

Judge orders Idaho to alter trapping to protect Canada lynx

By KEITH RIDLER, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — A federal judge has ruled that Idaho's regulations for trapping furbearers in northern Idaho violate the Endangered Species Act by allowing the inadvertent capture of federally protected Canada lynx.

The 26-page decision made public Monday in U.S. District Court requires Idaho to propose a plan within 90 days that protects lynx in the Panhandle and Clearwater regions.

"We hope Idaho will now recognize that these rare and beautiful animals need more protection than the state has been willing to grant them," Andrea Santarsiere, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a statement.

The Center, the Western Watersheds Project, Friends of the Clearwater and WildEarth Guardians filed the lawsuit in June 2014 asking that lethal body-crushing traps and snares be made illegal. The groups also want to limit the size of foothold traps in lynx habitat and require daily checks of traps.

Named in the lawsuit are Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter, Idaho Department of Fish and Game Director Virgil Moore, and members of the Idaho Fish and Game Commission.

Fish and Game spokesman Mike Keckler said Monday the agency is reviewing the decision and couldn't comment.

The Idaho Trappers Association intervened on behalf of the state.

"I believe the judge made a mistake," said the group's president, Patrick Carney. He said if all the limits the conservations groups want on trapping are put in place, it would greatly limit trapping in the regions.

"If they implement all that, wolf trapping is over, and so is all of the other trapping," he said.

Besides wolves, other animals legal to trap in Idaho include coyotes, bobcats, otters, beavers, foxes, marten and mink.

The conservation groups in the lawsuit said trapping in Idaho has increased from about 650 licenses issued in the 2001-2002 season to more than 2,300 in recent years. Officials say that at least four lynx have been trapped in Idaho since 2012. One was killed after a trapper mistook it for a bobcat.

Judge B. Lynn Winmill in his ruling found that trappers likely would capture additional lynx in the Panhandle and Clearwater regions through inadvertent trapping.

The conservation groups sought to limit trapping based on potential lynx encounters in other parts of the state as well. But Winmill rejected that argument, noting that the record didn't support inadvertent trapping of lynx in those areas.

Canada lynx weigh about 20 pounds and have large paws that give them an advantage in both pursuing prey and eluding predators when traveling across snow. They feed primarily on snowshoe hares and are believed to number in the hundreds in the continental U.S. It's unclear how many are in Idaho.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed lynx in the continental U.S. as threatened with extinction in 2000.

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