



How to Avoid Incidental Take of Lynx

While Trapping Other Furbearers



Updated September 2025
Includes Quick Reference Guide

Some modifications specific to Maine were made to this USFWS/AFWA publication by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) with permission from USFWS/AFWA.

The purpose of this publication is to help reduce capture, injury and mortality to the Federally Threatened Canada lynx population in the contiguous United States, which may occur as a result of hunting or trapping bobcats and other furbearers. This pamphlet was produced as a joint effort between the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA, formerly known as the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, IAFWA).

The mission of the USFWS is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies represents North America's fish and wildlife agencies to advance sound, science-based management and conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats in the public interest.

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With permission, MDIFW modified the original document published in 2003 by the USFWS and IAFWA. This booklet reflects Maine's trapping regulations and habitat conditions. MDIFW biologists Jennifer Vashon, Shannon Crowley and Scott McLellan contributed to the modification of the brochure in 2005. A third revision by MDIFW biologists reflected new regulatory changes in Maine (e.g. foothold trap configuration and deployment standards, exclusion device specifications for conibear traps set on land). The 2020 update provided a definition of visible attractor (see page 9). The 2025 update resulted in minor changes to improve clarity and provides additional release options in the rare event that a lynx is released prior to contacting MDIFW.



How to Avoid Incidental Take of Lynx While Trapping or Hunting Bobcats and Other Furbearers

Canada lynx were listed by the USFWS as Federally Threatened in the contiguous United States under the Endangered Species Act on March 24, 2000. As such, harvesting lynx is no longer permitted in any state except Alaska. In the contiguous United States, lynx may occur in Colorado, Idaho, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New York, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

The harvest of bobcats and other furbearers, whether by trapping or hunting, is not affected by this ruling. Trappers and hunters must use every reasonable effort to avoid taking lynx where they may occur in the contiguous 48 states.

Lynx are very similar in appearance and habits to bobcats. Lynx are also found where bobcats and other furbearers occur. Therefore, it is important for trappers and hunters to know how to distinguish lynx from bobcats, to recognize their preferred habitat types, and to avoid capturing or harvesting lynx. Trappers must also learn what to do if a lynx is caught incidentally.

Identifying Characteristics and Background Information

DESCRIPTION

Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) and bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) are medium-sized wild cats. Adult males are usually larger than females in both species. Bobcats are usually heavier than lynx; however, lynx may appear larger due to longer legs and larger feet. Bobcat weights range from 12-55 pounds (average 28 lb) for males and 9-34 pounds (average 15 lb) for females. Lynx weights range from 16-31 pounds (average 24 lb) for males and 16-23 pounds (average 20 lb) for females.

Lynx have ear tufts and facial ruffs on their cheeks that are larger and more prominent than those on bobcats. Ear tufts are usually longer than 1 inch on lynx but shorter than 1 inch on bobcats. Bobcat and lynx tails are approximately 4-6 inches long and match their pelt color except for the tip (about the last inch of the tail). The tip of the tail on bobcats is usually black on the upper side and white underneath, whereas on lynx the entire tip is black.

Bobcat pelts may be light gray, yellowish brown, buff, brown, or reddish brown and streaked or spotted with black or dark brown. Under portions of the body are white with black spots and the back side of the hind legs are dark brown in color. Lynx generally have more gray and less red in their pelts than bobcats and the belly fur is grayish-white or buff-white with mottled, indistinct black spots.

LYNX**BOBCAT**

Belly Markings

In contrast to the western United States and New Brunswick, bobcats in Maine are more difficult to distinguish from lynx based on pelt color. Spots on the belly of lynx (left) are slightly more mottled than bobcat (right) and belly hair is generally not as white as bobcats. Bobcats have more red and brown coloration to their coats.

LYNX**BOBCAT**

Note the foot size and color differences between lynx (left) and bobcat (right).

LYNX**BOBCAT**

Lynx and bobcat tails appear similar when viewed from the top. The tip of the tail on a lynx (left) is completely black, while bobcat tails show black bars with a white tip when viewed from above (right).

LYNX**BOBCAT**

Lynx and bobcat tails appear much different when viewed from the bottom. The tip of the tail on a lynx is completely black (left), while bobcat tails show a lot of white underneath (right).

Photos by Tom Krause

The hind legs of both bobcats and lynx are longer than their front legs, which helps them to spring and catch prey. However, the hind legs are even more disproportionately large on lynx, causing them to have a “stooped” appearance. Lynx also have much larger feet than bobcats.

BOBCAT



Bobcats usually have ear tufts shorter than 1 inch.

Photos by Tom Krause



Heavily furred bobcats might appear lynx-like, with significant ear tufts and facial ruffs.

LYNX



Lynx usually have ear tufts longer than 1 inch and more distinct facial ruffs.

Photo by RJ & Linda Miller Photography

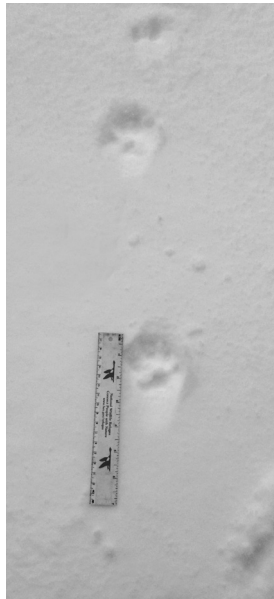
SIGN

In deep snow, lynx tracks are generally less distinct than bobcat tracks, since lynx toe pads are not visible as a result of abundant foot hair. However, in wet or compacted snow, lynx toe pads are visible, which can be confused with bobcat tracks. In these situations, stride or track size will help discern lynx from bobcat. Back feet often follow in the front foot tracks of both species. When **walking**, the stride (measured as the distance between footprints of the **opposite foot**) is 11-18 inches for lynx and 6-14 inches for bobcats.

A set of lynx tracks in snow



A set of bobcat tracks in snow



Photos by Chuck Hulsey

QUICK REFERENCE

Trapping Regulations to Avoid Incidental Take of Lynx

Statewide: Remember anytime you are trapping, bait (i.e. meat, feathers, bone, fur or other animal matter) within 50 yards of your trap **can only be used** if it is completely covered from above and in a way to withstand wind action. Because bobcats cannot be harvested during the early coyote/fox season, visible attractors are not allowed. A **visible attractor** is an object hung or placed at a trap site location that serves as a visual cue to attract an animal to the trap. Visible attractor includes, but is not limited to, CD-disc, tin can cover, foil, tinsel, feathers, bones, fur, mechanical devices, or any like items. Fruits or vegetables used for muskrat trapping, urine, and animal droppings (scat) are not considered a visible attractor. Small pieces of flagging can be used to mark trap site locations.

FOOTHOLD TRAPS SET ON LAND

STATEWIDE

- Must have at least 3 swiveling points on trap chains: 1 at the base of the trap, 1 at the anchor, and 1 midway in the chain
- Chain must be mounted to the central portion of the trap

LYNX ZONE: WMD 1-11, 14, 18, and 19

- Use of drags are prohibited
- Traps must be securely anchored
- Catch circle must be clear of woody vegetation or debris except small sticks and rocks or rotten wood used as backing, guides, or blocking
- Catch circle is defined as the area marked by the outer edge of the trap when the trap and the chain are fully extended in a circle around the anchor point
- **Foothold traps set on land** in WMDs 1-6 and 8-11 can NOT have an inside jaw spread greater than 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ "

KILLER-TYPE TRAPS SET ON LAND

STATEWIDE: Must have a lynx exclusion device

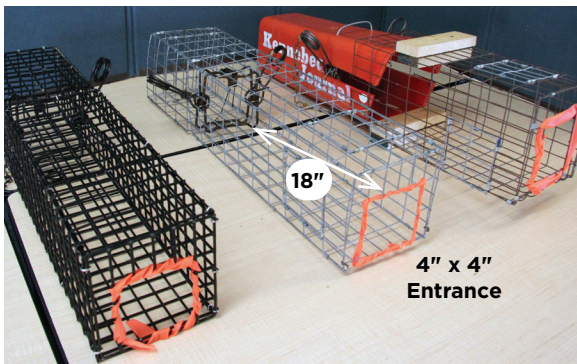
With the exception of killer-type traps with an inside jawspread of 5" or less set as a blind set or under an overhanging stream bank. Please see the *Summary of Maine Trapping Laws* for details.

- Lynx exclusion devices can be made of wire, wood, and/or plastic and must be constructed to withstand pulling and prying open
- The wire or wire mesh used on an exclusion device must be 16 gauge or less (wire diameter of 0.05 or greater)
- If wire mesh is used, it cannot exceed 1.5 x 1.5 or 1 x 2 inch mesh
- The back of the device must be secured; if using wire mesh with a wood or plastic box, the wire mesh must wrap around two opposite sides of the box and be secured
- The opening slot that allows the trap springs to extend outside the device can be no more than 7.5 inch wide x 1.5 inch high
- When there is a joint, there must be a secure attachment point on two opposite sides of the device to ensure the device does not separate when set
- The trap must be securely anchored independent of the exclusion device
- Bait must not be visible from above

KILLER-TYPE TRAPS SET ON LAND

A Lynx Exclusion Device for killer-type traps with a jawspread of 5 inches or less (e.g. marten trapping)

- The entrance hole cannot exceed 4 x 4 inches
- The trap must be a minimum of 18 inches from the nearest edge of the entrance hole
- Entrance hole can be at the end, on the side or top of the exclusion device
- A baffle is not required since the entrance is no more than 4 x 4 inches

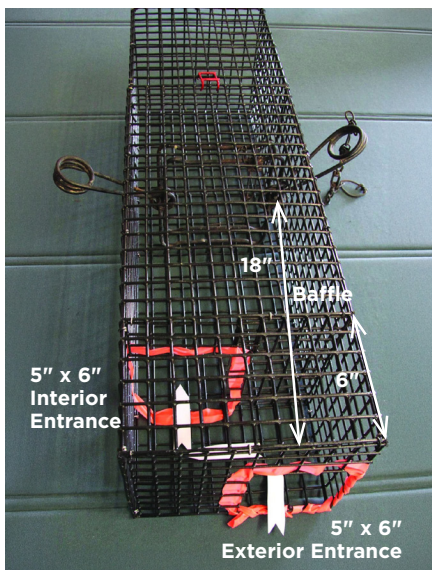


Flagging in this photo is used to illustrate the location of the entrance and is not required.

Lynx Exclusion Device for killer-type traps with a jawspread greater than 5 inches and less than 8 inches (e.g. fisher/raccoon trapping)

DESIGN 1

- An entrance hole set on the end of the device cannot exceed 5 x 6 inches
- The trap must be a minimum of 18 inches from the nearest edge of the entrance hole
- The device must include a baffle
- A baffle must be placed no more than 6 inches from the entrance hole
- The interior entrance created by the baffle cannot exceed 5 x 6 inches and must not overlap with the exterior entrance

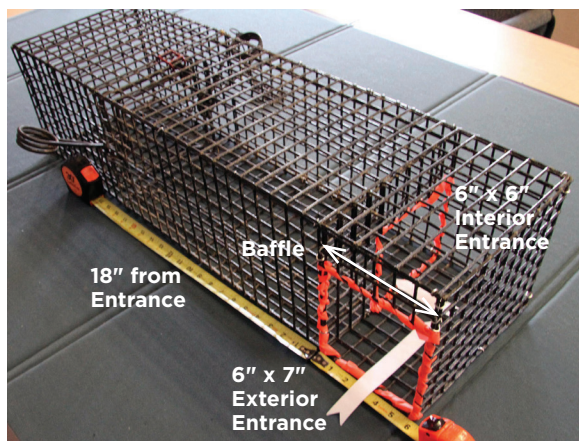


Flagging illustrates the location of the entrance hole.

Lynx Exclusion Device for killer-type traps with a jawspread greater than 5 inches and less than 8 inches (e.g. fisher/raccoon trapping)

DESIGN 2

- An entrance hole set on the **side** of the device cannot exceed 6 x 7 inches
- The trap must be a minimum of 18 inches from the nearest edge of the entrance hole
- The device must include a baffle
- A baffle must be placed at the edge of the entrance with the baffle opening on the opposite side of the entrance hole
- The interior opening created by the baffle cannot exceed 6 x 6 inches



Flagging is used to illustrate the location of the entrance and interior opening and is not required.

To learn more about all requirements of the lynx exclusion devices, visit mefishwildlife.com/trappinglaws.

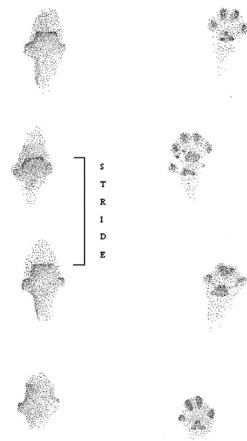
Lynx vs. Bobcat: Know the Difference

	LYNX	BOBCAT
EAR TUFTS	Generally greater than 1"	Generally less than 1"
FACIAL RUFFS	Larger facial ruffs with black banding at outer edges	Smaller facial ruffs with less distinct banding on outer edge
PELT COLOR	More uniform coat color. Generally grey pelt including the back of the hind legs. Belly fur greyish white with some black spots.	Reddish brown pelt with distinctive dark brown fur along the back of the hind legs. Belly fur white with distinct black spots.
TAIL COLOR	Generally matches body color except the entire tip (about the last 1") is black	Usually has dark bars and the tip of the tail is black on upper side but is white on underside
FEET	Large and snowshoe-like feet and hind legs are longer than the front, giving a "stooped" appearance	Smaller feet (proportional to body) and hind legs are not as long as lynx
TRACK SIZE	<u>In dirt:</u> up to 3 3/8" wide x 3 3/4" long	<u>In dirt:</u> up to 2 5/8" wide x 2 1/2" long
	<u>In snow:</u> up to 5 1/2" wide x 5 1/2" long	<u>In snow:</u> up to 2 1/2" wide x 2 1/2" long
	Stride: 11-18"	Stride: 6-14"

LYNX



- longer ear tufts (1" or longer)
- longer facial ruff
- shorter and completely black-tipped tail
- large and well-furred feet (>3" track)
- uniform coat color
- buff-colored hind foot



lynx walking in
deep, fluffy snow

lynx walking in
shallow snow

BOBCAT



- short ear tufts (absent to 1")
- short facial ruff, rounder face
- tail black-tipped on top and white underneath
- small feet (2" track)
- less-uniform coat (white underbelly, spotted)
- chocolate brown along back of hind foot



bobcat walking in
shallow snow

Life History and Diet

Lynx and bobcat normally breed in March and kittens are born in May. The snowshoe hare is by far the most important prey item for lynx. The availability of hares largely controls lynx abundance across most of their range. Other prey species important to lynx are red squirrels, mice, other rodents, and birds. Bobcat diets are more varied and can consist of snowshoe hare, squirrels, small mammals, grouse, turkey, and deer.

Habitat Preferences

Lynx and bobcats prefer areas with high prey abundance and dense understory vegetation. Habitat types preferred by lynx range from mature coniferous forests to coniferous or mixed forests that are regenerating. Forests that are growing back after fire or logging often provide excellent food and cover for hares and therefore attract lynx. It is extremely rare for lynx to be found in meadows, pastures or farmland habitats. Bobcats use similar habitats as lynx but are also commonly found in meadows, pastures, farmland, mixed and hardwood forests. Both lynx and bobcats seem to use the convenience of logging roads in forests to aid in travel.

Distribution

Lynx are primarily found in northern & western Maine, but also eastern Maine. Lynx are rare or absent in central and coastal areas. Bobcats are more common in western, central, and Downeast and are rarer in northern Maine due to increased snow depths.

Avoid Taking Lynx While Bobcat Hunting

Tracks should be closely examined and measured before any trailing dogs are released. (See “Sign” section, page 8). Any treed bobcat should be carefully identified and confirmed to not be a lynx before it is harvested. A treed lynx should be abandoned immediately with harnessed dogs in tow.

If hunting in areas lynx may frequent, it is essential to properly identify any animal to ensure a lynx is not shot. Since it may be difficult or impossible to positively identify an animal as a lynx or bobcat, it is best not to shoot if positive identity is unknown. Hunters should always risk the loss of legitimate prey to avoid the risk of shooting a lynx.

BOBCAT

Note shorter ear tufts, smaller feet, and tail coloration.



Avoid Taking Lynx While Trapping Furbearers

To avoid lynx while trapping bobcats, trap sets should be made where bobcats are known to exist. Trap set locations that tend to avoid lynx include open meadows, pastures and crop lands. Lynx rarely use agricultural lands and generally prefer to hunt and travel in forested or brushy areas and along lightly traveled roads and trails.

Rabbits, hares, or parts of rabbits or hares should not be used for bait if lynx may frequent an area. During the bobcat trapping season, flagging should not be used as a visible attractor near traps if lynx are present.

Lynx often avoid traps set for foxes and coyotes when the traps are placed in open fields. The use of tainted, rather than fresh meat baits, tends not to attract lynx while still providing significant attraction to coyotes and fox.

LYNX

Note long ear tufts, large feet, and completely black-tipped tail.



Photo by Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

Reporting Incidentally Captured Lynx

MDIFW regulations require all incidentally trapped lynx be reported to either a biologist or warden as soon as possible and prior to removing the animal from the trap, unless a Department official cannot be reached in time to prevent injury to the lynx. Any lynx released under this provision must be reported to the Department **within 24 hours** from the time it was discovered.

Call the Lynx Hotline at (207) 592-4734 (24 hr/7 days a week) to report the incidental capture of a lynx in a trap.

If you see a lynx caught in a trap, call the lynx hotline as soon as possible. Do not attempt to disturb the lynx or trap. There is no open hunting or trapping season on lynx in Maine.



Trappers are required to report the capture of a lynx in a trap before releasing the animal. MDIFW staff will release all lynx from traps with few exceptions.

Releasing Incidentally Captured Lynx

Trappers are required to report the capture of lynx prior to releasing the animal from the trap.

Call the LYNX HOTLINE: (207) 592-4734

In the rare event that you cannot reach MDIFW personnel in time to prevent injury to a lynx, you must report the capture/release of a lynx within 24 hours. When releasing a lynx, care should be taken to approach any trapped animals slowly and quietly, avoiding any excessive movement. There are several options to safely release an animal from a foothold trap.

Release Board/Tote

A large piece of plywood or plastic tote with a notch can be placed over the capture foot. When removing the trap, remember to keep the leg and foot in a natural position.



Catchpole

A trapped lynx will allow the catchpole loop to be placed over its head, but it may react when the loop is tightened. To minimize reaction from a lynx, slowly tighten the loop.



1. Carefully tighten the catchpole loop sufficiently to hold the animal without cutting off its air supply.
2. Once the loop is around the lynx head, pin the end of catchpole against the ground to restrain the head.
3. Once the head is down, quickly place a foot with light pressure on the hindquarters to restrain the rear legs.
4. Remove the trap with your remaining free hand and foot.
5. Securely hold the catchpole until the loop is relaxed and the animal has been freed.

If a catchpole is not available, an alternative method to release lynx is to cut a strong forked stick to allow the pinning of the lynx's neck and shoulder to the ground while the trap is removed.

Never attempt to render a trapped lynx unconscious with a blow to the nose or head or by any other means. Life threatening injury to the lynx may result.

Care should be taken at all times when releasing a lynx because they are capable of injuring the trapper with their teeth or claws. Wearing thick gloves to release trapped animals is always wise.

LYNX SIGHTINGS

If you see a lynx or lynx tracks, take a photo and send them to Shevenell Webb (shevenell.webb@maine.gov).

LYNX HOTLINE: (207) 592-4734

Bangor	(207) 941-4440
Ashland	(207) 435-3231
Enfield	(207) 794-1003
Greenville	(207) 695-3756
Jonesboro.....	(207) 255-2080
Houlton State Police.....	1-800-924-2261
Bangor State Police	1-800-432-7381

