

Judge approves DNR lynx plan, By LAUREL BEAGER, Editor

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A plan to protect Canada lynx and approved by a federal judge will impact local trappers.

Frank House, a veteran trapper, said the plan isn't needed because the only lynx in Borderland are traveling through the area.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources officials have come up with a plan to reduce the number of protected Canada lynx that get caught in traps. A federal judge has approved the plan, which would impose additional restrictions on trapping in northeastern Minnesota.

In March, Judge Michael Davis ordered the DNR to come up with a plan to protect the lynx from trappers pursuing other species. Davis had also ruled the DNR was violating the federal Endangered Species Act by not protecting the lynx.

Among the requirements in the plan, the lynx zone east of U.S. Highway 53 will have a ban on fresh meat as bait in traps and there will also be a near-ban on conibear body-gripping traps between 5 and 7 1/2 inches wide.

Davis declined to ban certain types of traps in the lynx zone.

House, who lives on the west side of Highway 53, said the plan will impact local trappers and the fisher and martin they are seeking negatively.

"It will put a lot pressure on fisher and martin on that side of the highway," he said.

"People on (the east side of Highway 53) will move over the highway. It will be harder on game in certain areas."

Not using fresh meat for bait and only using scent as an attractant on traps will make it tougher to harvest fisher and martin, he added.

But the worst part about the plan, he said, is that it is not necessary. There are no local lynx, he said.

"I've been in the woods 35 years trapping and I saw two sets of tracks: one in my pond and one in the woods. They were migrating through and likely got trapped in Canada. We're not protecting anything."

House says he believes the plan is motivated by a desire by some people to stop trapping.

"This is a different way of slowly eliminating trappers from the woods," he said. "They've got to get support and they won't if they go after the trappers. But if they use the Canada lynx, they'll get all kinds of support."

The judge also ruled that any lynx that are trapped must be reported to the government and to the Animal Protection Institute and Center for Biological Diversity.

Nicole Paquette, attorney for the Animal Protection Institute, said, "I think it's a good start to keep lynx from being trapped in Minnesota. We're going to be very vigilant in watching what happens in Minnesota."

Marc Fink, attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, said he expects additional restrictions to be imposed during the federal permit process if the new regulations don't stop accidental lynx trapping.

From 2002-2007, at least 14 lynx were injured or killed by trappers in Minnesota, mostly

by traps set for other species such as bobcat or fox.

Mike Don Carlos, wildlife research and policy manager for the DNR, said it was a sensible ruling. "It will provide reasonable protections for lynx while still allowing traditional trapping of other species," he said.

The forest cats were put on the federal threatened species list in 2000 in Minnesota, Maine and several Rocky Mountain states.

Lynx were common in northern Minnesota until the 1980s when their numbers began to crash. The state banned trapping of lynx in 1984, but their numbers kept falling.

However, they have staged a small comeback, and there are about 200 of them now living in the state, by some estimates.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.