CPW brought the first 41 lynx from Canada and Alaska to the San Juan Mountains in southwest Colorado, where river valleys, rugged mountains, and adequate snowshoe hares provided good habitat in the 5.2 million acre core reintroduction area. More than 200 lynx were brought to the area over several years and the reintroduction program established lynx as a self-sustaining population in Colorado.



Highlights of CPW's Lynx Reintroduction Research

All 218 Alaskan and Canadian lynx released in Colorado were fitted with radio and satellite collars, allowing researchers to monitor movement patterns, survival, male and female proximity during breeding season, and female denning and births. A few highlights:

- After the initial 1999 release, four lynx died due to starvation. The next group of wild-caught lynx were held in captivity for a much longer period and released later in the year when more natural food was available. Post-release survival rates improved dramatically.
- CPW released additional wild-caught lynx between 2003 and 2006 to encourage breeding, which had not occurred prior to 2003.
- Once the second set of reintroductions began in 2003, researchers documented the first 16 kittens born to the reintroduced lynx during that year.
- Lynx reproduction varied widely from a high of 50 kittens in 2005 to no reproduction in 2007 and 2008, and back to 10 kittens in 2009 and 2010.
- In 2010, CPW declared that the reintroduction project met all benchmarks of success established prior to the start of the project. The benchmarks included high survival rates after release, successful reproduction in released animals and animals born in the wild, low mortality rates, and reproduction rates that are equal to or that exceed mortality rates over an extended period of time.



Additional CPW Lynx Research

- The lessons learned from reintroducing lynx in Colorado aided conservation efforts for the critically endangered Iberian lynx in Spain and may aid in the potential reintroduction of Eurasian lynx to the Scottish Highlands.
- CPW scientists are exploring how to use state-of-the-art non-invasive techniques, such as remote camera surveillance and genetic analysis of lynx fur left in scat, to continue monitoring the status of lynx throughout Colorado.
- CPW is collaborating with the U.S. Forest Service on a project to determine the impacts of winter recreation on lynx.
- For more detailed information, visit the CPW website, www.cpw.state.co.us

Lynx Reintroduction Funding Partners

Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Great Outdoors Colorado, the Turner Foundation, the U.S. Forest Service, Vail Associates and the Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation.

Lynx Reintroduction Project Partners

U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Colorado State University, the Colorado Natural Heritage Program, wildlife agencies in Washington, Alaska, Montana, Maine, Minnesota, Wyoming, Utah and New Mexico, and the Canadian government and trapping associations.

