

# HOW TO AVOID INCIDENTAL TAKE OF LYNX

*While Trapping or Hunting  
Bobcats and other Furbearers*



The purpose of this publication is to help achieve the goal of reducing injury and mortality to the Threatened Canada lynx population in the contiguous United States, which may occur as a result of hunting or trapping bobcats and other furbearers. This pamphlet was produced as a joint effort between the United States Fish & Wildlife Service and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

The mission of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies governmental members include the fish and wildlife agencies of the states, provinces, and federal governments of the U.S. and Canada. All 50 states are members. The Association has been a key organization in promoting sound resource management and strengthening federal, state, and private cooperation in protecting and managing fish and wildlife and their habitats in the public interest.

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Lynx  
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# HOW TO AVOID INCIDENTAL TAKE OF LYNX

## *While Trapping or Hunting Bobcats and Other Furbearers*

Canada lynx were listed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service as Threatened in the contiguous United States under the Endangered Species Act on March 24, 2000. As such, harvesting lynx is no longer permitted in any state except Alaska. In the contiguous United States, lynx may occur in Colorado, Idaho, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New York, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Harvest of bobcats and other furbearers, whether by trapping or hunting, is not affected by this ruling. However, trappers and hunters must use every reasonable effort to avoid taking lynx where they may occur in the contiguous 48 states.

Lynx are very similar in appearance and habits to bobcats, and their range overlaps with them and other furbearer species. Therefore it is important for trappers and hunters to know how to distinguish lynx from bobcats, to recognize their preferred habitat types, and to avoid capturing or harvesting lynx. Trappers must also learn what to do if a lynx is caught incidentally.

# Identifying Characteristics and Background Information

## *Description*

Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) and bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) are medium-sized wild cats. Adult males are usually larger than females in both species. Lynx weights average 24 pounds for males and 20 pounds for females. Bobcat weights average 26 pounds for males and 15 pounds for females. Average lengths (from nose to tip of tail) are very similar for lynx and bobcats: 34 inches for males of both species, 32 inches for female lynx, and 31 inches for female bobcats.

Bobcat pelts may be light gray, yellowish brown, buff, brown, or reddish brown and streaked or spotted with black or dark brown. Under portions of the body are white with black spots and with black bars on the fore legs. Lynx generally have more gray and less red in their pelts than bobcats and the belly fur is grayish-white or buff-white with mottled, indistinct black spots.

Lynx have ear tufts and facial ruffs on their cheeks that are larger and more conspicuous than those on bobcats. Ear tufts are usually longer than 1 inch on lynx but shorter than 1 inch on bobcats. Bobcat and lynx tails are approximately 4–6 inches long and match their pelt color except for the tip (about the last inch). The tip of the tail on bobcats is usually black only on the upper side whereas on lynx the entire tip is black.



©Tom Krause  
Belly Markings  
Lynx (left),  
Bobcat (right)

*Lynx spots are mottled. Bobcats have more distinct spots contrasted with whiter fur.*



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*Lynx tails appear much the same viewed top (top left) or bottom (bottom left). The lynx tail tip is completely black all around, while bobcat tails show black bars with a white tip when viewed from above (top right) and show a lot of white underneath (bottom right).*



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The hind legs of both bobcats and lynx are longer than their fore legs, which help them in springing to catch prey. However, the hind legs are even more disproportionately large on lynx, causing them to have a “stooped” appearance. Lynx also have much larger feet than bobcats. This gives them a “snow-shoe-like” advantage chasing prey in deep snow.



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Top Left:

*Bobcats usually have ear tufts shorter than 1 inch.*

Top Right:

*Heavily furred bobcats might appear lynx-like, with significant ear tufts and cheek ruffs.*



Left:

*Lynx usually have ear tufts longer than 1 inch.*

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## *Sign*

Lynx tracks in snow are generally less distinct than bobcat tracks and often display a powder-puff appearance as a result of abundant foot hair. In wet or compacted snow, lynx tracks sometimes display smaller toe pads than are evident in bobcat tracks. Back feet often follow in the front foot tracks of both species. When walking, the stride (distance between footprints of the same foot) is 5–16 inches for bobcats and 12–28 inches for lynx. Both bobcat and lynx track trails tend to “wander” compared with the more straight-line patterns of wild canids (foxes, coyotes,



H. Golden, ADF&G  
*A set of lynx tracks in snow.*



B. Giddings, Montana FWP  
*A set of bobcat tracks in snow.*

and wolves). Lynx and bobcats travel and hunt with a deliberate and methodical walking pattern, rarely bounding unless chasing prey.

Lynx tracks are approximately 3–3¾ inches long and 3½–4½ inches wide in dirt and up to 4½ inches long and 5 inches wide in snow. Bobcat tracks are approximately 1¾–2½ inches long and 1¾–2½ inches wide in dirt and up to 2½ inches long and 2¾ inches wide in snow. Both bobcats and lynx have 4 toe pads on the front and hind feet. Claw marks typically do not show as they do with canids. Because lynx have more hair on their feet, their toe pads are usually less distinct than the toe pads of bobcats.



Montana FWP  
*Tracks are shown with shaded area representing impression of hair in the snow.*

### *Life History and Diet*

Lynx normally breed during March–April while bobcats breed during December–March in the southern portion of their range and during March–April in the northern portion. Litter sizes vary for lynx from 4 to 5 when prey is abundant to 2 to 3 when prey is scarce. Bobcat litter sizes range from 1 to 6 and average 2.7 kittens. The young of both species are independent by age 1 year, and by 2 years of age they have grown to full size and usually breed.

The snowshoe hare is by far the most important prey item for lynx. The availability of hares largely controls lynx abundance across most of their range. Other prey species important to lynx are red squirrels, mice, other rodents, and birds. Bobcat diet consists mainly of cottontail rabbits, jackrabbits, and snowshoe hares, but they also consume mice, other rodents, birds, and deer.

### *Distribution and Habitat Preferences*

Lynx occur across most of Alaska and Canada. Since 1990 in the contiguous 48 states, lynx or their tracks have been documented in Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Established populations of lynx are present in northern Maine, northeastern Minnesota, western Montana, western Wyoming, and north-central Washington. A small population was recently reintroduced in Colorado.

Habitat types preferred by lynx are variable, ranging from old-growth coniferous forests to coniferous or mixed forests that are regenerating after fire or logging. Forests that are growing back after fire or logging often provide excellent food and cover for hares, and therefore attract lynx. It is extremely rare for lynx to be found in deserts, prairies, or farmland habitats.

Bobcats are widely distributed across the United States. They are rare along portions of the mid-Atlantic coast with dense human populations. Bobcat densities are usually greater in southern states. Their northern distribution may be limited by snow depth.

Bobcats seem to prefer areas with high prey abundance and dense understory vegetation. Forest edges and rocky ledges and outcrops are also important terrain features. Bobcats thrive in a variety of habitats including dense old-growth forests, hardwood and hardwood-mixed forests, brushy habitats, deserts, prairies, swamps, and farmland habitats.

Both lynx and bobcats seem to use the convenience of logging roads in forests to aid travel.

## Trapping Methods to Help Avoid Catching Lynx

To avoid lynx while trapping bobcats, trap sets should be made where bobcats are known to exist. Making

trap sets near existing bobcat tracks is often successful because bobcats often reuse the same travel patterns within their territories. Bobcats also tend to use areas where cottontail rabbits are abundant. Trap set locations that tend to avoid lynx include open meadows, pastures, and crop lands. Lynx rarely use agricultural lands and generally prefer to hunt and travel in forested or brushy areas.



B. Giddings, Montana FWP  
*Leaning poles for marten and fisher should be less than 6 inches in diameter.*

*Whenever a lynx track is identified, trap and snare sets should not be made in the vicinity.*

Trap sets that are effective for bobcats also appeal to lynx. Lures and baits that appeal to one species appeal to the other as well. Visible baits of rabbits, hares, or parts of rabbits or hares should not be used

if lynx may frequent the area. Flags or other suspended sight-attractants (such as bird wings, feathers, pieces of fur, etc.) also should not be used near the traps if lynx may be present.

Incidental captures of lynx can be reduced by using a proper-sized foothold trap. Number 2 coilspring or number 1.75 coilspring traps help discriminate against lynx captures due to a relatively small trap-jaw spread. However, these sized traps maintain excellent efficiency for bobcats (as well as foxes and coyotes). Another appropriate foothold trap to consider where lynx may be present is the padded number 3 coilspring trap.

All types of foothold traps should be staked solidly to prevent a trapped lynx (or bobcat) from harming itself by entangling around trees or brush. Trap attachment chains should be no longer than 18 inches between the trap and trap stake, be attached at the center of the trap frame, and should include at least two swivels.

Lynx often avoid traps set for foxes and coyotes when the traps are placed in open fields. The use of tainted rather than fresh meat baits also tends not to attract lynx while still providing significant attraction to coyotes and foxes.

Marten and fisher often use the same habitat as lynx. To avoid lynx in marten or fisher sets, baits and traps should be placed on leaning poles at least 3 to 4 feet above the ground or snow level. Leaning poles should

be no larger than 6 inches in diameter as this size is adequate for marten or fisher, yet discourages lynx from climbing to investigate the elevated trap set.

The typical walking behavior of a lynx frequently enables it to notice and avoid snares that are 5/64 inch thick or thicker. Snare loops for coyotes and foxes should measure at least 8 inches from side to side. Attention to these two details by trappers will usually enable a lynx to avoid or remove the snare before it closes.

## Bobcat Hunting Methods to Help Avoid Taking Lynx

Tracks should be closely examined and measured before any trailing dogs are released. (See “Sign” section). Any treed bobcat should carefully be identified and confirmed as not being a lynx before it is harvested. A treed lynx should be abandoned immediately with harnessed dogs in tow.

If predator calls are used in areas lynx may frequent, it is essential to identify and confirm any responding animals to assure a lynx is not shot. Since it may be difficult or impossible to positively identify a moving or partially hidden animal as a lynx or bobcat, it is best not to shoot at all whenever positive identity is unknown.

## Reducing Mortality and Injuries to Incidentally Captured Lynx

All trappers need to carry a catchpole to allow safe release of any unintended animal captures. Care should be taken to approach any trapped animals slowly to avoid their excessive movement. A trapped lynx will allow the catchpole loop to be placed over its head, but it can be expected to react when the loop is tightened. Tighten the catchpole loop only sufficiently to hold the lynx securely without preventing its ability to breathe. It is important to keep the head of the lynx pinned to the ground so that



B. Giddings, Montana FWP

*Use a catchpole to release any lynx taken incidental to harvests of other furbearers. Tighten the catchpole loop sufficiently to immobilize the lynx without cutting off its air supply. Then quickly remove the trap and release the catchpole loop.*

the front end of the body is restrained. Once the head is down, quickly place a foot, with light pressure only, on the hindquarters to restrain the rear legs. A heavy canvas is also useful to protect the trapper from the cat's claws. Once the lynx is immobilized, the canvas can be placed over the prone animal to quiet it as the trap is removed quickly. Then the catchpole loop should be relaxed and removed to allow the lynx freedom to escape.

If a catchpole is not available, an alternative method to release lynx is to cut a strong forked stick to allow the pinning of the lynx's neck and shoulder to the ground while the trap is removed.

Never attempt to render a trapped lynx unconscious with a blow to the nose or head or by any other means. Life threatening injury to the lynx may result.

Care should be taken at all times when releasing a lynx because they are capable of injuring the trapper with their teeth or claws. Always be aware a trapped lynx may try to kick at you with claws extended on any foot. Wearing thick gloves to release trapped animals is always wise.

If you need help releasing a lynx from a trap, please contact your local game warden or state fish and wildlife office (Monday-Friday, business hours) listed on the facing page for assistance.

Colorado	303-291-7336
Idaho	208-334-2920
Maine	207-941-4466
Michigan	517-373-1263
Minnesota	218-327-4130
Montana	406-444-2612
New Hampshire	603-271-3361
New York	518-402-8885
Oregon	503-947-6000
Utah	801-538-4700
Vermont	802-885-8831
Washington	360-902-2200
Wisconsin	608-266-8204
Wyoming	307-332-2688

Front Cover:

Lynx

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