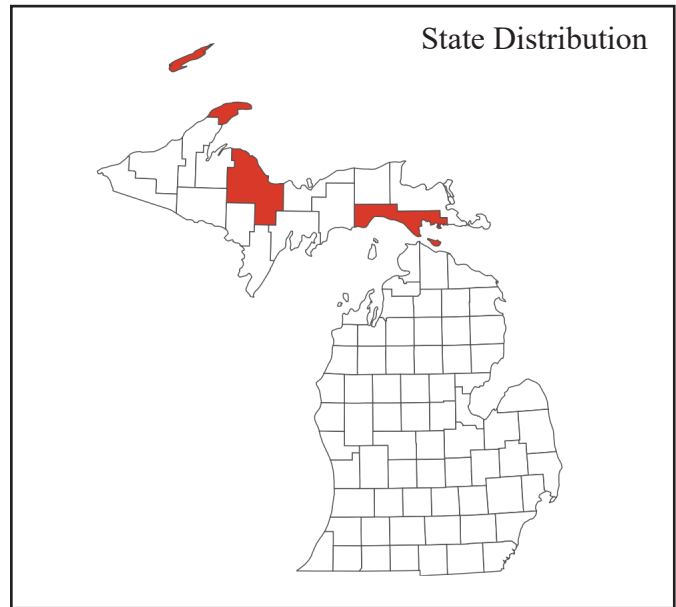
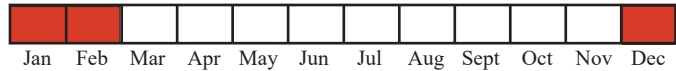




Photo by aalilith, [CC-BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)



Best Survey Period



State Status: Endangered

Federal Status: Threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (contiguous United States Distinct Population Segment)

Global Rank: G5

State Rank: S1

Family: Felidae

Total Range: Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) occur throughout the boreal forests of Canada and Alaska, extending south into portions of the northern Rocky Mountains, Cascade Range, Great Lakes region, and northern New England. Historically, lynx occurred across much of the northern United States where extensive boreal forest and snowshoe hare populations were present. Habitat loss, overharvest, and declining snowshoe hare populations resulted in range contractions throughout the twentieth century (McKelvey et al. 2000, Aubry et al. 2000). Minnesota currently supports the only persistent breeding population of Canada lynx in the Great Lakes region. Individuals occasionally disperse

into Wisconsin, Michigan, and other northern states from Minnesota and Ontario. These dispersing animals are generally considered transient and have not established resident breeding populations outside Minnesota (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2008).

State Distribution: Historical records indicate that Canada lynx once occurred throughout portions of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, although they were never considered abundant. Today, confirmed occurrences are rare and are generally limited to the western and central Upper Peninsula. Most recent observations are believed to represent dispersing individuals originating from Minnesota or Ontario rather than resident animals. Despite occasional verified sightings, there is no evidence that a self-sustaining breeding population currently exists in Michigan (Linden et al. 2011; Evers 1994).

Recognition: The Canada lynx is a medium-sized wild cat that closely resembles the bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) but is distinguished by several characteristics. Adults measure approximately 81–107 cm (32–42 in) in total length and typically weigh 8–14 kg (18–30 lbs), with males averaging larger than females (Evers 1994).



Diagnostic features include:

- Long black ear tufts.
- A short tail with an entirely black tip.
- Large, heavily furred feet.
- Long legs, particularly hind legs.
- Gray to gray-brown pelage with limited spotting.
- Prominent facial ruff.

Compared to bobcats, lynx possess proportionally longer legs, much larger feet, less distinct spotting, and a completely black tail tip. Bobcats generally have smaller feet, shorter ear tufts, and black coloration restricted to the upper surface of the tail tip (Evers 1994).



Canada lynx paw prints are greater than 7.5 cm (3 in) wide, while bobcats are smaller. Photo by Rob Routledge, [CC BY-NC 4.0](#)

Best Survey Time: Winter, when tracks in snow provide the greatest opportunity for detection.

Habitat: Throughout their range, Canada lynx are closely associated with boreal forests dominated by spruce (*Picea* spp.), fir (*Abies* spp.), tamarack (*Larix laricina*), and mixed conifer-hardwood stands. In the Great Lakes region, they occupy mature spruce-fir forests interspersed with dense early-successional patches that support high densities of snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*), their principal prey (Poole 2003).

Although lynx hunt extensively in regenerating

forests and forest edges where hares are abundant, they rely on mature forest for resting, traveling, and denning. Females typically establish dens beneath wind-thrown trees, root structures, coarse woody debris, or dense conifer cover that provides protection from predators and weather (Poole 2003; Evers 1994).

Deep, persistent snow is an important habitat component because the lynx's exceptionally large feet provide a competitive advantage over other predators, particularly bobcats and coyotes, under these conditions (McKelvey et al. 2000).

Biology: Canada lynx are solitary, primarily nocturnal predators whose ecology is closely linked to fluctuations in snowshoe hare populations. Throughout much of their range, hare populations undergo cyclical peaks and declines approximately every 8–11 years, and lynx populations typically follow these cycles with a one- to two-year lag (Poole 2003).

Breeding occurs during March and April followed by a gestation period of approximately 63–70 days. Litters generally consist of one to four kittens born during May or June. Reproductive success is strongly influenced by prey abundance, with females frequently producing larger litters during periods of high snowshoe hare density (Poole 2003).

Although snowshoe hares comprise most of their diet, lynx also prey on red squirrels, grouse, various small mammals, and occasionally white-tailed deer fawns or carrion. Adult home ranges vary with habitat quality and prey availability but often exceed 100 km² in boreal forests (McKelvey et al. 2000).

Conservation and Management: The primary factors limiting lynx recovery in Michigan include the absence of a resident breeding population, limited connectivity with source populations, and insufficient areas of high-quality boreal habitat supporting abundant snowshoe hares. Habitat fragmentation, road development, and forest management practices that reduce mature conifer cover may further reduce habitat suitability.



Conservation efforts should emphasize maintaining large, interconnected landscapes containing mature spruce-fir forest, dense regenerating stands that support snowshoe hares, and coarse woody debris suitable for denning. Maintaining habitat connectivity between Michigan, Minnesota, and Ontario is important for facilitating dispersal and potential recolonization.

Continued documentation of verified sightings through genetic sampling, remote cameras, and track surveys remains essential for evaluating the species' status within Michigan.

Research Needs:

- Determine the frequency and origin of dispersing lynx entering Michigan using genetic analyses.
- Evaluate habitat connectivity between Michigan, Ontario, and Minnesota.
- Assess the availability and distribution of suitable boreal habitat and snowshoe hare populations.
- Develop standardized monitoring protocols using remote cameras, snow-track surveys, and non-invasive genetic sampling.
- Quantify potential impacts of climate change on snow conditions and future habitat suitability.

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