

Lynx May be Declared Endangered Species

Congressman Don Young is angry and other Alaskans are shaking their heads in disbelief at recent efforts to declare the lynx an endangered species.

The federal Endangered Species Scientific Authority (ESSA), formed early this summer, has proposed strict regulations to control the export of lynx, bobcat and river otter. According to John Burns, a biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, conservationists backing the regulations hope to reduce the take of lynx below the number needed to support the industry.

Sam Dementieff, of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, complained that the Scientific Authority has not provided enough time for Alaskans to comment on the status of lynx populations, nor for trappers to file applications for export permits. The period for comment began August 30 and is to run until November 1.

"How do they expect to get input from trappers? They don't have access to all the information we have here in town. What I'm saying is that the time period for comment is way too short," Dementieff said. He added that he had received no material on the issue until very recently.

According to Dementieff, many Alaskan trappers commonly sell their lynx pelts to Canadian buyers because they can get better prices. Under the new regulations, they would have to file separate applications for permits for each pelt they want to export. If trappers are unable to file an application in time, or if their applications are denied, they will be forced to sell through Seattle outlets at lower prices or stop trapping the lynx altogether.

One of the most serious differ-

ences between federal authorities and state biologists is the question of whether lynx should be trapped when their population cycle, which follows that of hares and rabbits, is at a low point.

According to information available to ESSA authorities, lynx populations are particularly sensitive to hunting and trapping pressure during their low years. According to the Federal Register which contains the proposed regulations:

"If trapping during those years is not prohibited, he predicted that a progressive dampening in amplitude of the lynx cycle would result because the time lag between increases of hare and lynx would lengthen. Eventually lynx would be reduced to isolated pockets in the most remote parts of Alaska."

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game disagrees. Department official Jean Ernest said she is preparing a report on lynx which must be submitted to ESSA by October 31:

"We're out to show that trapping lynx during the low years will not endanger the lynx anymore. We have no data to show that, none at all. Trappers do not bother to trap them when they're low because return is so low it's not worth a person's while to go out and trap them. They usually switch to other furbearers."

Ernest questioned whether the export regulations would be enforceable and suggested that if regulations were not made more reasonable, "I tell you there's going to be a lot of smuggling across the border."

Burns also criticized the regulations, commenting that during periods of low population, lynx tend to be found in very remote areas that simply cannot be

trapped, such as ledges and other rough terrain. And he added, "The vast majority of lynx-producing country in Interior Alaska is not trapped, period."

Regulations drafted by ESSA set up guidelines which it must use to determine if export of lynx pelts will endanger the survival of the species:

1. Whether past export has caused stress or damage to the species;

2. Whether the nature of the species or its ecosystem are such that present levels of export will endanger the animals;

3. Whether trapping, hunting, and export levels are expected to increase in the future.

The tricky part about ESSA's approach to deciding if a species should be more strictly regulated is that trappers or other wildlife consumers must prove that the species in question will NOT be harmed by continued export. The ESSA is under no obligation to prove that such harm WILL occur and if ESSA feels there is not enough information to make a definite decision, its policy is to rule in favor of the species rather than the consumers.

Based on lynx pelt shipment records dating back to 1910, the Department of Fish and Game contends that the lynx is not endangered. Burns and Ernest charged that ESSA not only acted on insufficient information, but misinterpreted the information they do have.

Norm Phillips of the Interior Trappers Association praised Congressman Don Young for persuading the ESSA to establish a quota for lynx instead of banning the taking of lynx altogether as it originally planned. He said his group is concerned that the quota has not been set yet and will continue its effort

to keep the lynx off the endangered species list.

"Once they get on there, it's hard to get them off," Phillips commented.

The Endangered Species Sci-

entific Authority was formed to comply with an international conservation treaty to protect endangered wildlife.