



Photo from wallpaperweb.org

You don't have to be a professional wildlife biologist to know that wildlife does not play by the same rules we do. Animals don't recognize international, state, county, or any other artificial political boundaries.

Though wildlife managers would prefer it, Grizzly bears in the Northern Rockies don't stay put in the United States, Montana, Flathead County, or in a specific national forest or bear management unit. On the contrary, bears, like most wildlife, are often on the move, inhabiting and moving between large areas of secure, core habitat.

It was of no surprise, then, that when the state of Colorado released Canada lynx into southwest Colorado's San Juan Mountains, in an effort to re-establish the dwindling population, the lynx were later found to have traveled along the contiguous, forested habitat into New Mexico's side of the San Juan and Sangre de Cristo mountains.

The Colorado/New Mexico state line, which divides the high-elevation, forested land, was of no consequence

to lynx. They were in search of suitable habitat for foraging and denning and unaware that they had crossed into New Mexico.

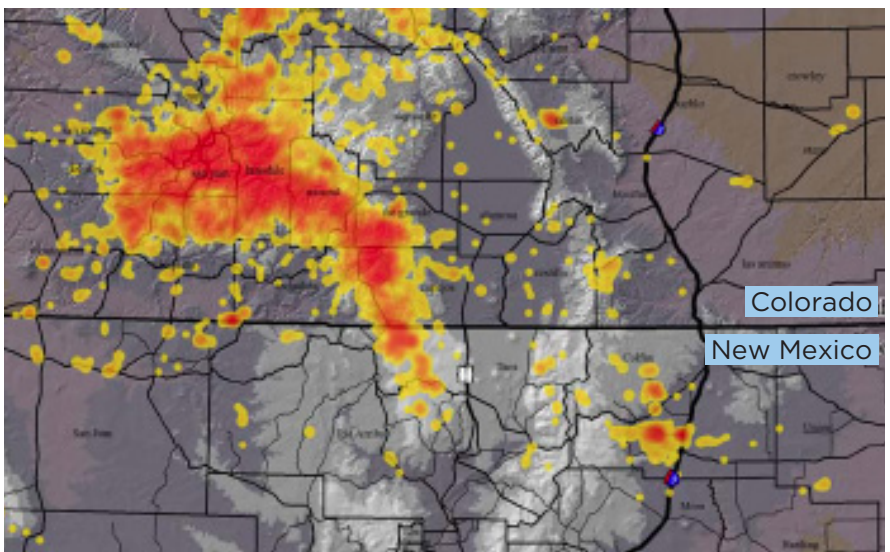
That's unfortunate, because the federal 'threatened' species designation that protects lynx while in Colorado does not extend to New Mexico. And absent federal protection, at least 14 of the 61 re-introduced lynx have been killed while in New Mexico.

What caused this problem? In 2000, when the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service brought Canada lynx under protection of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), it failed to recognize that the wildcat's historic range included New Mexico and mistakenly used the Colorado state line to demarcate its boundary for protection.

So while Colorado spends millions of dollars to rebuild the lynx population, cats that regularly migrate south into the mountains of New Mexico lose all protections and are routinely shot and killed.

Outraged by this simple but disastrous error, we launched what turned out to be a protracted, four-year battle with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to provide lynx the protection they need and deserve while in New Mexico.

In August 2007, we filed a formal petition on behalf of a coalition of local conservation groups requesting the agency amend the lynx's protected boundaries to include New Mexico. After receiving no response, we filed a lawsuit to compel one.



Map from CDOW, 2006-07 Lynx Research Report

This map of the San Juan mountain range, with hot spots indicating lynx occupation, illustrates that lynx frequently travel across the Colorado border into New Mexico. It took WELC four years and two lawsuits to secure federal ESA protection for the imperiled wildcat on the New Mexico-side of the range.

In December 2009, the agency came back with a “warranted but precluded” finding, meaning that while ESA protections are warranted for lynx in New Mexico, the agency has higher priorities and the lynx will have to wait. What’s more, the agency placed the wildcat at the end of a line of 245 species awaiting protection. Absent further legal action, lynx would not have received protective status in New Mexico for a decade or more.

This would not do. We again sued in August 2010, this time requesting that the agency re-visit and justify the findings, and urging the immediate correction of the lynx’s federal protections.

Now, we are thrilled to report that this September the agency finally agreed to provide protective status for

lynx in New Mexico by 2013. Many years and two lawsuits later, lynx will finally get the protection necessary for its long-term survival and recovery in the Southern Rockies.

Winning protection for lynx throughout its habitat in the Southern Rocky Mountains is one piece of WELC’s commitment to helping this formerly banished cat reclaim its birthright in the Southern and Northern Rockies.

Look for news in the coming months about our other efforts to rebuild the lynx population including: protecting occupied lynx habitat and travel corridors from large-scale development on Colorado’s Wolf Creek pass; pushing the agency to adopt and implement a formal recovery plan for the species; and ensuring that the

U.S. Forest Service complies with the important forest protections designed specifically to conserve lynx in the Northern Rockies.



Photo by Tony Rix

Closely related to and resembling the bobcat, Canada lynx are slightly larger and have supersized paws that spread their weight over soft snow allowing them to survive in high elevations.

Volunteer Profile: Quinn Yackulic



Why do you volunteer for WELC?

I connected with WELC’s New Mexico staff while working in Bandelier National Monument. In New Mexico alone, WELC has a great impact. The recent victory over the National Laboratory, relating to the Clean Water Act and toxic runoff, was monumental and is just one of the many victories WELC can (but doesn’t) boast about.

Describe your involvement in conservation efforts.

My most recent volunteer gig was in New Mexico’s Bandelier National Monument working as a backcountry intern through the Student Conservation Association. I had free housing, a biweekly food check, equipment when needed, and a glorious backyard.

For those three months, I patrolled the backcountry, did basic trail maintenance, worked with an archeology team, helped the rangers manage bears, and other jobs. Volunteering in Bandelier was an unforgettable experience; giving back by doing something I love is a great feeling.

What do you do in your free time?

I enjoy rock climbing, running, skiing, good company & conversation, reading (my mom will appreciate that one!), and playing in the woods, in a tarn, on a peak, or pretty much anywhere that’s not my basement.

Quinn Yackulic is a freshman at The College of Wooster in Ohio. He volunteered last spring at WELC’s screening of the Wild & Scenic Film Festival in Taos, New Mexico. Quinn’s mother, Corrie, serves on WELC’s Board of Directors.